

The Snake That Ate Dinosaurs

And other Essays 2010-2011

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1. What is wrong with India?

India is the largest democracy in the world. It is to the great achievement of the country of such size and such diversity to become a democratic country. Election of Obama as the president of USA showed that Democracy offers a possibility of change in the leadership. Same can be said about Mayawati. She is a woman. She is a Dalit. Both these classes impede people's rise to power. But democracy made it possible for Obama in USA and Mayawati in India to come to power. This is the power of democracy. There is no other way out for depressed and outcaste people of the world.

Democracy offers such a way out to more freedom and more power to people. It shifts the power in favour of people who would otherwise remain at the mercy of the elites and rich. Democracy cannot stand of its own, and it has pillars and most importantly solid foundation. The foundation of democracy is society which is nearly equal and minimum gap between the rich and poor, and haves and have nots, knows and know nots. The democracy can work in true sense if there is social democracy; which is an attitude of respect for a fellow human being. In fact democracy starts from the grassroots and rise above to give rise governments and states. American democracy could rise as it was based on the strong foundation of local democracies.

However, every state and government is different as they have different problems and different societies to respond to. India is a different society. The ageold enemy of democracy (and its most deeper form social democracy) is alive and kicking. This is caste system. Not only caste system is alive, but its ugly manifestation "untouchability" is alive and affecting people to a greater extent. Caste system is a major stumbling block in the democratic India in the true sense. Besides caste system the communalism is posing a major threat to democratic foundation of India. The people who feel left out are resorting to violent ideologies. India is at the present point of time has become a very interesting place where there are thousands of social movements are proliferating leading to unprecedented changes and not to say complex problems.

Communalism is often attributed to Muslims in India. But there is also a saffron side to it. This side is much more dangerous than Muslims. This is evident by the information collected by Hemant Karkare, who effectively brought out the linkages between Hindu terror and public offices and their political connections. The Hindu nationalism is very dangerous as it makes the oppressed majority in India forget their suffering and target straw man, that is, Muslims. India is a nation of slaves, according to Hindu scriptures itself. The majority of Indians belong to the middle classes, who are traditionally Shudras. They constitute over 54 percent of India's population. They are laggards in public institutions. Their percentage share in the public sphere is far less than their population. Only dominant castes among them have

benefitted due to political power, even then, those dominant castes are far lagging in public services and businesses. Over 16 percent of India's population is Scheduled Caste. They are being targetted as people without merit by educated elites in India. Then there is 9 percent of Scheduled Tribes, and hundreds of millions of people are denationalised as they are never brought within the process of census. They are termed as nomads.

In a sense, reality of India differs from people to people, and there is no unified vision of what India as a country should be. This is a big problem. As Dewey said, every state is an experiment, and every nation is a nation in making. The idea or concept of India that people have in their minds affects the society at large.

If we look at the ideas of India, there are some remarkable ideas which come into open. There is an idea that India is Hindustan. This idea further leads to concepts like India for Hindus. Hindu India is a myth which like all other myths affect public life. However there is a big problem with Hindu India. The word "Hindu" itself is of persian origin and have bad connotations. None of the so called sacred scriptures of Hindus do not include this word. The concept of "Holy land" and "father land" advocated by Hindu nationalists doesnt sound so appealing to 54 percent OBCs, 16 percent SCs and 9 percent STs and millions of denationalised Indians called nomad and denotified tribals. What can be holy about the land which makes them Shudras, untouchables and criminals. The bigger question of nationalism and casteism have been resolved by superficial arguments by Hindu idealogues. Limited nationalism of Tilak, with Bramhans at the top; and obnoxious nationalism of Savarkar with "Hindu" as a national caste and "Bramhan" as the individual's family caste cannot resolve the larger question.

There is also extreme Hindutva advocated by RSS. The essence of nation as Hindutva. Actually it is very important to carry on debates and discussion on what constitute Hindutva. This links to language based nationalism; Marathi Nationalism, Hindi Nationalism and Tamil Nationalism. Then there are regional varients of nationalisms.

Pakistan is creation of Muslims from India, now called Mohajirs in present day Pakistan. Pakistan as a nation, like India, is facing the similar hydra-headed problems, but is it mostly based on ethnicity. Since its inception, the Muslims migrated to Pakistan, mostly from UP and major Provinces wanted to keep power for themselves, and didnt resort to democratic elections as it would have offered a challenge to their power from Baluchis, Pakhtuns, Sindhi, Punjabis and most importantly from Bengali speaking Muslims. Urdu like Hindi is language of nationalism. Less than 10 percent people spoke what is called Urdu today when Pakistan was created. Indians should look at Pakistan as a nation of ethnic groups. One can clearly see what happened to Pakistan and how Bagla Desh was created. The extreme Islam is not the

doctrine of the majority of people in Pakistan, but that identity depends on extreme Hinduism. Both the extreme groups benefit from keeping alive religion based hatred. In the end, the losers are poor and disadvantaged people in both the countries. There is a more scope in resolving issues if both the countries focus on problems of common citizens, and not make efforts to feed them with pills of religion based nationalism. Both the sides should understand that Cricket is just a game, and not a war.

For India to become a solid democracy, it is important for more and more Indians to know the reality of Pakistan and deprivation of people in that country. India houses second largest population of Muslims in the world. Sacchar Committee report brought very ugly facts about social and political deprivation of Muslims in India. Needless to say that majority of the Indian Muslims are converted from lower castes in India. Census of India is bringing this social reality on the surface as most of the Muslims are also registering as the lower castes. India will have to solve the problems of Indian Muslims.

There is no scope for Muslim India, but growing fundamentalism in the Islamic world (however the recent revolutions in the Arab world gives a positive hope for democracy, human rights and freedom, which the Islamic Scholars are claiming the essence of Sharia) can sweep away Muslims in India to the violent ideologies.

There is a growing Urban Middle Class India. The suddenly rich class is very impatient without any sense for responsibility and sense of charity. Indian sense of charity is limited to giving donations to temples, which in the end benefit the custodians of the temples, who are invariably Bramhans. The famous case can be the case of Tirupati Balaji where billions of money were pocketed by a few individuals. Urban Middle class India get swayed by campaigns like anti-corruption, but never get swayed by more crucial issues of human rights and atrocities. It is entangled in the caste muck and god industry. One can safely call it Middle Caste Nationalism. One can call it economic nationalism too.

All the credit to keep India intact goes to democracy and constitution. Constitution as an instrument of democracy has succeeded in India till date. The periodic elections, the multiparty system and adult franchise keeps the hope of the people alive. If it had not been for the constitution of India, India would have fallen into a big mess. The proper checks and balances that constitution provides, if made more effective then most of the issues of Governance can be solved. Even when there are so many nationalisms proliferating in India, the real hope is offered by the Constitution, which defines ultimate goal for India as a nation, and that is Justice (social, political and economic), Liberty, equality and fraternity. The standard therefore for any nationalism to be valid in India are these constitutional values. The question is whether Hindu, Muslim, Linguistic, Middle Class nationalisms are in accordance with these values, if not these

nationalisms are anti-national. The problem of India is problem of not understanding what constitute real India; India based on Justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Is anyone opposed to these values?

2. Ambedkar's India

The idea of India is new. In fact there is no India besides the legal or constitutional India. India is not constituted by waging war with the several principalities. India was a landmass conquered by invaders from time to time, starting with Aryan invasion of India to English invasion. In the kaleidoscope of time, it is very difficult to get the clear essence of what constitute India. Definition of India eludes people like the mirage in the hot summer. Over this question of idea of India or to define India, lots of ideological fights and battles are waged, of course, without any fruitful result. This was however case till India got its own constitution in the year 1950, the idea of India became clear at least conceptually, and the cacophony of opinions and ideas about India came in the manageable limits of understanding, and in fact, making India for its citizens, present and future.

As far as constitution is concerned, it is a country projected in the future based on the very important values of liberty, equality and fraternity. These are the values on which the modern India at least constitutionally is constituted. These principles were very dear to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who can be termed as the founding father of Modern India. He started advocating these principles very clearly through his important writings and speeches since 1930s, and even in the beginning of his struggle. The roots of India as a Modern India lies in the 1920s and 1930s, and the decades that followed shaped the future of modern India. It is still an unfinished project. It is still a nation in making as there lies a huge gap between the ideals that are laid in the constitution of India and that of the realities of political, social and economic situations. There is a long way to go. However to choose the goal for a nation is itself a big step forward, and clears lot of ground and opens up practical ways to realize what is envisioned in the constitution of India.

Let us look at India as an idea. Some right wing elements in India want to make India into a Hindu India. There is still a strong movement especially led by the upper caste Hindus to supersede the present constitution of India, and make it subservient to Dharma Shastras, which necessarily means India based on the Caste system with Bramhins at the top. This project of India has given rise to extremism which can sometimes lead to gross violence with the intricate network of people involved in various state agencies. The strategy of the Hindu Militia is to create a fear amongst the masses of the growing Islamic terrorism, and to forge a pan Indian identity. They are very largely successful in some of the major states of India, and the state sponsored terrorism, which is a blot on constitution of India and Democracy, killed hundreds of individuals in the riots following Godhara. The idea of Hindu India is anti-constitutional, and hence anti-national. The proponents of this idea come in various colors starting from Tilak, whose idea of Hindu Nationalism was based on the supremacy of the Bramhins, and that of Gandhi, whose concept of India based on Hinduism, led to fear in the minds of the Muslims and untouchables alike. Religious nationalism

has done more harm to India than any good. Some people argue that it was necessary for the national movement for independence. To the objective mind, the process of transfer of power to Indians started in 1919 and it was really a question of how the power will be shared by different stakeholders based in Administrative British India and its Princely States.

There was a growing discussion in India about the future India since 1920s. In this period, various Hindu nationalistic organizations were formed. The Hindu Mahasabha was formed in 1915, and RSS in 1925. At the same time, Muslim League was formed, which was later taken over by Jinnah, initiating political wing for the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent.

Similarly, Indians also started taking interest in Socialism, and its core ideology of Marxism. They even participated in the International conventions, and J.N. Nehru participated in one of such conventions. The socialists in India were in touch with the international organizations advocating communism. They have an idea of India as a communist India.

The idea of Islamic India led to formation of two nation states exclusively based on religion, later divided into one of the states claiming linguistic identity. (Pakistan is Islamic republic and Bagla Desh is based on Bagla Nationalism). Even today Indian Muslims constitute over 13 percent of Indian population, and in modern India, they have been degenerated into second class citizens of India as shown by the Sacchar Committee report.

Let us look at the profiles of the leaders who led various movements in defining India. All of them were elite upper caste and educated in England. Most of them were lawyers and hailed from established families. Gandhi came from Bania family and his family was established and had a network of Banias to support him in his political action. Nehru's father was already rich man. Jinnah also came from a rich family. In the contrast, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar came from Dalit family, a self made man, but he was educated more than any Indian of his times, including the national leaders. He not only studied in England in the London School of Economics, but also studied in the famous Columbia University in USA. He was a lawyer, an economist and a statesman. While rest of the leaders built on already existing political and social structures, he had to found his own political structures and create a social organization to dismantle the very structures that supported politics of other elite Indian leaders. He stood intellectually higher than leaders of his time, and therefore he has higher vision of India. His vision of India was narrow view of acquiring political power, but to give an Indian society basis of liberty, equality and fraternity, which he eventually did when he drafted the constitution of India.

As he came from the untouchables caste, which constitute 16 percent of India's population, he knew the suffering of the common Indian citizens. Having lived in the villages and poor urban localities, he was

closer to masses than any Indian leader of his times. While others tried to create artificial poverty around them, he had no choice but to live among the poor and the wretched. Besides untouchables, he had to also look the suffering of other major sections of Indian society, which included 9 percent tribals, and 54 percent other Backward Classes. In short he represented illiterate and unconscious majority of Indians, including the interests of the converted lower castes in India. With the awakening of this mass, no doubt Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has acquired a centre figure in any discourse of India.

What was his concept of India?

He advocated India as a social democracy firmly established on the principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and humanity. For him state was a mechanism to bring about radical changes in the society. He wanted a welfare state to fight two evils plaguing Indian society; social exclusion and economic exploitation. Therefore his vision of India is casteless and equal India. This necessarily defines Indian nationalism in a broad sense of the word Nationalism. This is what Indian constitution aimed at bringing radical change in India.

Ambedkar's India is only hope for India. The Hindu Nationalism can't work for the majority, because the OBCs, SCs, STs and women will have no place in it. Islamic Fundamentalism will wreck havoc in India with its fundamentalist ideology. The Mao's India that a Naxalite groups are trying to bring with create an autocratic state. Marxist India cant solve problems as clearly seen in the states of Kerala and West Bengal. Incidentally these ideologies are antithesis to the essence of India as defined in the constitution of India; liberty, equality and fraternity.

Dr. Ambedkar's India is enlightened, equal, free, just and compassionate India. While he advocated a total revolution in India, his methods are firmly rooted in democracy and use of intellect in the Modern world.

In his very important paper, Reason or Revolution, Karl Popper advocated that method of scientific thinking can lead to lot of changes in the society, thus making human intellect an instrument of social transformation. This idea is not new, but can be located in the philosophy of John Dewey who was a teacher of Babasaheb Ambedkar at Columbia. Similar intellectual challenges were posed by the Buddha in ancient India to make society think more about the realities around them with a view to transform them. According to Popper, the species changed due to evolution based on trial and error, and those species which survived went ahead in the evolution, and rest of the species which couldn't survive were wiped out. We human beings are biologically same species, and we make each other suffer due to wrong ideas and opinions. This is what Babasaheb Ambedkar pointed out in the Annihilation of Caste. This is

what Popper is referring to, which means that we do not have to kill each other. We have to change each other through critical analysis of ideas and opinions in any sphere, including the religious sphere.

Babasaheb Ambedkar therefore provided a criticism for various anti-human ideologies. In a sense he criticized the very notions that cause immense suffering to fellow human beings. Ambedkar's idea of India is therefore based on the tradition of criticism, both personal and social, with a view to lift the society on the higher planes of existence. He was not a status quo-ist. He wanted to dismantle the structures that enslave individuals and do not let me realize their inner potential fully. From this perspective he opposed the very idea of the caste system and religious fundamentalism. He brought a tradition of debates and discussion and through it changing the very minds of the people for better. Alone he stood against powerful forces of his time, but in the end, it was he who laid a strong foundation for this country irrespective caste, creed and gender. He laid the economic foundation of India. And if he had not brought significant changes in the law, the famous Hindu Code Bill, the women in India would have languished perpetually in slavery. If he had not made efforts to uplift untouchables, tribals and OBCs, people like me would have been up against the very country that I am ready to work for now.

3. Ambedkar, King and Obama

Addressing Indian Parliament, Obama referred to Dr. Ambedkar and how the constitution drafted by him is ensuring equal rights to all Indian citizens. This came as a relief to many Dalit organizations, which sent petitions and letters to office of President Obama directing his attention to the problems of Dalits and what Dr. Ambedkar did for modern India.

This incidence reminded me of similar visit by yet another great man to India in 1959, Dr. Martin Luther King, who praised constitution of India, and his pro poor campaign was inspired by Indian constitution. At least one can say that it has some influence. Comparatively Indian constitution though was newly drafted and enacted in the year 1950, it was advanced than the American constitution in terms of Civil Rights. Martin Luther King was impressed with the range of safeguards that Indian Constitution provided to ensure civil rights to the Untouchables, but surprisingly no one told him of Ambedkar then. We have evidence to know that he was familiar with Dr. Ambedkar or had heard of him, though he was indirectly had a connection with him. The book that he called Bible of the Blacks-the strange Career of Jim Crow- was written by the person who was inspired by Dr. Ambedkar.

He might not be familiar with the connection between the untouchables of India and Blacks. The important connection was between WEB DuBois and Dr. Ambedkar. In fact, C. Vann Woodward, the author of the strange career of Jim Crow remarked that Dr. Ambedkar was a very keen student of Black movement and knew more than many contemporary scholars of Black history. Danial Immerwahr who wrote an important paper in this connection has drawn attention to how the elite Indians obscured the problem of the India's untouchables and succeeded in camouflaging the category of caste with the category of colonialisation of the Indians. Race and caste are similar categories compared to Race and colony. This is a very important finding. Despite of this, Martin Luther King showed his solidarity with the Dalits, and he declared that all the Blacks in America are untouchables.

Recent years saw growing interaction between the Dalits and the world community. This is largely due to the fact that many Indian Dalits are traveling all over the world. This growing interaction is leading to growing solidarity for the Dalit movement in India, which was, so far, neglected by the Human Right defenders and activists throughout the world. India also saw rise of power to Dalits and they are having third largest national political party in India. Besides that there are thousands of movements all over India led in the name of Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar has emerged as the most important public icon after the transfer of power to Indians in 1947. His legacy is continuing and with this his important role in Indian democracy is beginning to be understood by the Indians who do not want get dragged into the religious polarities of politics and fundamentalism.

For the conflict ridden society, his writings and speeches can be the guide. The way he guided and educated Indians through his writings, particularly his book Thoughts on Pakistan is still relevant and important. And his book What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables demonstrates that how petty politics of power of the dominant elite groups can sabotage the social democratic movement through faulty narration and propaganda.

As the most powerful man on the earth (which is beginning to change after China's rise), Obama need to learn from the legacy of Ambedkar and King that what is important is not waging war against the other nations in the name of democracy, but create and promote social democracy which is always and will ever based on the trinity of principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, of this, no doubt, Fraternity is the essential principle.

4. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Martin Luther King, Jr's and the Historical Bible of the civil rights movement

C. Vann Woodward, who died in 1999 at the age of 91, was America's most eminent Southern historian, the winner of a Pulitzer Prize for *Mary Chestnut's Civil War* and a Bancroft Prize for *The Origins of the New South*.

The Strange Career of Jim Crow is one of the great works of Southern history. Indeed, the book actually helped shape that history. Published in 1955, a year after the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* ordered schools desegregated, *Strange Career* was cited so often to counter arguments for segregation that Martin Luther King, Jr. called it "the historical Bible of the civil rights movement." The book offers a clear and illuminating analysis of the history of Jim Crow laws, presenting evidence that segregation in the South dated only to the 1890s. Woodward convincingly shows that, even under slavery, the two races had not been divided as they were under the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s. In fact, during Reconstruction, there was considerable economic and political mixing of the races. The segregating of the races was a relative newcomer to the region.

Hailed as one of the top 100 nonfiction works of the twentieth century, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* has sold almost a million copies and remains, in the words of David Herbert Donald, "a landmark in the history of American race relations."

This is how this book is linked with Babasaheb Ambedkar. In Woodward's autobiography, he says that there were two main influences that led him to write that book. The first was the burgeoning civil rights movement. The second, though, was Ambedkar. Here is what Woodward says:

A new and extraordinary foreign perspective came my way during the Second World War, while I was on duty as a naval officer in India. With a letter of introduction in hand, I sought out Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, acclaimed leader of India's millions of untouchables and later a figure of first importance in Indian constitutional history. He received me cordially at his home in New Delhi and plied me with questions about the black 'untouchables' of America and how their plight compared with that of his own people. He also took the time to open to me the panorama of an ancient world of Indian segregation by caste and to show me how it appeared to its victims.

5. Crisis in Dalit Movement

In Khairlanji, on 26th September 2006, Surekha Bhotmange, her daughter, Priyanka and her two sons, were killed by a frenzied mob. In total four people were killed. They would have been just killed like any other killing. But before they were killed, the women were stripped naked, and humiliated and maybe raped (the evidence of which is very difficult to establish due to lapses in the postmortem procedure and reporting, but circumstantial evidences prove beyond doubt that their modesty was outraged as the bodies were found naked). One of the men (one among the two brothers) was blind. The mob didn't spare even a blind and helpless person. The whole incidence did not get much press, and whatever it space it got in the newspapers whose front pages are adorned with scandals and gossips, painted this heinous incidence as just another scandalous murder by the mob.

Due to alertness of a few local activists, the case came into public after one month. And the demonstrations were held everywhere, not only in the state of Maharashtra, but also all over India, and world. Hundreds of peaceful demonstrations took place, which were suppressed by the violent and brutal police action. Thousands of people were baton by the Police and in some cases the peaceful demonstrators were branded as seditious and anti-national. Still hundreds of cases are pending in the court of law. For the first time in Indian history any case raised such a fury for justice, and this fire for justice was finally extinguished by the infamous judiciary in India, which instead of acting as the custodian and guardian of Justice favored the perpetrators by invoking the decision of the lower court.

The Dalits in India, who constitute almost a quarter of India's population and five percent of the world's population, are wondering about their fate after this infamous reversal of justice. What is their fault? Why is justice denied to them? Why they have to eat rats? Why do they have to clean human excreta? Why they are forced to the life of subordination? Why their humanity and dignity is snatched? How long will it take to end their plight? How long it will take to send their children to good schools?

There is a crisis in the Dalit movement. The movement that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar started facing infinite series of hurdles is in crisis. The Dalits as it were are treated with tokenism, tokenism as a technique to blunt the movement of Dalits includes offering one post here and another post there, and in reality not doing anything to solve to solve the problem of caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability. The tokenism as a technique is not only used by the governments, but also by the established national and regional parties to just show that they care for Dalits, but in reality they do not do anything to end it.

The laws that are made in this country are also against the Dalits, even if they look effective on paper, they don't do anything in reality to stop their plights. The example of this is infamous Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989, which looks such a great social legislation on papers, but the conviction rate is less than half a percent. If this is not the mockery of the law, what else can it be!!

The Dalits in India are the poorest of the poor, and in some situations their condition is so pitiable that they have to eat rats to survive (The Mushahars). In several cases their condition is so pitiable that even the rats may be eating them.

The techniques that Babasaheb Ambedkar used need to be revisited. In Dalit community, there are people

with varying mentalities, and some of the politicians act as the brokers, some people willingly sale the community interests for their private gains. This doesn't mean that the majority of the Dalits do not want change or bring in revolution. This is very much evident in case of Khairlanji agitation during which thousands of people came on the streets to express their feelings and their willingness to work and sacrifice for the society.

As a technique to take the fight further, we have to try to reach to individuals of the community. We have to find means to reach the people through various media like pamphlets, emails, cell phones and newspapers both our newspapers and mainstream newspapers.

The message can be simple.

We condemn the decision of the High Court to reduce punishment of the casteist perpetrators who massacred and raped mother and her daughter and killed her two sons.

We demand reopening of Khairlanji case.

We demand application of Atrocity act on the killers.

On the internet forums:

We can express our feelings through writing on our blogs, writing emails to as many people as possible.

The National Crime Bureau of India publishes reports on crimes in India. They also publish crimes committed against the Dalits. They reports thousands of cases of such crimes, which include rapes, arsenals, looting etc. These reports are based on the records available in the police stations across the country. Parallel reports are also published by voluntary organisations like Human Rights Watch (HRW) and recently several reports are published by national and international agency. It is the fact that needs no further elaboration that crimes are committed against the Dalits. The severity of the crimes will shock any sane and thinking human being. The Dalits suffer violence by the hands of caste Hindus all over India. The Dalits suffer all forms of disadvantages. The Dalits suffers due to poverty. The Dalits suffer due to lack of health care and proper sanitation. The Dalits suffer due to lack of education and lack of access to education. The Dalits not only suffer in villages which are dens of caste Hindus, but also in the cities like Mumbai. They live in the city slums in the rat-infested shacks. They have to do lowest of lowest dehumanising jobs like cleaning human excreta. They are whipped, paraded naked, raped and killed. This happens every day in India, the country which boast of its rising economic power. The country is built on the labor of the lower castes. Without the availability of cheap and exploitable labor of Dalits, this country would have been nothing, its agriculture would have been nothing, had it not been for the landless laborers who are mostly Dalits and are exploited for a pittance.

These obvious facts fail to change the mindset of the upper caste Indians. The rising middle class (including Dalit middle class) has no sense of duty towards other citizens of India. There is a complete absence of public consciousness. It is also true that the Dalit middle class, though not numerical very large, but significant, failed its own community by staying neutral and in case posing major hurdle to the

movement of the Dalits. The movement does not just seek change in the mindset of the people, but it also seeks changes in the institutions that perpetuate injustice and violence. There are several issues and they can be enlisted as many as thousands when it comes to Dalits. There is an issue of lack of unity amongst the Dalits. Unity can only be reached if the people feel a need that there is need to be united. Unity can not be forced on the community. Dalits do not realise that they can be the most powerful community in India. Only if, and that is a big only if, they can be united. In fact they can rule India easily if they work together and learn to understand the importance of unity. There will never be uniformity in the vision and outlook of all Dalits all over India, but they can certainly be united. The national unity of Dalits is the need of all Dalits at this crucial juncture of Indian history. This is to say that the Dalits wherever possible must work with other Dalits, and the severest issue that they face is that of violence against them, or the possibility of dragging them on the violent path by those who propagate violence as means of bringing social change. Violence for and against them will lead to uncontrolled chain reaction which has the capacity to blow the very foundation on which this country is founded. The sooner upper castes in India realises this the better it is for them and the future of this country. No country can afford to remain in the perpetual wars. The small wars here and small wars there will one day lead to mighty wars that will perish this country.

State has equal responsibility in annihilation of caste. But the governments so far have not done anything other than cosmetic changes and in many cases tried to perpetuate the caste system. No government so far has taken any steps to annihilate the caste system. There is no law which claims to seek the annihilation of caste system. The government itself is responsible for supporting the practice of manual scavenging in the state sponsored organs. The Judiciary which is not represented proportionally showed its ugly face in the Khairlanji case.

Dalits should know that they have a numerical strength to change the political structure in India, and that is the reason why some of them are wooed by the Political parties to show that they care for the Dalits. The Dalit votes are decisive, because for them the only weapon is the weapon of vote. They do not have wealth. They do not have say in media. They have nothing, and the psychology that is given to them by Hindu social system make them fearful and at the same time helpless. But fear and helpless are the mental states and can be replaced by confidence and strength, which is there in the Dalit power. Nay if the Dalit Power becomes strong, it will gain an unstoppable momentum for the social change in India.

The Congress party comes in power because of the Dalit votes. No political party in India can neglect Dalits. They cannot afford it. They can ignore it at their perils. This is such a simple fact in the Indian political life. The only political game is how to keep the society fragmented and fractured so that this fissure creates political strands which will benefit the dominant players in India, and the payoff to Dalits is nothing. Their payoff is violence, insult and further slavery. Why do not Dalits all over India cogitate over this simple fact that if they prostitute their dignity they prostitute their entire generation and make arrangements to further enslave their own sons and daughters?

The single solution to all the problems of Dalits is the unity, but anyone who had worked with the society will know that it is very difficult to achieve, though not impossible, and one of the factors that can unite them is the crisis in the societies which wakes them from the slumber. The duty of Dalit elite is to create that creative tension which will wake the larger masses from the slumber and darkness and urge them (or

propel them) to fly high in the sky and in the light. There is always an escape possible from this dungeon of caste and untouchability. However the problem is that the Dalit movement is fractured, and it is fractured by the consciousness of the caste that is imbibed by the caste psychology. From where the seeming solution to this problem come? It has to come within the Dalit community itself. When we are surrounded by the packs of wolves, we have to safeguard our lives.

To my mind, the movement at one time can touch one issue which can unite the larger community and mobilize them. Some issue that will pinch their hearts and consciousness and that issue is undoubtedly is that of dehumanization and insult and denial of dignity. The caste based society doesn't treat individual as "I-you" but as "I-it", making the other individuals into inanimate and insentient object. For the caste Hindus, the Dalits are not the people, but objects to be played at their whims and fancies. The movement does not need leaders as once the people are mobilized natural leaders will appear from them itself. There is always a discussion of leadership, but even a cursory look at the society can show that there are thousands of leaders awaiting to be born in the Dalit Community.

After Babasaheb Ambedkar, barring a few exceptions like Kanshi Ram, D.K. Khaparde, Mayavati, the Dalit leadership is in shambles. In fact we have failed to generate leaders on all levels and of all calibers. There is a need of thousands of leaders in our community, but not at the cost of larger vision of solidarity amongst us. The future leadership of Dalits needs to be all inclusive and tactical, and focused on the gains of community. There might be different approaches, different ways and even different styles of leaderships, but all of them should have honesty and commitment at its centre. The roots of the leaders is the general public, and without creating public (creation of public is a difficult process as they are the essence of every change in every society), leadership cant emerge. Only in the process of creating public a true leadership can emerge and thrive. The public can be created around certain consciousness, certain issues, certain vision, certain goal and certain ideology. We do not have to worry about multiplicity of views, consciousness, issues, visions, goals and ideologies so long as they are directed to serving society and not playing with it.

The biggest challenge is to create public and leaders. The leaders should imbibe the vital elements of our movement just like our forefathers for whom tactics mattered as much as ethics and vice versa, for ours is a moral battle against tattered morality and corrupt view, we have every chance to succeed. The leadership must grow with the challenges facing the society. We can look at the crisis as creator of leaders and public. It is not just the Khairlanji incidence that has created crisis, but if we look around us, there are many crises going on in every home, every village, every society, every community and the entire nation as far the Dalits are concerned.

People at the time of transfer of power, when there was a larger crisis of future of Dalits in the Indian politics, Babasaheb Ambedkar fought with the British and Congress Party, but our people on Babasaheb Ambedkar's call fought the battle on the streets. Hundreds of people in Vidarbha courted arrested and were jailed. The direct action is as important as legal battle. The direct action doesn't just mean strikes, demonstration and bandhs, but it can mean any form displaying public's displeasure with the current state of affairs. It can take a form of mass petition. It can take form of signing oaths to annihilate the caste system and to be a dedicated soldier of the battle against the caste system and practice of untouchability. It can mean forming small associations, organizations, and institutions to support the larger cause that will

eventually blow the caste system in India.

An efficient and creative political leadership is also important. And politically nothing is impossible or beyond reach is shown by the BSP. If the BSP can get absolute majority in UP, it shows that the Dalits can get absolute majority in Centre. It is not impossible or beyond reach. The only obstacle is the psychological dependency on the political parties and political bosses. There is a lot to be learned by the other states from the BSP which showed and demonstrated what is possible for Dalits in Politics. A success speaks louder than hundreds of words and speeches. The overall movement and its small rivulets must work for larger political gain in the longer run, which will not put the other political parties on guard, but ensure a complete security to our community based on the principle that “dare you touch us now, and reap the consequence afterwards”.

It is not difficult to achieve that kind of political strength. Overall our politics should be, and is, based on the Constitutional authority, because our father wrote it, and only way to keep his legacy alive is to make alive the values and principles which are there to be awoken in the constitution of India. The greatest safeguard for us is democracy. We have to learn to make full use of Democracy in India. Without democracy, the Dalits would have been hauled into the darkest dungeon by the upper castes. Whatever light there is, is due to the presence of Democracy in India, and no one can stop us from using this greatest value for realizing our social, economic and political rights.

6. Vision and Direction

Where are we since 1956?

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar died in the year 1956. During his lifetime, he singlehandedly led the movement of the untouchables and won important landmark victories in their favour, such as access to education, representations in institutions and rise in political consciousness. What Babasaheb Ambedkar achieved in a short span of 34 years of his active public career is unique in the history of the world. He stands tall in the galaxy of the luminaries who sacrificed their lives to liberate their fellow human beings. Though he addressed his followers who were mostly from the untouchable castes, his vision of social change, or reclamation of human personality, was universal. This vision often comes clear and shining in his innumerable speeches and in the debates of the constituent assembly of India. This vision also crystallized in the Constitution of India, which Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar drafted. The story of Ambedkar era will inspire generations to come and his name will remain forever so long humanity lives is beyond doubt.

During his lifetime, Babasaheb used various methods and strategies to create a society based on the values of liberty, equality, fraternity and manuski (Manuski is the Marathi word often used by Babasaheb, and it has connotations of humanity, humanness and respect for human life) through education, agitation and organization. He gave to his people self respect, dignity and most importantly moral courage to fight any odds. He started political parties, fought for the transfer of power to the untouchables, liberated Hindu women from heinous Hindu laws tainted by male chauvinism, gave representation to the untouchables and made passionate plea to include OBCs (Shudras) in the process of democratization of the Indian masses, created political and legal structure to make it possible for social democracy to take its shape in heterogeneous country like India. His achievements are innumerable.

The focus of the succeeding paragraphs is to look at what happened after 1956, in other words, where do the followers of Babasaheb stand as of today. I am going to describe the situation in general. The broader areas that I am going to look at are: education, institutions, politics, religions, and other areas which include; academics, science and research, sports, media and entertainment.

Education:

Considerable progress is made in this area. After 1956, there are thousands of doctors, engineers and lawyers amongst the followers of Babasaheb Ambedkar and many of these professional are living well to do life. The recent trends in globalization have exposed a lot of followers of Babasaheb to the outside world. This was not possible without Babasaheb's efforts. Despite of that majority of the Dalit population is illiterate and have no access to education. There is certainly quite an advancement, but still a long way

to go in this area. However there is a considerable mass of the educated lot who can lead the movement inaugurated by Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Institutions:

Due to representation, one will find a good representation of Dalits in governmental or semi-governmental institutes. Though many seats go vacant, still there is a representation in these institution, which includes Executives and at the moment, the Chief Justice of India is from the untouchable background.

Politics:

BSP set up a new convention and broke the myth that Dalits cant come to power. Now the BSP is the third largest party in India, with party structure established in the all the states of India.

Religion:

Conversions to Buddhism are happening all over India, and followers of Babasaheb have taken Buddhist practices seriously and at the least a new culture on Buddhist values is emerging in Maharashtra which will soon spread all India.

Other areas:

In other areas like academics, Science and research, sports, media and entertainment, the participation is meager and far less compared to extent and opportunities in these areas. There is much stride to make in these areas so that these areas are effectively influenced to make contribution in the social change in India.

I have attempted to take stock of the situation in general so as to derive some specific conclusions which will be practical in nature and in a way help us to suggest whither we go from here and how.

1. Though there is some progress, there is a long way to go towards annihilation of caste
2. The caste is not annihilated, it is not only prevalent in amongst the Indians at large, but also the Dalits practice the caste system within their own community thus an effective and coherent movement is not possible
3. The success in some areas indicate that the movement is not dead at all and far from it, it is kicking and thousands of Individuals and organizations are working since 1956 for advancement of their kind in several areas.

In this situation of diverse interests and commitment and various interpretations of vision of Babasaheb himself, it is very important to clearly define the goal. The task is made easy by Babasaheb himself, when he declared that the battle is for the “Reclamation of Human Personality”.

In case of untouchables in India, their personality is mutilated by the Hindu Caste system and practice of untouchability. Let no one say that the practice of untouchability is ended in India. The study conducted in 2006 clearly showed that untouchability is still practiced massively all over India. Caste system mutilates and degrades the human personality is the important conclusion and to reclaim the personality and restore it is the goal of the movement. Once the goal of the movement is clear, one can spell out the strategies and use various structures towards achieving the goal. Needless to say that Babasaheb Ambedkar fought entire life towards this goal.

The mutilated personality:

Caste mutilates the personality in two ways: internally and externally

The external factors such as presence of caste puts limitations on the growth of individuals and it crushes the personalities by the predominant value system like Brahmanism. It needs various strategies to dismantle the external structures and factors and political power is the sure way of doing that as the society lacks requisite social and economic strength. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar looked at democratic principles of Governance as a way to dismantle the external structures that mutilates the human personality from outside.

The internalization of the caste system and its values is the most important factor in reclaiming human personality. Enough progress has been made since 1956 that most of the members from the untouchable caste are free to reclaim their human personality by freeing themselves from the caste, but contrary to that many, if not most, of them are still entangled into the labyrinth of the caste identities. They take pride in the narrow caste identities and thus limit their own growth and that of the larger community that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar strove hard to create. Basically, humans do not need support of identities to live a fulfilled life. They can be just human and act in the world. But the security is one of the psychological problems of human beings and they try to find it somewhere, including in case of Indians, the identity of the caste. The faster the followers of Babasaheb cast away their caste, faster will be the social movement towards realization of the values of liberty, equality, fraternity and manuski. This is not to say that one should be naïve and not understand caste. One should strive to understand the dynamics of the caste system and see how this dynamics can be used to gain access to power for the disenfranchised communities in India.

The larger goal is therefore reclamation of human personality; of our own and that of others.

The Grand single strategy which will influence various methods and tactics are therefore as follows:

1. Recruiting oneself for the social revolution

We always try to recruit others for the battle, but what is important is self recruitment for this noble and great battle. After the recruitment follows the training. We must strive to train our selves so that first of all we save ourselves from the heinous caste identities that pull us down from the level of humans. This can be done by following the straightforward path of the Buddha. I am just describing it in some details below.

Applying the principle of no-fixed self (Anatta)

However hard we try to fixed self in our experience of body and mind, we cant really find it, The Buddha asked us to find, rather challenged us to find, the fixed self. The self is conceptually created. It is the outcome of the social, cultural and family conditioning. The caste is same as this. It is just a label, but this labeling process creates a perpetual cycle of locking ourselves in the narrow and limiting selves. Once we break from this illusion of “atta” and see that reality and nature of our being, we no longer fix ourselves in the labels.

Applying teachings of the impermanence

Everything changes. If we understand this basic truth of the existence, it is very easy to brave and not to hear unknown.

Unsatisfactoriness of the self centered life

The self centered life is basically a limiting life and it is not the full expression of what we really are, to use the jargonic language, social creatures. It is therefore essential to understands limits of self centeredness and family life or life confined to one caste.

2. Recruiting other human beings for the social revolution

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is a great example of this. He not only recruited and trained his own caste men, but influenced and opened up a broad and glorious vision for all the people who came in his sphere of influence. He has no enemy and he often said that he carries no animosity even in the worst situations. There are various ways to recruit other human beings; one of the important way is to open up a new Vista of world for them, another is challenging their intellect so that they can think big and for themselves.

Whither we go from here

1. Building communities of people who are trying to create a society beyond caste through practical methods
2. Making caste and social discrimination the most important issue in politics, debates on national and international levels
3. Immediate followers of Babasaheb casting away their caste and reclaiming their personality, which is the essence of social revolution that Babasaheb inaugurated.

If we work on these simple things slowly and gradually, the complex things will happen surely and suddenly!!

7. Internationalism and revolutions: What about India?

Internationalism and revolutions: What about India?

This article per se is not about internationalism. It is about linking the revolutionary spirit of human beings all over the world which influences one another irrespective of their national boundaries. Let us begin with the revolution in England in the 17th century, where in Royal army fought against the Parliament army. The crown of England belonged to different dynasties with their roots in other European countries, and the first victory of the parliamentary army over the royal army transferred the power in the hands of people who were not the rulers then, and it took hundreds of years before the women got right to vote in UK, which only happened in 1920s. The end of Stuart Dynasty in England, one can say, unleashed the forces towards modern Parliament and Democracy.

England pursued the course of colonialisation, but not only that, all other countries from the continental Europe fought against each other to get hold of lands and people in the rest of the world. (Germany was left out from this struggle and it was busy in solving its own political problems). The English colonialisation of America happened at the same time when they expanded in the east. The east was having its own development and in the 17th century, Agra was more populous than London, and if sources are to be believed, more advanced market than London.

We can look at the colonialisation from the present linguistic and religious map of the world. I am giving these examples to show that nothing happened in vacuum or independently of events in certain countries, as a matter of fact, these events are interconnected with the human spirit that loves liberty, equality and fraternity, which goes beyond nation, language and cultures. Wasn't the Boston's tea party related with the tea brought from India?

The French support and influence on American Revolution is very strong, and had it not been for France to fight together with then Americans, it would have been difficult for American to win their war against the British. Wasn't the French support connected with their defeat by the British on Indian soil? One of the gentlemen who effectively participated in American Revolution was English gentleman was Thomas Paine. His pamphlet provided a ideological framework for American revolution, famously known as "Common Sense". His another important work "Rights of Man" influenced the great social revolutionary in India, Tatyasaheb Jotiba Phule, who was one of the Gurus of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Thomas Paine also influenced the revolution in France, and the British connection of the French revolution can't be underestimated. Voltaire was much affected by Newton's rationality and scientific temper.

One of the important revolutions in the history is that of revolution of proud Blacks in Haiti, and their glorious struggle to fight the colonialist and found the nation of their own in Haiti. This happened at the same time when revolutions were taking place all over the places. What was happening in the east then?

The so called the east and the west were always connected. There were always interactions between people through trade, commerce and religious missionary work. The Buddhist monks traveled all over the places from India, to both the east and the west. In the modern times, who can forget the contribution of John Dewey in China and Japan, the famous teacher of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in the Columbia University. Many of the ideas which fertilised science in the west went from the east, including celebrated zero, and the mathematical algebra derives its name from Arabian Al Jabr.

The point that I am arriving at is this: it is very important to link people to cause revolution in any part of the world.

Recently Barak Obama visited India. He is the outcome of the celebrated struggle of Black leaders in the first half of the last century, but their struggle goes far in the past. Though for whatever reasons, people like Abraham Lincoln dwelled on the conflict between union or slavery, and ultimately resolving it by tying them together in the Civil war, by creating the black regiment and freeing the slaves, there was always a thirst towards the end of slavery. When we look back into the history we can see that American Bill of Rights were full of discrepancies as it failed to give and treat the Blacks equally with the white citizens. At least one can clearly see that there were whites who fought and died to end the slavery, though the movement was led by very talented and resourceful Black leaders. The movement and efforts of last hundreds of years culminated eventually in Obama's presidency. This is not to say that Obama is not a talented man. He is the smartest man alive on the earth with his wide ranging knowledge and skill to lead the longest democracy in the world.

I am trying to link up two things here; revolutions and internationalism. The constitution that Babasaheb Ambedkar wrote gave a gift of democracy to India, thus making it the largest democracy. The success of Indian democracy can also be attributed to the structures of democracy that the British rule created in India, mostly during the First World War. Had there been not the practice of democracy, it would have been difficult to ensure continuation of that in India. However the similar experience of Pakistan, which failed to carry on the democracy, and rather tilted in favour of Theocracy, is struggling with lot issues, such as internal strife and so on.

Despite of the fact that there is Democracy in India and its eventual part in acting as a great leveler, so many things in India needs to be changed, and one of them and the most important of them, is the

dismantling of the caste system. The caste system creates the practice of untouchability and kills the spirit of human innovation, rather its completely inhuman to believe in the caste system. The Indian struggle against the caste system, though should be led by the Indians themselves, and effectively they have to mobilize their forces, needs the support of international communities. Unless there is a global awakening that there is something pathetically wrong with India, the internal issues, which are not internal, but human issues, will not be solved.

The soccer world cup pitched an advertisement “Say No to Race”, why Indian Government did not pitch for the simple sound bites “Say No to Caste”. The silence over the important issues speaks louder than the roaring claim that India is becoming a developed nation. Mere glance at the statistical figures will show that such is not the case, and still there is a long way to go, long long way to go!!

The important aspect of the social revolution in India is therefore make the revolution an international revolution and invoke the revolutionary human spirit of people all over the world.

8. Information technology and social movement in India

The traditional control over the information is main cause of creation of hierarchy and domination of one group over another. It is applicable to not only society, but also in economics as clearly demonstrated by Nobel Laureate, Joseph Stiglitz, in his pioneering work on information economics. A symmetrical and skewed information will always create imperfect markets and therefore the state will have to insure that the information is available freely and to all, thus resulting into two important public legislations; Corporate Social Responsibility (in which the private sector will have to disclose crucial information not only to the stakeholders, but also to the citizens) and Right to Information (The state will disclose all information to the citizens except in few areas of national defense etc).

So much so about the information and its availability. The information also needs a medium to reach to the masses, otherwise the masses can not have requisite information to form their opinions and hence judgments about schemes, policies and intentions of the political classes. The media that communicates such information (in many cases such information is useless to the welfare of masses and information can be ornamental and entertaining) is largely dominated by the politically and socially dominant classes in India. In this grave situation where the information is communicated based on the importance of it to dominant players, the common citizens languish in the dark dungeon of ignorance and eventual suffering and helplessness.

Knowledge is power is very important aphorism of Renaissance Era, but how will citizens form knowledge without having correct information is a big question that needs careful attention. Faulty information will lead to faulty inferences and faulty inferences leads to faulty actions. Right to information is important but what is also important is the right information.

Day to day experiences of the common masses in India are far from televised images and sports which feeds into pockets of already rich companies. The picture begins to emerge clearly if one just look at the front page of any news paper.

I would like to bring to surface two important news items. One is related to Indian Premium League (Known as IPL where the payers auctioned for crores of Indian rupees), the bidders put their bait for the prospective players and hundreds of crores are spent (rather wasted) on a minor few players. The same newspapers carry in the fine print news about India's rank in the Global Hunger Index, in which India lies miserably low. A quarter of world's hungry population lives in India and the situation is worst than the sub-Saharan region. The more important question is: Are

citizens of India hungry for food or entertaining sports?

Food is an existential issue, no sport person can sport without food. Despite of this why there is so much encouragement to the sports and not to the food which is the crucial national problem. Why is there no reference in the media about hunger and poverty? What we are ashamed of nation?

Adding fuel to fire and readers will let me use this metaphor for the lack of other one is the question of inflation. The rise in prices of the essential commodities is the most important concern for the common citizen. The prices increased by whopping 50 percent. If the Chana Dal was priced Rs. 100 in the past, now the citizens have to pay Rs. 150 for the same. The prices fluctuates more than the fluctuations of power in the rural India where people play the volley with prices in the game of Indian Poverty Leagues, in which players have no alternative, but to sell their dignity and honor.

Such a disgusting situation and our national psyche. I began with Information technology and I ended up talking about two important problems of India's citizens; hunger and inflation. I have barely touched the monster problem or for the weak hearts the mother of problems; the caste system. There is a direct correlation between poverty in India and status of the people in the social ladder. The more lowered caste you are, the more chances that you are hungry and frightened by the ever rising inflation.

Right information is a need of time and dissemination of it is important and disadvantaged classes should get hold of every possible media to reach out and Speak the Truth!!

This is applicable to netizens who are regularly on internet to catch the facts and spread them. At least people have recourse to facts to interpret the world around them so that they are free from malicious grip of the information fed by the dominant classes. The freedom starts with speaking out and let us speak.

I am writing this on the occasion of the 9th anniversary of the Buddhist Circle, the egroup that was founded in 2001 and grown into a network of over 1000 people, who are not only concerned with writing the truth, but change the world in which each of us can participate equally and fully.

9. Thoughts on Women's reservation bill

We as a nation have come a long way after passing the Women's Reservation Bill, at least, at the moment, in upper house. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar a pioneer in women's liberation who introduced a very important social legislation, Hindu Code Bill, for women's liberation and equality, said something which is very important: I measure the progress of the society by the progress of the women in that society. This is very true as the society consists not just of men, but half of the society and social experience is that of women's.

The caste hindus opposed the Hindu Code Bill and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar resigned in the protest. The another reason that he cited in his resignation treatment is the Government's apathy to the Other Backward Classes, though it was mandated by the Constitution of India by Article 340. What followed is Government's appointment of the Kaka Kalelkar commission, whose report was then thrown in the dustbin by the Congress Government only to be brought alive by V.P. Singh Government. Both the issue of liberation of women and that of OBCs was so crucial to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The present opposition to the bill is a bittersweet memory of what happened in the 50s.

At present, two national parties are headed by women in our country. The INP is led by Sonia Gandhi and the BSP is headed by Mayavati. Compared to what Mayavati achieved without any political heritage and social disadvantage is something extraordinary in the caste ridden Indian society. Her aspirations were kindled by the possibilities of a new world shown by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. But not all women are in such a position to throw away dominance of men and caste prejudices.

The women's reservation is a welcome step and their participation on the larger scale will improve general efficiency of Government and our political structure, but without inclusion of the women from disadvantaged sections through proper legal representation, it will remain just a weapon to control disadvantaged classes through the hegemony of upper caste men and upper caste women.

10. Caste crossfire: Clash of Historical interpretations and upside down world

In Maharashtra, Sambhaji Brigade (Sambhaji was the son of the famous warrior king, Shivaji, who is the centre of this piece of note) along with Non Bramhanical movement organisation, BAMCEF launched a campaign to remove the statue of Dadu Kondadev, successfully. The statue was removed promptly after the resolution was passed Pune Municipality Council to that effect. Dadu Kondadev, according to the textbooks on Maratha history, was a mentor of Shivaji, the seventeenth century ruler of parts of Maharashtra. He effectively established what can be termed as Maratha empire. He has become a symbol of Maratha Nationalism. An explanation of the term "Maratha" will not be out of place here. He was Marathi speaking ruler. Maratha as such is not a caste, but a designation for Marathi speaking people, who were mostly in the service of Shivaji and his successors.

Shivaji rose to power from a small principality and built a Maratha Empire. He was forgotten quickly, but was discovered in the 19th century by no other than the Great leader of Non-Bramhanical movement, Jotiba Phule. The first written text on Shivaji is a ballad written by Jotiba Phule, who praised Shivaji's many qualities as a just ruler. However, Shivaji was co-opted by Tilak, who used him as symbol to create what can now be termed as "Hindu" Nationalism. Studies on Tilak and his concept of Nationalism indicate that he opted for Bramhan Nationalism, in the guise of Hindu Nationalism. As always, people in India are interested in the caste of the great people. All the evidences proved that Shivaji was from the landowning community, and his caste is not clearly indicated, but he was definitely non-Bramhan. Unlike the great Maratha prince, Shahu Maharaj, whom Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar termed as the "father of silent social democratic revolution", Shivaji was not opposed to Bramhans. In fact, he faced humiliation by kissing the toe of Gaga Bhutta in his desire to be recognised by the Bramhans as the Kshatriya. While Shahu Maharaj took a clear cut stand against the Bramhanical hegemony.

The bone of contention between the Bramhans and non Bramhans on Shivaji is about two figures; Ramdas and Dadu Kondadev. They were Bramhans, and according to Bramhan historians, they were king maker, or instrumental in making Shivaji the king emperor. This view is opposed by the Maratha leaders (mainly the Kunabis) and they claim that Shivaji was influenced by Tukaram, the great Marathi saint-poet. According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Tukaram's social revolution paved a way for Shivaji's political revolution. The quarrel reached its summit when James Laine published a book on Shivaji, indicating that Dadu Kondadev was a biological father of Shivaji. What followed was mayhem and burning on Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune.

Recently an ultimatum was given by Sambhaji Brigade and Bharat Mukti Morcha to remove the alleged humiliating statue of Dadu Kondadev in Pune. The PMC complied and what followed is an interesting story, worth telling in many words, but due to restriction of space, a few lines will suffice.

Shiv Sena was founded by Bal Thakare, whose father was one of the greatest social reformer Maharashtra has seen. His name is Prabodhankar Thakare (Prabodhan means to make people enlightened). He was the staunchest opponent of Hinduism and bitter enemy of Bramhanism. His books spit venom on Bramhans and Hinduism, and they are now in wider circulation, thanks to the efforts of Non-Bramhanical movements in India, and mostly in Maharashtra. Shiva Sena made Shivaji a prominent figure in arousing the sentiments of people, it was a "Maratha Nationalism" card played by the CKPs (Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu). No doubt the CKPs due to their Shudra status as that of Shivaji remained very loyal to Shivaji, unlike Bramhans. The Marathi historical documents reveal how CKPs fought with Bramhans, the battle continued till Prabodhankar Thakare. Shiv Sena benefitted by this churning in of emotions around "Maratha Nationalism", however the lower caste Marathas didnt benefit due to coming of power of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. Presently, a new card of nationalism is played by nephew of Thakare, which can be termed as "Marathi Nationalism". One can say that both "Marathi" and "Maratha" brand of nationalisms are anathema to the Indian constitution. Now Shiv Sena and MNS is taking a stand that Dadu Kondadev's statue should be reinstalled.

Simultaneously, there was a lot of uproar in "Marathi Sahitya Sammelan", the congregation of Marathi writers, which was headed by famous Buddhist Ambedkarite writer, Uttam Kamble. The issue was inclusion of Godse who killed Gandhi in the publication of Marathi Sahitya Sammelan. It was opposed by the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), however there was a clash of people on the renaming of the ground on which the congregation was held. The irony of the situation is that the Shiv Sena opposed renaming of the ground in the name of Thakre's own father, Prabodhankar Thakre.

It is undoubtedly clear that history and historical interpretations are becoming bone of contention between social and political classes. One can say that it is a great game of "History", but it is not just about history, it is about caste and history. It is about history morphed, changed, interpreted, re-interpreted and eventual weaponised to set people apart with an eventual clash with real weapons of mass destruction. It is time to look at future. Though past can be light and heavy depending on who is benefiting from it, it is important to look at the coming future from the view and vision of our constitution, which encourages transformation through debates and discussions, evidences and facts. There can be doubts about history, but there is beyond doubt a political game is being played with players shifting sides depending on the their hold of power and desire to hold the power.

At the moment, the world remains upside down, where the most pressing issues of caste exploitation and poverty are relegated to the position of gross negligence, and banners are raised over the issue who did what in the barren past.

11. Movies, books and social change

For the first time in Indian Cinema, the movie, Raktacharitra, is made into sequence and is being released back to back. The main character in the movie is from lower caste, whose father is murdered by conspirators from upper caste. The movie begins with politics of caste, and then culminates into gory scenes of violence which reminds one of the massacre in Jehanabad and Naxal infected areas in India. Though it is difficult to watch those gory scenes, but they act as a reminder to amount of violence in real life in India; killing of civilians, uniformed, dalits and tribals.

The first part ends with protagonist becoming a big leader through democracy, and the ultimate message is this that the change can be brought in if the perpetrators are punished (in this case not in the court of law or punitive police system which is shown to be corrupt and biased) and democratic system of elections is used to gain control of power. As such it is a masala movie, but what makes it stand above other movies is the clear depiction of the tension between the High castes and low castes. In other movies that made it a big on the box office, particularly Dabhangg, where Salman Khan claims that he is from high caste, and that is, Bramhin, and same with Shahrukh Khan in Swadesh, though there is a lovely dialogue clearly indicating caste system and untouchability. So the movies are not caste immune, and besides Akrosh, which is a remake of "Mississippi Burning" in Priyadarshan's style based on massacre of civil right activists in America which eventually led to massive protest.

Coming back to Indian Cinema, which is lavish in creating surreal images and give birth to gods and goddesses, both real (who can forget temples of South Indian actresses) and imaginary (Santoshi Mata), has failed miserably in educating public through entertainment. The unending sequences of songs and marriage ceremonies can grip the audiences to such a level that they never realise that most of the Indians are not married the way it is shown in the Indian movies. It is completely different world far away from reality of Indian society.

May the movies not only touch the issues of Page 3 and Corporate life, but also show the social realities as they stand.

Yesterday, Ramchandra Guha published his book: Makers of India, and in his interview in the newspapers, he claims that Gandhian literature is consciously promoted while the other makers of India have been neglected. This is a very right and objective observation. The state control rationing of Gandhian literature could fool the western people, but it couldnt fool the Indian masses, and important figures, perhaps far important than Congress leaders, were kept alive by the masses with their sweat and

money. Not only that but the personalities like Mahatma Phuley who thought beyond his present time, and create a solid foundation for Indian democracy, and EVR Ramaswamy Periyar who at least for sometime demolished the Bramhanical tyranny only to be replaced by dominant middle castes in the state of Tamil Nadu.

India is changing, and so will be media and books. In fact they do not have to change, they only have to work towards bringing out the reality and contradictions in the Indian society. Indian society is seeing rise to power of Dalits in UP, and the Dalit led party is the third largest party in India, and if it continues to grow with this pace, will soon make important headway. There are public intellectuals like Arundhati Roy, P. Sainath and Meera Nanda and a galaxy of stars who try show the humanity what is wrong with our country and how to work for a better society.

12. The Basic Teachings of the Buddha' by Glenn Wallis

I have been reading Glenn Wallis's basic teachings of the Buddha since 2007. This is not a voluminous book, but the beauty of the book lies not in his size but its content and the arrangement of the material. The material consists of 16 Suttas from Pali Tipitaka. The scheme of the book is the introduction to history of Buddhist texts, which also introduces philosophical gloss over the texts and words. He also examines the texts as such from the very creative standpoint of philosophers of literature, like Umberto Eco and Italo Calvino. In fact this book introduced me to the great writings of Calvino and Eco; the giants of literary creativity. He also gives a touch of lightness to the introduction by bringing poetic inspiration from Emerson and Whitman. The introduction is worth reading many times, because of its beauty and vista that it opens up to the readers.

The main body of the book consists of 16 texts selected very carefully from the vast expanse of Pali Buddhism. It introduces the readers gradually to the 'basic teachings' of the Buddha. The main body is followed by guidance to the texts selected by Wallis. The guidance is like a key to unlock secrets of the 16 suttas. Glenn Wallis is the scholar of Sanskrit and Pali language. In fact he wrote his doctoral thesis on Vajrayana Buddhism and he has been practicing Buddhism from last 30 years. The clear illustrations of the teachings and commentaries on certain world give the reader an encouragement to practice the teachings of the Buddha. This book can be titled as "the guide to practice the Dhamma". I had an occasion to sit in a meditation with him in Philadelphia with my Indian Buddhist friends. In that meditation session he brought alive the naturalness of the meditation practice.

The 16 texts are also divided into 16 legs of schematic journey, beginning with our home that is our body and mind. The first sutta talks exactly about how we are wandering in the foreign domain (the world of sounds, sights, tastes, touches, smells and thoughts) leaving behind our natural habitat (the body, feelings, mental states and reality). The 16th text is the Mahasatipatthana sutta, which is about how to live like the Buddha.

This book makes the Buddha's personality human by freeing the personality of the Buddha from mysterious atmosphere. He makes Buddha human and hence accessible to any human being. This book is not just a delight to read, but a very important addition to the body of Buddhist literature, which aims at liberation of human minds and end of suffering.

More about Glenn can be found out at <http://www.glennwallis.com/>

13. From Primitive society to enlightened society

Human beings are evolved species. They came to where they are in the geological time scale due to natural selection. The beautiful principle that Charles Darwin discovered explains the origin of species, including us. Charles Darwin was greatly affected by slavery, and in a way, through his discovery he proved that all humans are one species. They are mutable species. On the scale of time, we began to arise in our present form just a few million years before. Prior to that we might be in the form of Pika, as speculated by Stephen Jay Gould in his famous book “Wonderful Life” on Burgess Shell ancient fauna found in North America.

Human beings are different than animals. They are endowed with special consciousness or mind that can reflect. It is termed as “reflective consciousness”, consciousness that is aware of itself. Human minds are capable doing complex tasks that include reasoning, language and literature. They wonder about their origin, and their end. The human mind is not just rational, but also emotional and volitional. The later two aspects of human mind dominate his rationality and his intelligence.

Though it is begin to change with the changes in intellectual advancement of humanity through science, the past beliefs are still dominating humanity at large. Human beings as it were are torn into two mental compartments; one compartment dominated by beliefs which has no basis in facts and other compartment dominated by science which is based on evidences, facts and experiments. Beliefs may have origin in primal fear of death and destruction. This seems to be largely true if we look at the religious texts and philosophies of the ancient times. The beliefs are based on the fantastic stories which feed on human fear for change and destruction. The religions begin with the beginning of the universe and creation of human beings therein, except Vedic Bramhanism which posits beginning of the world directly to the creation of the Varna system. Unlike Abraham based religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) which is based on Creationism by intelligent being (God), Bramhanical creationism is based creation of Varna system, but only confined to the creation of men without any attention to creation of women.

The concept of soul (the eternal me) is also a dominant concept in the religions. The creator (eternal outside) and soul (eternal inside) are the twin pillars on which ancient societies stood up. The pillars were blasted by science, including advancement in understanding the nature better, and understanding human mind as a natural fact. Human beings crave for certainty and we fear contingency. In fact uncertainty and contingency created the present life form. Change is the reality of life, and basis of modern developments, when human minds engaged with the nature around to use it to make human life better. Man is a tool making animal, and this quality of mind has brought men out of caves in the cities.

These tools including the modern tools are meant to make human life easier, and more refined tools that responded to needs of human beings needed understanding of the nature. The more one understands nature, the more it is easy for human beings to live a better life. This understanding of nature and human beings quest to understand it has not entered into understanding human societies, morality and politics. This is more or less true about Indian society, which is still based on the caste system, which denies basic humanity to masses. The system of caste benefits only a few and keeps masses perpetually in the poverty and suffering.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was the only Indian who looked into these issues from the scientific methods. He is in a true sense a philosopher of science who inquired into the nature of Indian society and found what is wrong with it. He not only found what is wrong with it, but gave a solution, which is embedded in his total scheme of liberation of humanity from inhuman social norms and religious ideas. He demanded critical inquiry based on scientific methods of the Brahmanical religious books, which have led the Indian societies where it is today, that is fragmented humanity divided into thousands of war camps.

In Buddhism, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar found systematic method to awaken human beings. This is very remarkable that the Buddha who was born in India was the first to pose intellectual challenges to humanity. He gave remarkable methods to know the fountainhead of our experience, the instrument of experience and the creator of that what is possible, and that is that, human mind.

Key to change the world in the right direction is to understand the human mind and the mind of the world as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar remarked.

14. Tribute to Bhagwan Das

Death of great people always reminds us of their good done to others. Bhagwan Das is one of the stars and heroes after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who not only shouldered his responsibilities, but helped to strengthen the struggle of the Dalits all over India.

I often met him at his Munirka residence many times in New Delhi, and also in recent years I went to see this great man, and learn at his feet the great learnings of his years with Babasaheb Ambedkar. He belonged to so called Bhangi community, and he tried all his life to convince Bhangi community people that they are Broken people (Bhangis) and not Valmikis (a hinduised identity posed on them by the upper caste Hindus to Hinduise them and bring them under Hindu flag in 1920s and 30s). Sometimes he was rebuked by his own people. I learnt from him the great stories about Babasaheb's life in his flawless English. He was a High Court advocate and fought many important cases, but to my mind his important contribution is in making Dalit/untouchable problems outside India. As such the strategy of the dominant classes in India is to hide the ugly truth of caste and discrimination and create a rosy picture, but Bhagwan Das not only spoke in UN about the problems of the untouchables, but also he was a member of many Human Rights commissions, including IMADR founded by Burakumins of Japan. He also worked with people so discriminated from Nepal and parts of South Asia.

His another important contribution is in the area of publishing Babasaheb's speeches in famous volumes which nurtured my childhood and teenage fascination for Babasaheb, which were published under title "Thus Spake Ambedkar". These speeches were the only source to learn about Babasaheb's message in the early days of the movement till Maharashtra government started publishing the blue books which sort of fueled social revolution all over India.

In the early days, Bhagwan worked throughout India to make SSD stronger and along with his friends from Punjab, including L.R. Bali got lot of important works published in Hindi, another milestone in the Ambedkarite movement after Babasaheb Ambedkar. Samata Sainik Dal (SSD) acted as a very important force at the time of Babasaheb, and it continued its work even after Babasaheb.

He was a fearless fighter, and even when he grew old he kept copies of paper cutting related to Dalits and development in various fields. He told me many stories, and one of them that I will relate is this: one day he was reading a book written by Darwin: Origin of Species, and Babasaheb came and saw him reading it, became fascinated and told him that he havent read that book, but found the ideas of Darwin interesting.

The way he talked about Babasaheb created the scenes lively in my mind. His library was immense and he was fond of books. He was always surrounded by books. His grasp of western philosophy was strong and deep, and also his hold on English language, but also he was master of Urdu Language. In fact he wrote books in Urdu.

I salute this great man, and I hope sincerely that the Dalits throughout India will follow in his footsteps. One of his actions to show his efforts to end the caste system is to marry off his son and daughters to people from all different castes thus creating a truly Buddhist classless and casteless family.

15. The snake that ate Dinosaur

The title is not describing some myth, but the fact brought to the light by the fossil findings in Gujarat, India. The natural historians brought into light many amazing facts about the history of life. However this fact inscribed in the fossil rock about 67 million years old is special and it shows how reptiles preyed on the Dinosaurs themselves. The Dinosaurs ruled the world for 100 million years like kings of the earth and other species unquestionably the mammals and reptiles lived like pygmies in the era dominated by the Dinosaurs. Compared to reign of Homo Sapiens the Dinosaur reign is far larger in the length of time. And here in Gujarat we found an evidence of a snake devouring babies of Dinosaur.

It is almost a political lesson to the state of Gujarat which is infamous for twisting history and killing the members of the species brutally in the name of nationalism and Hindu fundamentalism. The evolutionary history of nation states and of the religions themselves is shorter than the blink of eye compared to the history of life forms before the coming of stage of erected apes. The sophisticated consciousness of such species which explores the deep time and the species existing before millions of years is blurred by the narrow conception of existence informed by the religious texts. The speculative nature of such texts creates further ado, which is harmless till it comments on the relations between people of the same species and their position in the divine creation, which creates a divine tragedy of mass murders, riots and killings.

The directed inquiries even at such a mundane thing like stone and rocks can teach us lessons which can never be taught by the so called sacred scriptures. The facts are always interpreted by the people according to their conditioning, and hence the quarrels emerge out of multiplicity of the interpretations that each of us try to get at when some facts are reveals. Sometimes we believe in the interpretations of the interpretations ad infinitum.

The fact that Snake ate Dinosaur should challenge some of the interpretations of the skewed minds finding solace in hatred and ultimate waste and destruction of the precious human life. The world throws us such revealing and earth shattering evidences of our marginal position in the stream of life. However we try to create an interpretation that we dominated the earth and that we are the final product of divine will to enjoy the fruits of the creation. One can understand this logic to certain extent, but when we look at our more human acts and behavior and how we hold religious interpretations as the truth statements and in the name of those interpretations took up the sword or in modern avatar took up AK 47 and kill other human beings.

In what can be called the poetic justice, the fossils were found in Gujarat, the laboratory to experiment

with the fundamentalist doctrines. In India, not a lot of people will read about the snake that ate Dinosaurs. Generally the love for science is low in the country where the people get buoyed by the seeing that Ganesh drinks milk. The scientific facts cry out for audience. Stupid, it is simple scientific fact of surface tension!!