Post-Panther Dalit movements and the making of civility in India

Suryakant Waghmore

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University of Edinburgh

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Abstract

Civil society has come to dominate the discourses of development and social change for the last few decades. This thesis is a critical engagement with the liberal ideas of civil society; it specifically explores the politics that surfaces in the civic sphere in the context of caste inequalities through the study of Dalit socio-political organisations that occupy the margins of civil society in India.

This ethnography of Dalit politics interrogates the intersections of caste and civil society in current globalised times and spaces through exploration into post-Panther phase of Dalit politics in rural Maharashtra. The focus is on two socio-political movements; one is Manavi Hakk Abhiyan (MHA), a grassroots Dalit organisation with international networks and the other is Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) a national Dalit political party.

This study offers insights into the dynamic nature of caste and its vitality in constructing localised form/s of civil society in India. A common running theme in the thesis is Dalit politics of resistance and their struggle to access justice through the state despite the continued denial of justice to Dalits through fragmented institutions of the state. The study, thus, observes how the participation of Dalit movements in claiming democratic citizenship through party politics occurs alongside the marginalisation of Dalit assertion in electoral politics.

Looking beyond the state, the thesis charts the relationships between Dalits and the external relational fields within which they operate: it details the vernacular modes of communication in the civic sphere where protests and violence are important modes; the innovative uses of caste and cultural repertoires by Dalit movements in challenging caste hierarchy and forming collective identities of protest; and finally, the context of global associational revolution and engagement of NGOs and INGOs as new associations in Dalit politics of resistance.

This thesis contributes to the larger debates on the makings of caste and civil society in India and argues that caste and Dalit movements have a key role in constructing localised forms of civility and civil society that challenge the dynamic hierarchies and exclusions of caste.

Acknowledgements

Glossary

Aani-baani	Marathi term for state of emergency in India between 1975-1977.
Ati-shudra	Refers to untouchable castes that are classed as outside of the Varna therefore 'untouchable'.
Babasaheb	Ambedkar is also referred to as Babasaheb as a sign of respect amongst Dalits.
Bahujan	Literally means "majority". As an ideological construct Bahujan refers to organising the lower castes that constitute a majority into a political community.
Bajra	Pearl millet, also referred to as *bajri* in Marathi.
Bauddha	Mahars who have converted to Buddhism are also referred to as Bauddha.
Bhakar/bhakri	Flattened bread made out of jowar or bajra.
Chambar	The third most numerical ex-untouchable caste in Maharashtra whose caste occupation was shoe making and leather work.
Charmakar	Sanskritised name for the word Chambar.
Dhangar	Shepherd Caste
Gaairan	Gaai literally meant cow and *ran* means land. The grazing lands attached to villages are referred to as gaairan in Marathwada.
Gaav	Village
Gavaki	Village duties of Mahars.
Girdhawar	Circle[comprising of few villages] revenue inspector.
Gram panchayat	The decentralised governance structure in Maharashtra is a three tier system with Zilla Parishad at District level, Panchayat Samiti at Block/Taluka level and Gram Panchayat at the village level.
Jai Bhim	Means victory to Ambedkar and followers of Ambedkar prefer to greet each other with Jai Bhim instead of the Hindu ways of greeting like *ram ram.*
Jat(i)	Caste
Jatiwad(i)	Casteism or communalism
Jayanti	Birth anniversary, Jayanti is used to refer to annual birthday celebrations of political and socio-religious leaders.
Jwaree/Jowar	Indian variety of sorghum and an important cereal for rural poor.
Karan	A *karan* refers to a religious event of sacrificing animals (buffaloes or goats) which friends and relatives feast on. A potraj is called to make this sacrifice in the case of goddess mari-aai. A karan of mari-aai can also be done by the village patil if he offers the halya (male buffalo). Karan is generally done to ask for a *navas* (specific blessings) from gods or to return the blessings that goddess has extended.

Khairlanj	A village in Bhandara district of Maharashtra. In September 2006 four members of a Dalit family were murdered in this village by the Kunbi-Marathas.
Kunbi	A peasant/cultivator caste considered as lower sub-caste of the Maratha caste.
Lok Sabha	House of the People, members of which are directly elected.
Mahapurush	Literally means great-men. A term used in Dalit movements to refer to 'great men' who challenged indignities of caste.
Mahar	The most numerous ex-untouchable caste in Maharashtra ranked lower than the Chambars in caste hierarchy.
Maharuda/Manguda	Dalit localities, places where Mangs and Mahars live.
Mang	The second most numerous ex-untouchable caste amongst in Maharasthra after the Mahars. Mangs are ranked lower than the Mahars and Chambars.
Mari-aai	In Maharashtra Mariaai or Laxmi aai are symbolic of the virgin village goddesses.
Namantar/Namantar movement:	Namantar means changing of name. The terms are associated with Dalit mobilisation that ensued from late 1970s till mid-90s in Maharashtra to rename Marathwada University.
Panchayat Samiti	See Gram Panchayat
Parishad	Meeting/conference
Parit	Washer man
Patil	Village headman who generally came from Maratha caste.
Potraj	A potraj generally belongs to Mahar or Mang caste and is the worshipper of Mari-aai.
Rajya Sabha	Council of States, member of this council are elected by through the representatives of state legislative assemblies.
Samaj	A term variedly used in to refer to social groupings like caste or collective identities like Dalit or Bahujan.
Sarpanch	Chairman of village panchayat
Satyagraha	Peaceful modes of protest
Savarnas	Caste Hindus. The term is also used as a synonym for Marathas by Dalits in Marathwada.
Shudra	Shudra is the fourth and lower Varna and castes under Shudra Varna are considered ritually impure.
Talathi	Village Revenue Inspector
Taluka	Also referred to as Block/Tehsil, is an administrative unit in a District.
Tahsildar/Tehsildar	Block/Taluka revenue officer
Teli	Oil pressing caste
Valmiki	Sweepers or cleaners [also referred to as Bhangi]
Vanjari	Identified as OBC in Maharashtra is ranked lower than the Marathas in Maharashtra.

Veth begar	Extracting forced labour related to caste, was practiced in Marathwada region.
Vichar/vaicharik	Literally means thoughts/ideas, was used in the movements to refer to ideology.
Vidhan Sabha	State Legislative Assembly
Yeskarki	Caste duties of the Mahars like cleaning village streets and removing carcasses of dead animals.
Zilla Parishad	See Gram Panchayat

Abbreviations

BAMCEF – Bahujan and Minority Community Employees Federation

BBM - Bahujan Bharipa Mahasangh

BJP – Bhartiya Janta Party

BMP: Bahujan Majdoor Paksha

BPL – Below Poverty Line

BSP – Bahujan Samaj Party

CBI – Central Bureau of Investigation

CM – Chief Minister

CPI – Communist Party of India

CPI (M) – Communist Party of India (Marxist)

DS4 – Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti

FIR – First Information Report

GoM – Government of Maharashtra

GP – Gram Panchayat

I/NGO – International/Non-governmental organisation

MLA – Member of Legislative Assembly

MHA – Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan

MLC – Member of Legislative Council

MP –Member of Parliament

NCP – Nationalist Congress Party

NT – Nomadic Tribes

OBC – Other Backward Classes

PCR – Protection of Civil Rights

PM – Prime Minister

PWPI - Peasants and Workers Party of India

RDC – Rural Development Centre

RPI – Republican Party of India

SC – Scheduled Castes

SC/ST (PoA) Act: Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act

SS – Shiv Sena

ST – Scheduled Tribes

ZP – Zilla Parishad

Contents

Introduction

On an afternoon of December 2008 during my fieldwork, I was with Chanderlal Banage at his small cobbler shack in Majalgaon town of Beed District in Maharashtra. Banage is from the Chambar[1] caste (ex-untouchable caste[2]) and we were discussing here an incident of caste discrimination that he had faced early in his life. Banage worked on a shoe as we conversed. Two men came on a motorbike and the one riding the bike asked Banage about the owner of the closed shack next to Banage's shop. Banage informed him that the owner was out of town and may come tomorrow, following this he continued working and talking to me. Banage's reply however did not seem sufficient for the man who with some authority asked Banage again, 'where has he gone? When will he come?' Banage this time stopped the work at hand and politely provided details about a crisis in the neighbouring shop owner's family. He also added that the shop owner will return day after tomorrow for sure. After this the man rode off, I asked Banage if the man on the bike was from the Maratha caste which is a dominant caste in Maharashtra, Banage smiled acknowledging that my guess was right, and added, 'they think they are big (*mote*).'

Since the man did not refer to Banage by his name nor did he use any usual etiquettes of courtesy or respect used in Marathi, and carried a sense of authority in his speech, I tried to take a guess at the man's caste which worked out to be right. My guess was partially influenced by the narratives of activists and participants of Dalit movements who emphasise the dominance of Marathas and continuance of caste based exclusions in Marathwada. Banage though aware of the rudeness in the behaviour of the Maratha man did not get into any argument with him and opted to ignore it. Banage's silence may be mistaken for docile behaviour, but this does not

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[1] Chambars/Charmakars are the numerically third most populous caste after the Mahars and Mangs respectively in Maharashtra. Charmakars are considered higher in status than the Mahars and Mangs. Charmakar is a relatively new sanskritised term for the word Chambar that has come in vogue in last two decades.

[2] The Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra used the term Dalit broadly to include landless labourers and poor of all castes. The word Dalit however is used mostly to refer to Untouchable castes in Indian politics. I use the term Dalit to refer to (ex) Untouchables who are identified as Scheduled Castes in the Constitution of India, at times these terms are also used interchangeably in this thesis.

represent his politics and agency against caste exclusion. Banage though not from Mahar caste which has traditionally dominated Dalit movement and politics in Maharashtra, is part of Bahujan Samaj[3]Party (BSP) and also works for a social organisation called Akhil Bhartiya Guru Ravidas Samata Parishad (ABGRSP) that mobilises Chambars in favour of BSP and Ambedkarite ideology. Besides mobilising the opinion of Chambars and other castes in favour of BSP, Banage contributes funds to these organisations from his limited earnings. He reads and circulates literature linked to the Bahujan movement and his shack was a site for discussion on party politics during the elections of 2009. Due to such efforts he had also managed to convince few Marathas to join BSP.

Banage's politics reflects the deliberative practices in public sphere. He resorts to rational communicative strategies to convince people to join BSP and its anti-caste ideology so as to bring social transformation through capturing state power. In contrast to Banage's politics is Massa Rambhau Kasbe's (37) contentious political engagement. Massa is from Umri village in Beed district and comes for the Mang[4] caste. Being landless he works as a sugarcane migrant labourer for half the year. He also cultivates *gaairan* land (common grazing land) in Umri village despite the opposition of dominant castes and the state authorities. His cultivation of *gaairan* is 'illegal'. A local movement organisation called Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan (Human Rights Campaign, MHA hereon) had played a critical role in raising awareness amongst Dalits, particularly landless Mangs against caste exclusions and for cultivating grazing land. Umri village has around 250 acres of *gaairan* land of which Massa cultivates five acres. MHA has supported Massa and other Dalits to cultivate *gaairan* land in this village since 1996 despite Marathas threatening Dalits

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[3] *Bahujan* literally means "majority" and samaj can be translated as social group or society. As an ideological construct Bahujan refers to organising the lower castes that constitute a majority into a political community
[4] Mangs are the second numerous Scheduled Caste in Maharashtra. Mangs are the most deprived amongst the three major Scheduled Castes, for instance literacy amongst the Charamkars and Mahars is 74.9 and 74.1 per cent respectively, whereas the Mangs stand on 62.2 per cent. Literacy amongst Mang women is at the lowest at 48.6 per cent compared to 60 per cent average for the Scheduled Caste women in Maharashtra. Amongst the Mangs 66.9 per cent continue to reside in rural areas highest amongst the Scheduled Castes followed by Mahars at 65.5 per cent. Mangs have higher percentage as agricultural workers of around 57.9 per cent followed by Mahars at 48.5 per cent. All figures from www.censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_sc_maha.pdf

with violence and occasionally letting their cattle loose in the standing crops. The politicisation of Dalits in Umri has also enabled Dalits to access the common well in the village where they were prohibited earlier.

MHA's politics however is not all extra-institutional. For instance, it helps Dalits resist dominance though helping Dalits resort to legal means like registering police complaints against violence they may face. Grieving Dalits who may have faced violence or face the threat of violence for violating etiquettes of caste, approach activists of MHA who are based in various villages or they visit the Rural Development Centre (RDC) office in Telgaon village. RDC is an NGO run by Dalit activists since mid-80s and is part of MHA. RDC networks with international NGOs and movements in Europe and South America. It also conducts research surveys on *gaairan* cultivations by Dalits and atrocities against Dalits that are used for lobbying with the government.

Massa's membership in Dalit politics is not limited to MHA and he participates in rallies of other Dalit socio-political organisations. For instance he attended a small meeting of MHA in Kaij town meant for organisation building of MHA in September 2008 followed by a massive rally organised by a faction of Republican Party of India (RPI) in October.

Socio-political organisations like RPI, BSP and MHA constitute the fragmented but vibrant Dalit politics of protest and resistance in Maharashtra. These organisations despite their marginal location in the civil society arena continue to influence and shape civil society, state and caste so as to assert Dalit concerns of recognition and redistribution. Banage and Massa's civic engagement is visible in their participation in BSP and MHA respectively to challenge their perceived exclusions of caste and economic deprivations. Banage and Massa's politics point to the simultaneous relevance of caste and liberal institutions of the state and civil society in Dalit politics. The international networks of RDC that partially aid the vernacular practices of MHA's Dalit activism, and the party politics of BSP that is supported

by small non-party organisation like ABGRSP explicate the intersections of civil and political in civil society in general and Dalit politics in particular.

Studying civil society through Dalit politics

The social and economic exclusions of Dalits and the continued stigma and pollution attached to Dalit identity stand in opposition to the conferment of universal citizenship in India. Caste and untouchability continue to be culturally reproduced in insidious forms, generating newer modes of Dalit exclusions and Dalit politics of resistance. Dalit politics in colonial and postcolonial periods achieved several critical socio-political changes and civil society constitutes a critical sphere that has enabled political participation and Dalit politics of resistance.

 "Research on civil society has mostly focussed more on theoretical dimensions than on field level processes" (Varshney 2002: 41). One under studied area in the Indian context is the interface of caste and civil society and, specifically, the agency of the marginalised, particularly Dalits, in shaping civil society. What does the interface of caste and civil society in India means for Dalits and Dalit politics in present globalised times? How do Dalits organise in the realm of civil society and what role do Dalit movements play in civil society? Any endeavour to comprehend the dynamic intersections of (anti?) caste based mobilisations and civil society should consciously include a study of Dalit mobilisation at the grassroots. My research is an attempt in this direction.

Caste and civil society can be viewed as two conflicting structures if analysed through the heuristic dualism of tradition vs. modern where caste is synonymous with tradition and civil society to modern. However a study of the dialectic intersections of caste and civil society can offer insights into the dynamic nature of caste and its vitality in constructing localised form/s of civil society in India. It is this dynamism of caste and civil society that I unravel through my ethnographic study of Dalit movements operating in the socio-political landscapes of the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. Maharashtra makes an interesting case for such a study

because of the historical dimensions of ideology building and mobilisation primarily carried out by Ambedkar followed by growth of post-Ambedkar Dalit movement politics and their supposed 'impasse' in the state (Shah 2002).

This thesis moves beyond the instrumentalist analyses pursued by liberal and Marxist traditions that tend to deny ascribed identities a role in the making of civil society and civility. In transcending normative readings of civil society I argue that caste, civil society and state intersect and co-evolve in postcolonial times. Caste, civil society and state are not rigid structures rather I analyse them as fragmented processes that shape the dynamic fields of power relations. My effort thus is to move beyond the dichotomies of local against global, state against civil society and more importantly caste against democracy or civil society. Caste has continued to dominate the civic sphere since colonial governmentality opened up space for political conversations and competitions. The postcolonial modern sovereign state with a 'liberal' constitution and 'socialist' leanings, followed by the present neoliberal state have hardly reduced the salience of caste in civil society. In moving beyond the structural emphasis, I seek to construct the meanings of civil society, caste and the state through a study of their daily workings and their ideological as well as strategic usage by Dalits who are generally located at the margins of the state and civil society.

Thesis Summary

My study of Dalit politics in the civil society arena rejects structured understandings of civil society, as they can underplay the element of power and the exclusionary character of civil society and public sphere (Flyvberg 1998), and may also ignore the significance of non-bourgeois public spheres and counterpublics (Kellner 2000; Bhandari 2006; Fraser 1985, 1992). A framework that emphasises counterpublics can however be limiting as Dalit movements and politics do not merely communicate within themselves, they also affect changes in the state and civil society at large. As suggested by Asen (2000) counterpublics do not refer to particular places, persons or topics, therefore it is more useful to study how counterpublics set themselves against wider publics. Approaches with structural emphases are not fully adequate to

capture the contextual and complex praxis of grassroots Dalit movements. This research therefore moves beyond the framework of political opportunity structures in the study of social movements in favour of studying social movements in their 'external relational fields'(Goldstone 2004). My study trails anthropological approaches like that of Scott (1985) and Chatterjee (2004) to explore the resistance strategies and politics of the governed, so as to understand the small revolutions that may be happening daily. The specificities of Dalit politics in civil society has partially been studied through a focus on print and popular music (Narayan 2006). An attempt to theorise their marginal position, daily strategies and challenges involved in Dalit politics, however is still missing, particularly in the cultural and political landscapes of Maharashtra.

My research is an ethnographic exploration into the post-Dalit Panther phase of Dalit politics in rural Marathwada. The focus is on two socio-political organisations: one is Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan (MHA), a grassroots Dalit movement with international networks; and the other is Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a national Dalit political party with considerable presence in the Marathwada and Vidarbha regions of Maharashtra. Dalit socio-political organisations like MHA and BSP are engaged in creating spaces for the articulation of alternatives to the dominant public sphere and democratic processes. The socio-political struggles and strategies of Dalit movement politics are explored in the following chapters. A common theme running through all the chapters is the Dalit politics of resistance: the struggle of Dalits to access justice through the state and the continued denial of justice to Dalits through fragmented institutions of state. Looking beyond the state, the thesis charts the relationships between Dalits and the external fields within which they operate: it details the vernacular modes of communication in the civic sphere where protests and violence are important modes; the innovative uses of caste and cultural repertoires by Dalit movements in challenging caste hierarchy and forming collective identities of protest; and, the context of global associational revolution and engagement with NGOs and INGOs as new associations in the Dalit politics of resistance.

The first chapter is an engagement with the intersections caste and civil society in India. I argue here that the distinction between civil society and political society that Chatterjee (2004) suggests in the study of postcolonial societies and politics has shortcomings. His handing over of civil society to the elites is particularly problematic. Civil society, I argue, serves as a key concept in the study of Dalit politics as it is a critical space of political freedom and self realisation which can reform and civilise caste relations. I dwell here upon the interface and intersections of caste and civil society and elaborate the politicisation of caste and caste inequalities and rise of Dalit politics in western India. Such politicisation, competition and conflicts were not accidental and reflected the suppressed political aspirations of citizenship amongst Dalits. Moving beyond impact of colonial and postcolonial governmentality in disaggregating and disciplining society, I elaborate upon Dalit politics in civil society that influenced the evolving civil society and the colonial and postcolonial state and make a case for study of Dalit politics under globalisation and globalised grassroots.

The second chapter sets out the socio-economic and political context of Marathwada, particularly Beed where I carried out this ethnographic study. I introduce the power fields of Beed in particular and Marathwada in general where the dominance and traditional authority of Marathas as *'Raje'* (king/s) dominates the political fields and constructs the excluded status of Dalits and Dalit politics.

The third chapter is on methodology and fieldwork processes. I consider the importance of using an anthropological approach to study Dalit politics in order to gain a processual understanding of the workings of caste, the state and civil society. My research questions, methods of data collection, fieldwork process, insider-outsider status and some ethical issues are detailed here.

In the fourth chapter, I present the post-Ambedkar Dalit politics in Maharashtra to highlight the rise of Dalit politics and Ambedkarisation despite factionalism. The centrality of the state and the reliance on democratic/electoral politics continued in the post-Ambedkar phase of Dalit politics. While in the socio-cultural and literary

fields Dalit politics continued to grow, Dalit politics faced fragmentation in party politics with politically ambitious leaders leading various factions. It is in this context that I situate the growth of BSP in Maharashtra as a formidable Dalit party, and also the mobilisation of MHA as a grassroots Dalit movement which utilised the new associational form of NGOs. I argue that the growth of Dalit politics in Marathwada represents a continuum of their marginal locations. This however is coupled with increased politicisation and socio-political struggles, and it is these struggles that are charted in the following chapters.

Two key issues that Dalit movements in Marathwada region of Maharashtra organise around are encroachment of grazing land for cultivation purposes and caste atrocities. Dalit mobilisation for land rights in the last decade attracted international civil society actors who participate in such mobilisation through local Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Chapter five explores the land rights activism by Dalit movements in globalised times and spaces, which has a long history in Marathwada that remain parallel to the exclusionary state. This chapter offers a theoretical engagement with the forms and roles of the state and civil society in the current era of globalisation and liberalisation. The case of MHA's mobilisation for land rights with international support is critically analysed in order to engage with the debates on changing spaces and forms of civil society under globalisation. Land rights mobilisation by MHA in Marathwada illustrates the intersections of recognition and redistribution in Dalit politics. NGOs, I argue are 'new associations' in Dalit politics and do not necessarily depoliticise Dalit politics. In the context of Marathwada where fragmented institutions of the state are also active forces of Dalit marginalisation, international networks serve as a resource for local Dalit political claims.

In the sixth chapter, I move on to discuss Dalit activism around the issue of caste violence and the role of violence in democratising public spaces and civilising caste relations. I argue in this chapter that the increased violence against Dalits is a product of Dalit assertion in public spaces. Dalit assertion challenges traditional authority embedded in caste hierarchies that dominate public spaces. Dalit assertion and

mobility threaten the *Raje-shahi* (king-ly) control of dominant castes particularly Maratha. I elaborate through ethnographic details, the changing meanings of Dalit labour, Dalit assertion in public spaces, the violence that accrues against Dalits, and Dalit engagement with state institutions and legal measures. Dalit politics and empowerment in public spaces, I argue needs to be studied not through merely consensus and deliberations in the public sphere but also through violence revolving around public spaces.

While Dalit movements come together when Dalits are faced with extreme crises and political violence, the realities of caste divisions within Dalits run deep and affect the formation of a united Dalit ideology and identities of protest. Moving beyond violence, chapter seven and eight develop a processual understanding of collective identity formation in Dalit politics. They present the intersections of caste identities and cultural repertoires in anti-caste politics that Dalit movements claim to practice. The case of BSP, in chapter seven, is of post-Dalit mobilisation in Dalit politics. In forming the 'Bahujan' collective from below where Dalits play the role of leaders and facilitators for electoral politics, I argue that the BSP makes selective use of the fragmented anti-caste culture and history making democracy and democratisation a cultural project that encompasses issues of both recognition and redistribution.

Chapter eight presents the case of MHA, and the play of Mang identity and its intersections with the *swabhimani* (self-respecting) Mang identity that MHA seeks to construct. I argue here that *jati* though a resource for socio-political mobilisation is not an absolute social category. Mobilisation of *jati* into a political community is a dynamic process shaped in the relational contexts of movements and may lead to multiple collective identities and socio-political outcomes. The case of MHA illustrates the performance, politics and limitations of the particularistic Mang identity and its engagement with the evolution of an alternative politicised *swabhimani* Mang identity.

The ninth Chapter moves beyond collective identity formation, to analyse the participation of Dalits and Dalit movements in electoral politics. Dalit movement participation in electoral politics does not neatly fit into analyses that emphasise the 'sacredness' of elections and democracy for the marginalised and poor (Banerjee 2008). This chapter recounts Ambedkar's efforts of constructing assertive Dalit politics through purging them from the mainstream nationalist thinking, particularly Congress. This was also an attempt to challenge the sacredness of political practices pursued by elite Hindus. The idea, therefore, of symbolic equality for one day at the polling booth was considered as 'madness' by Ambedkar as the Scheduled Castes elected under joint electorates would end up being slaves of Hindus (Ambedkar interview: Broadcasted on BBC 31st December 1955). Chapter nine contextualises the challenges of practicing assertive Ambedkarite politics that BSP and MHA attempt to pursue in rural Marathwada, where the expanding rural state consolidates patronage politics and the control of dominant castes over the state. MHA and BSP's electoral strategies and challenges are analysed through their participation in the 2009 Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections.

MHA's engagement in grassroots decentralised politics elaborates on the absolute control of dominant castes on the state institutions and the resulting Dalit exclusion from their entitlements. Dalit political mobilisation to autonomously represent their own interests is pushed into narrow lanes of *jati* politics where MHA comes to represent only Mang interests. BSP, though a marginal player in Beed, mobilises as an autonomous (Dalit led) Bahujan movement in Marathwada. While the ideological and principled politics dominate mobilisation processes of BSP, electoral compulsions bring the cadre face to face with caste arithmetic and money power that dominates the electoral politics. This clash of principled politics and politics of power in BSP presents the forced marginalisation of ideological considerations. While BSP and MHA are partially forced into margins to replicate the power process of dominant political parties during and after elections they continue to retain their non-political roots and commitment to Dalit ideology and politics, thus sustaining Dalit politics in the arena of electoral and non-electoral politics.

The concluding chapter revisits the liberal struggle to make caste status irrelevant in the civil realm due to its inherent primitivism. The collective trauma of Dalits requires caste to be at the centre in their anti-caste struggles. Dalit politics, I argue has no doubt changed the local norms of civility and has partially cured discriminatory elements of society. Dalit politics engages in what Alexander (2006) calls civil repair thus contributing to the continuing process of reforming the state, society and civil society.

Chapter 1

Caste and Dalit politics in the making of Civil Society in India

Civil society has come to dominate discourses of development and social change over the last three decades. Although there is a lack of consensus on what constitutes civil society, the idea of civil society has become increasingly celebrated across academic, activist as well as national and international bureaucratic circles. The liberal notion that a free and vibrant civil society forms the heart of successful democratic regimes (Gellner 1994), is increasingly held as commonsense now. This thesis is a critical engagement with the idea and practice of civil society as manifested at the micro socio-political level in the state of Maharashtra in India. It specifically explores the politics that surface in the civic sphere in the context of caste inequalities, through the study of Dalit movements that occupy the margins of civil society in India.

In this introductory chapter, I argue that civil society as a realm of freedom for associational and extra-institutional mobilisation emerged in the colonial period. During this period these limited opportunities of political freedom were largely dominated by the upper castes (mostly Brahmans). However, the lower caste masses too were able to participate and influence the colonial state by organising around ideologies of protest that countered dominant nationalist currents. The sustenance and growth of localised ideologies through associational and extra-institutional mobilisation under the democratic state in the postcolonial period is also briefly analysed. The nature of mobilisation in the realm of civil society at the interface of caste and civil society suggests two specific outcomes: firstly, community (*gemeinschaft*), particularly caste, became central in constructing local forms of civil society (*gessellschaft*); and, secondly, civil society and political society became intertwined. I elaborate upon these in the following discussion.

The chapter proceeds as follows: it begins by making a case for recognising civil society of India in its existing vibrant form, particularly the role of the ascribed identity of caste in shaping civil society and the prevalence of caste-based social

movements. This is then followed by a discussion about the interface of caste and civil society in the colonial and postcolonial phases. The continued relevance and dynamism of caste and its intersections with civil society and the state as they are evolving are highlighted. The politicisation of caste and rise of Dalit politics in western India are also presented to contextualise discussion on the post-Ambedkar Dalit politics which I will pursue in later chapters.

Where is civil society? Identifying India's vibrant civil society

The origin of civil society as a modern political phenomenon is Western both in terms of thought and practice. I will not follow the much travelled path of summarising the development of civil society in the western context which has been carried out systematically by several scholars.[5] Rather my focus is on elaborating and engaging with the challenges posed by some scholars to the utility of the concept of civil society in India.

The Western orientation embedded in the notion of civil society does not necessarily act an impediment to its use, however, problems do arise with ethnocentric terms like civil society (Goody 2001). The localisation of Western conception of civil society in the Indian context is no doubt riddled with some tensions.[6] Two good examples of this disjoint between the western liberal orientation of civil society and its complex local practices in current times are the liberal emphasis on the, firstly, 'non-ethnic' nature of civil society and, secondly, the 'associational' forms of civil society. If followed these approaches could almost render invisible the existence civil society in India

Gellner's (1995) discomfort with segmental loyalties in the sphere of civil society is repeated in Beteille's (1999) critique of caste 'imposition', in the form of caste-based reservations, on the intermediary institutions (e.g. universities). He suggests that caste imposition leads to inefficiency and hampers autonomy of civil society. In a similar vein, Chibber (1999) maintains that associational life in India is weak and

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[5] See Khilnani (2001), Kumar (1993), Cohen and Arato (1994).
[6] Gellner (2009) points out the difficulties of finding a closest translation for the term civil society in South Asia.

this enables political parties to play a larger role. The disjuncture between the liberal ideas of civil society and the localised forms of civility raises some crucial questions for studying the intersections of civil society and caste society: What implications do the dominant approaches to understanding civil society have for understanding civil society and the public sphere in the Indian subcontinent? Is civil society a space meant for collective consciousness building (Cohen and Arato 1994) and public deliberation focussed on the common good (Cohen 1997)? Or does it continue to be a colonial [now neo-imperial] project of civilising and normalising its subjects (Scott 1995)? Putnam's (1995) emphasis on associational dimensions, Gellner's (1994) preference for modularity as opposed to segmentality[7], or understanding civil society as realm of hegemony and counter hegemony (Gramsci 1971), and civil society and public sphere as associated with a long-term 'civilising' of political and societal relations through rational public deliberation (Habermas 1991); how do these work in the caste context of India? Did civil society exist in India in the pre-colonial period along these lines? If not, then why not? Can civil society exist in a caste context? If yes, what happens to caste and civil society at their interface? And, most specifically, how do Dalits find or create spaces to articulate their anti-caste concerns in contemporary civil society?

Answers to these questions largely depend on how we understand the concept of civil society. A narrow definition of civil society with emphasis on associations will fall short of answering the questions raised above. Besides missing the vibrancy of civil society in the form of extra-institutional movements, this narrow definition fails to capture the diverse strategies that the competing actors in civil society adopt. For my purposes, I take civil society to refer to a political and socio-cultural space for collective mobilisation that is dependent on state for legitimacy but is also independent in its functioning. I take my cue here from Gramsci's separation of civil society from the state and economy: 'civil society stands between economic structure and the state'(Gramsci 1971: 31). While Gramsci views civil society as an apparatus that sustains the state's hegemonic project he also acknowledges the emancipatory potential of civil society and the challenge it can pose to the state's hegemony. To

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[7] By segmental loyalties Gellner refers to those associations that are formed on the basis ascribed identities where membership may be restricted and exit difficult.

explore this emancipatory potential of civil society I understand civil society in a broad communitarian sense to include associational and non-associational forms of mobilisation and organisation which could evolve around ethnic and non-ethnic interests and can be both institutional and extra-institutional in nature. Cohen and Arato's (1994) emphasis on conscious association building as one of the key processes in civil society is important for my study of caste and civil society, particularly in examining the daily workings of civil society through Dalit politics and the politicisation of Dalits. A further analysis that is important for this study is that civil society is a mere reflection of the society and, therefore, the possibility of conflict within remains at the heart of civil society (Chandhoke 2001). Processes of conflict and consensus constantly reinvent civil society and the state. Civil society cannot be abstracted from the state and the market and is 'constituted by the politics of power as much as it is constituted by the politics of protest' (Chandhoke, 2001: 21). Civil society is also a realm of freedom that gives rise to politics and spaces for self realisation (Chandhoke 2002). For the marginalized groups, civil society can open spaces for making claims of citizenship and justice. Such claims are embedded in complex and unequal social relations making consensus building around these claims a process full of conflicts. Justice, as argued by Alexander (2006), is an outcome of social and cultural conflicts, and the complex interplay of these conflicts influence human qualities that are included and respected in civil society.

Civil society, 'thus, is a project and cannot be achieved, even in fullest flush of success' (Alexander 2006: 9). It remains a space for critical (and complex) public conversations influencing the goals and values of governance (Elliot 2006), for reforming not just state and society but civil society itself. Civil society cannot be purged from the ascriptive possibilities of caste in the Indian context and neither can it be restricted strictly to associational forms excluding social movements. The criticism of Habermas (1981) for maintaining strict distinction between rationality and irrationality and for his insistence on the power of 'rational' arguments are critical in the study of civil society in India. The imagination of an ideal public sphere offers little in India where rational deliberations are not the only mode of public communication. The distinctions of rational and irrational, 'depend on

keeping some higher sphere separate from lower order contamination'(Alexander 2006: 17).

Chibber (1999) and Gellner (1994) have been rightly challenged by various scholars (Chandhoke 2001; Rudolph 2003; Rudolph 2000; Varshney 2001) who question the very basis of claims that deny the existence of strong civil society in India. Rudolph (2003: 1118) observes, 'If caste associations, demand groups, issue and movement politics, and nongovernment organisations are taken into account, India could be "read" as having a pervasive and extraordinarily active associational life, perhaps one of the most participatory in the world.'

Debates in the context of India thus revolve mostly around what should be included and excluded from the civil realm and not on the fundamental relevance of civil society. The "autonomy" of civil society and the importance of universal ideas that inform it (Alexander 2006), remain relevant to the Indian context as well. It is the lack of this autonomous space or a civil sphere for collective mobilisations that makes any effort to trace the existence of civil society or public sphere in pre-colonial India a difficult proposition. The state or other institutions promoting citizenship for all were simply missing in pre-colonial India. The public sphere in pre-colonial India was not egalitarian and was largely dominated by power holding elites, excluding women and the masses (Hasan 2005). Thus, in pre-colonial India civil society did not exist and there was no concept of citizenship (Beteille 1999).

Civil society as a realm of political freedom in India emerged during the colonial period. Contesting arguments have prevailed on the makings of caste and civil society in India, and on whether caste associations formed as organic movements or caste became a specific form of civil society as a result of colonial technologies of governance. It is to an assessment of these arguments that I now turn.

Caste and Civil Society in Colonial India: Interface of the opposites?
There are two important perspectives on the origins of civil society and intersections of caste and civil society in the colonial period that are important for our discussion

here. One maintains that caste remained a major challenge to the introduction of the idea of citizenship during the British period. The closed societal relations arising out of caste (and also religion) affected the possibilities of individuation and freedom as they existed in the West (Bhargava and Reifeld 2005; Beteille 1999). The second important position is to be found in Kaviraj (2001) and Chatterjee (2001) who argue that civil society in its early inchoate form was created in the colonial period by and for the elites. Both perspectives, however, offer only a partial view of the complexity and dynamism of caste in its interface with the evolving sphere of civil society.

The understanding of caste as a strictly rigid form of hierarchy based on the principles of purity and pollution has been an issue of dissent. Such an understanding would turn caste into *gemeinschaft*.[8] Dumont's (1980) thesis of Hindu religious values dominating state and sustaining hierarchic caste structure has long been challenged (Mary Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma 2003). Caste is said to have turned rigid due to a modern kind of discourse that emerged in the colonial period. This discourse insisted on having a fixed determinate form for local collectivities, as destruction of community was fundamental to the project of capitalism (Chatterjee 1996). Much of the arguments about the formation of caste as a rigid structure in postcolonial discourses are attributed to the 1872 census of the British government, a process of communal enumeration. The British, in trying to be fair referees, made political representation 'communal' and created fixed communal categories, a feature inherent in the modern civil society (Chakraborty 1994). Dirks (1997) goes a step further in this strand of argument to claim that colonialism created much of what is now accepted as Indian 'tradition', including the autonomous caste structure. Caste achieved its critical position in colonial times, because the British state was successful in separating caste as a social form from its dependence on pre-colonial political processes, and caste became a specifically Indian form of civil society as a result of the colonial project of legitimising its rule over colonial subjects (Dirks 1997).

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[8] For Tonnies (1988: xvii), 'Gemeinschaft[community] was deeply conservative and sheer antiquity of a rule was enough to justify its application and the imposing religious sanctions of heaven and hell assured compliance. Gemeinschaft demanded structure of church and authority of pope. Gemeinschaft was irrelevant and politically dangerous for a modern society [civil society/gessellschaft].'

These views, however, ignore the pre-colonial socio-cultural, political and material basis of caste inequality and also the dynamic transformation that caste society was witnessing as a response to the political and economic changes during colonial period. Guha (2003: 162-163) reminds us that communal enumeration processes were also present in the pre-colonial period and suggests that pre-colonial community structures survived into the colonial era using the colonial public sphere to assert their claims. Similarly Lorenzen (1999: 654) observes, 'Caste, like Hinduism, undoubtedly responded to the British conquest with significant changes, but neither institution was so radically transformed during the colonial period to claim that the British invented them'.[9]

As discussed above, Chatterjee (1996) seems to challenge the possibility of the movement from *gemeinschaft* (community) to *gesellschaft* (civil society) as a problematic of the discourse of modernity. The discourse of the modern state, he suggests, cannot provide a theoretical language in which community (caste) can be discussed, and the struggle between the narrative of capital and community has, therefore, remained unresolved. Such an approach fails to capture the interface between civil society and caste vis-à-vis the politics that was surfacing between the elites and the masses in the political realm. The interface of caste with the colonial imposition of civil society that forced new rules of politics, could also help us critically examine Chatterjee's (2001) second proposition that civil society in colonial India belonged to the elites.

Politics of/in the evolving civil society and the public sphere
Civil society as a political arena of associational activity did emerge during the colonial period, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century. Before the colonial injunction of civil society, 'India had non-liberal forms of pluralism that was constituted by groups […] with widening scope of citizenship, these groups

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[9] Dharma Kumar cautions historians against an over emphasising the exploitative nature of colonialism and the possibility of underplaying pre-colonial local social conditions of inequality. She also discusses socio-political contributions including the growth of public sphere in the colonial period (Kumar 1998).

reconstituted as political agents.' (Khilnani 2001: 29). These spaces of civil society were largely engaged by local elite castes to protest against the limited scope for their political mobility and for independence from the colonial rulers. The second mode of associationalism came from the lower castes (especially those who were exposed to western education through Christian missionaries). This, however, was a case of unintended consequences: the British did not intend to affect such social changes in Indian society, but their diverse interventions began to rupture the traditional bonds that held the ascriptive hierarchy of caste together (Aloysius 1997: 21-51).

The localised civic culture that evolved in the colonial public sphere revived the fractured indigenous ideologies of change, protest and hegemony. While the 'twice-born' (pure) castes became active members of the civil society created under the British regime, the *shudra* castes too were able to carve out spaces of resistance. An example of how the colonial government opened up new associational spaces was in the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, which continues to be important and survives (with some amendments) to enable registration of various non-profit organisations today (Sheth and Sethi 1991). After the act was passed, registered societies started cropping up including various caste and religion based associations.

Carroll (1978) limits her analysis of caste associations to the rise of elites amongst castes and the success of these elites in seeking state patronage. Besides homogenising the fractured nature of caste mobilisation across India, she denies the colonised any of their own agency or civic sense.[10] The limited conditions of modernity - the growth of the printing press, education, the changing economy and the evolving public sphere - produced new elites amongst upper caste groups and some of the lower castes. The ex-untouchables/Dalits were definitely last in terms of accessing these socio-political spaces.

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[10] See Carroll's (1978) study of the *Kayastha* movement which highlights the 'one-man show' nature in terms of leadership. These organisations are seen as a response to colonial constructions, specifically for seeking patronage in terms of jobs from the British Government.

The specific local conditions of caste hierarchy and its fragmented ideologies paved the way for the growth of associational culture and resistance movements around transforming caste status and relations, these movements also reconstructed local ideologies of change, protest and hegemony. One can categorise some of these mobilisations as organised around three competing prominent ideologies: Gandhian nationalism, Hindu nationalism and the low caste movements for claiming citizenship rights under the emergent colonial state.[11] All three mobilisations intrinsically dealt with the question of caste and religion in different modes. The reason for the formation, and evolution processes of these ideologies too were different. While incipient associational culture was the prime mode of organisation, extra-institutional mobilisation connoting the growth of social movements was also dominant in the civil society.

Competing associations and caste politics in the civil sphere

Gandhian nationalism focussed on bringing together competing castes and religions (specifically Muslims and Hindus) under one umbrella in the struggle against the British colonial state. Gandhi voiced this through the Indian National Congress (INC), a political organisation that largely was dominated and articulated the interests of the elite castes. The "Other" was necessarily British rule and their modern institutions and his critique became known as the Gandhian critique of modernity. According to Rudolph and Rudolph (2006), Gandhian mobilisation contradicts Habermas's insistence on critical rational exchanges as the basis for communication in a society where the majority of people were illiterate. They argue that the coffee house was reconstructed by Gandhi to suit the local context of India: Gandhi envisioned the public sphere as an *ashram* where commitment to changing hearts as well as minds was the foundation for a democratised public sphere, and the language of publics was both communal (religious) and individual centric (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 140-174).

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[11] I am consciously limiting my discussion to mobilisations around these three ideologies in order to focus on the theme under discussion: the intersections of caste and civil society. This is not to underplay other critical mobilisations like the Muslim League, the peasant's movements and the women's movement, all of which can be critically examined through a caste lens.

The Hindu nationalist movement was a movement that developed in parallel to the growth of Gandhian nationalism. Hindu nationalism rejected the non-violent positioning of Gandhian ideology and celebrated violent Hindu traditions as a means of securing freedom. Jaffrelot (2007: 6) sees the growth of Hindu cultural nationalism as a modern phenomenon that developed on the basis of organisational strategies of ideology building. Hindu nationalist mobilisation began with the formation of *Brahmo Samaj* (1828)*,* and then *Arya Samaj* (1875) and later the *Hindu Sabhas* (1907) and then the *Hindu Sanghatans* (1915). Jaffrelot (2007) describes a historical shift in this movement from Hindu reform to Hindu revivalism. All these organisations had close ties with the Indian National Congress. Under the project of Hindu nationalism all castes had to unite against the common enemy which had been configured as Muslim assertion and Christianity (especially lower caste conversions). Some limited reform of Hindu religion was also a mobilising strategy for including lower castes in its ambit.

The emerging Gandhian ideas of the nation and nationalism were countered here by promoting the idea of Hindus as the majority community and the race that could embody the potential independent nation (Hansen 1999). Hindu nationalism and its mobilisation had not been able to take much hold in the colonial period due to the dominance of the Indian National Congress, which to an extent successfully united the masses and the elites under its ambiguous union of political and spiritual ideologies [12]. Its dominance was also because it stayed away from party politics.

The imagined national community both of Gandhi's Congress and of Hindu nationalism were largely based on caste Hindu traditions, the former with slight *Bhakti[13]* orientation and the latter with Brahmanism as its base. Colonial India however also saw the emergence of a lower caste subaltern nationalism which was based on its *oppressed past* as the "Other" (Aloysius 1997). Growth in the press culture, military recruitment, the liberal values of Christian missionary education,

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[12] For the politics of Gandhian synthesis see Aloysius (1997: 170-213) and a re-reading in Rao (2009).
[13] Bhakti literally means devotion and Bhakti movement(s) is a term used to refer to various socio-cultural sects and practices preached by saints in medieval India. These were considered to be against inequalities of caste, class and gender and had element of modernity, see Lele (1981) and Lorenzen (1995).

development of cities under the new economic regime and the rise of associational activity, were intertwined with changes in the lower echelons of the caste structure. First it was the *shudras* who organised and protested against 'caste disabilities'. In spite of the fact that the judiciary playing a limited role (it generally judged in favour of upper castes), the judicial system was actively engaged by the new elite amongst low caste groups.[14]

The conflict and competition that was emerging within the Indian society gained new forms, constructing fragmentation and conflict within the evolving civil society. Whilst analysis of the new waves of capitalism and colonialism requires a critique on moral grounds, there is also a need to recognise that local practices of civility historically were not just when it came to citizenship rights for untouchables. Washbrook (1990) rightly questions the "all is bad with capitalism" approach and suggests that this may result in other kinds of "orientalism with moral intention". He maintains that the British Raj was never simply an instrument of foreign domination, it also related to struggles inside South Asian society for status, privilege and power.

Such struggles in western India translated into the growth of non-Brahman mobilisation against Brahman dominance in civil society and state society. These associations also temporarily integrated untouchable concerns within this newly imagined non-Brahman community that attempted to mobilise against Brahmans and Brahmanism.

The rise of Untouchable politics and ideology in western India (the Bombay Presidency)

The 1830-40s in Western India witnessed the growth of the printing press and the production of periodicals both in English and Marathi, some of which were controlled by the Christian missionaries. A new elite amongst non-Brahman groups emerged through exposure to western education and also due to the evolving public sphere that was open to 'political' criticism of the dominant values and religion. Western India also had a specific history of the *Peshwas* (Brahmans) overthrowing

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[14] See Galanter (1963) and Rudolph and Rudolph (1963) for the brahmanical bias of the colonial legislation.

the Maratha[15] rule to establish a Brahmanic state. Rao (2009) suggests that this created the ground for a novel alliance between peasant protests and anti-caste thought, the former being the shudras and the latter *atishudra.*[16] In order to sustain the struggle against Brahmanic dominance, in 1873 Jyotirao Phule[17] founded the *Satyashodhak Samaj* (the Truth Seeking Society, refered to as SS hereon). This had a clear ideology that aimed at educational empowerment of *shudra* and *atishudra* castes and at promoting cultural-religious protest by giving up Hindu practices that gave primacy to the ritual leadership of the Brahmans. SS's ideology starkly contrasted with the Hindu nationalist and Congress ideology in its celebration of Western ideals and the enlightenment, in its overt support to the colonial rule and in viewing Brahmanism as it's 'Other' (Gavaskar 1999; O'Hanlon 1985).[18] Phule turned the Aryan [Brahman] invasion theory on its head by identifying the pre-Aryan era as the golden age and posing King Bali as an alternative to Brahman centred interpretations of culture and models of social leadership (O'Hanlon 1985: 186).

Naregal (2001) has explored the emerging vernacular public sphere in western India, which she maintains was dominated by the conservative interests of upper castes. She also describes the low caste counter-public and its associational form in *Satyashodhak Samaj* formed by Phule, and highlights that he understood the importance of education in modern politics; she suggests that education and political representation became sites of conflict. Naregal (2001: 272) observes that, 'the limited potential of the upper-caste intelligentsia to develop an inclusive discourse found itself at odds with the logic of representative politics, resulting in historical incompleteness of the hegemonic influence they were able to establish'. The hegemonic influence of the upper castes, however. was strengthened after the end of Phule's ideological leadership of the non-Brahman movement. Phule belonged to a lower *shudra* caste and tried to merge the interests of *shudras* and *atishudras* through forging an imagined anti-Brahman collective identity of the *kshatriya* (warriors). It

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[15] Marathas referred to a small social elite who were considered Shudras by the Brahmans in western India, a claim that Maratha Kings contested.
[16] Shudra is the lowest and impure Varna in the Varna order and the *Atishidra* is classed as outside of the Varna order, and therefore classified as 'untouchable'.
[17] Born into the Mali [gardener] caste, a *shudra* caste that is lower than Marathas.
[18] Dilip Menon presents a detailed critique of Chatterjee by discussing the celebration of enlightenment, modernity and English education amongst the lower castes (Menon 1997).

was only Shahu Maharaj (a Maratha king of Kolhapur province) who pursued a pro non-Brahman politics (Copland 1973). The non-Brahman mobilisation was dominated by Marathas and did not always accommodate concerns of untouchable castes easily. The non-Brahman ideology and identity, argues Rodrigues (1998), was never an ideological union of castes and the interests of land owning Marathas dominated non-Brahman politics. Further, the Marathas did not accommodate untouchables in their anti-Brahman politics and they claimed *Kshatriya* status. The anti-Congress ideology of Phule and the non-Brahman movement came to an end with the Marathas joining the Congress and the dissolution of the Non-Brahman Party in December 1930. The *Kshatriya* ideology that Phule constructed to undo the dominance of Brahmans (as Aryans) in ritual and political spheres was diverted by the Marathas to claim higher social status, thereby constructing the untouchables as the lower 'other'. It was now left to the untouchable movements to take forward remnants of the anti-caste ideology constructed by Phule. The untouchables saw a need for initiating an independent struggle to challenge their total exclusion, which was opposed not only by the Brahmans but also non-Brahmans, their former ideological counterparts.

Untouchable protests in western India evolved as a counter current within the non-Brahman politics. Hardtmann (2009) distinguishes between the earlier caste federations that emerged amongst the untouchables and the later Dalit movements, in that the former believed in Hindu reform and the latter in an autonomous anti-caste tradition. The late nineteenth century struggle of the untouchables in claiming educational rights made limited but important gains from colonial educational policy and the Christian missionaries in promoting untouchable education. Constable (2000) argues that the syncretic incorporation of the ideologies of Christian missionaries (who also brought some material help) by radicalised untouchable local cultures, produced radical untouchable ideologies and created dynamism for structural social transformation through associations such as the *Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal* (Society for Removal of Problems of non-Aryan Origin) in 1890. The recruitment of untouchable castes in military service was banned from 1892 and untouchable leaders influenced by Phule's ideology challenged this exclusion. Constable (2001)

demonstrates that the *Kshatriya* status claimed by untouchables under the influence of Phule was a contestory consciousness that stood in opposition to the Brahmanic caste structure.

These initiatives were to provide a foundation for the later Dalit movement under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar's struggle for political rights of untouchables/depressed classes had associations like the *Bahiskrit Hitkarni Sabha* (Depressed Classes Institute) and Peoples Education Society, these associational features and the extra-institutional struggle (protests) later took the form of political formations like the Indian Labour Party, the Scheduled Caste Federation and finally the Republican Party of India (Omvedt 2004; Jaffrelot 2005; Zelliot 1996). Ambedkar's scholarly political action mined the possibilities for collective emancipation of Dalits through the use of associations both charitable and political.

The colonial government dispersed and disaggregated Indian society along religious and caste lines thus leading to a rise in the idea of "community" as a parastate entity. Caste radicals[19] in western India made use of these terms and context to theorize caste as structural violence that imposed structural negativity on Dalits (Rao 2009). To liberate Dalits from the "structural violence of caste", Dalits were framed as a peculiar kind of political minority by Ambedkar, a position that brought him into conflict with the Hindu community, Congress and the British colonial state (Rao 2009).

The liberal rejection of segmental associations from the civil society is similar to Ambedkar's fear of the 'tyranny of cousins' structured around caste in Hindu society, which he felt limited the possibilities of civility and civil society across caste. Caste, for Ambedkar stood in contradiction with democracy, caste could not be reformed and had to be annihilated. Ambedkar's struggle for political and social equality for Dalits also revealed a nexus of caste exclusion and liberalism in the Indian public sphere, where Dalits were considered to be 'trespassers' (Rao 2009: 116-117).

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[19] A term used by Rao (2009) to refer to radicals like Phule, Ambedkar and their followers in colonial India.

I will return to the innovative interpretations of the influence of Ambedkar in Dalit politics in the current times in the following chapters. What is important to note is that the newly emerging realm of civil society, under an alien and partially secular colonial state, created a buzz of political activity in the public sphere with the formation of associations around identities and socio-religious issues. Civil society did not necessarily emerge in contradiction with the state, rather it was promoted by the colonial state at times to disaggregate the society and discipline its subjects. The fragmented, dynamic and hierarchic caste society responded to this new sphere of political (in) dependence by organising around competing ideologies of change and hegemony. Civil society though dependent on colonial state for its legitimacy did have elements of political freedom. The lower caste associations and ideologies under civil society focussed on uniting the lower echelons of the society primarily for their political rights, the other two dominant streams focussed on promoting associationalism across all castes under the patronising leadership of the upper castes. The caste context and the resulting movements in the newly evolving public sphere turned what had been the 'homogeneous' project of nationalism into something much more 'heterogeneous'.

Contrary to Chatterjee's (2001) proposition that civil society was the exclusive domain of interaction between elite Indians and the colonial/postcolonial state, civil society, even within Tocqueville's more limited conceptualisation of civil society as associationalism, was also to a certain extent accessed by the lower castes during the colonial period. Chatterjee (2004), referring to Ambedkar's movement, acknowledges the impact of politics upon governmentality and that incipient resistances may succeed in inventing new forms of social justice. However, he does not see an interface between civil society and the masses, especially the lower castes. For him, civil society belongs to the elites and the other forms of resistance lie outside civil society.[20]

Where the evolving civil society and public sphere interfaced with caste, they did reflect the contradictions of caste in terms of hierarchy, fragmentation and

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[20] Similarly Kaviraj (2001: 311-312) observes, 'as long as politics was between elites and colonisers, rules of liberalism and etiquettes of civil society were observed punctiliously'.

competition; however, they also created space for public conversations especially about the social role of the colonial government and about hierarchies of caste. The colonial state and colonial forms of governmentality were new sites for influencing or solving the contradictions of caste, and civil society emerged as a sphere for communicating between and amongst competing ideologies and with the state. Crucial features of mobilisation in the realm of civil society during the colonial period were the implicit tendency to organise around ascriptive identities like religion and caste (and coalitions of these) and also the intense engagement with state. Thus, sustaining the role of community in the working of civil society where caste shaped the civil society and the intersections of caste and civil society were a local political necessity in postcolonial India.

Caste and the making of civil society in the postcolonial period

The caste character of civil society in the colonial period did in some way influence the nature of growth that would ensue in civil society, sovereign state and politics. The modern postcolonial state is criticised for being isolated from the logic of the social order (Kaviraj 1984), and for its secular aspirations that were not in touch with the cultural practices of ordinary citizens (Madan 1997). The Constitution, however carried in it the contradictions of caste by guaranteeing fundamental rights to all citizens irrespective of caste, religion and gender and also by providing special representation for the Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribes (and later to the Other Backward Classes[21]). The secular and liberal constitution of India also protects the sacred Hindu cow[22], thus the Hindus managed to save the cow through the constitution and the lower caste radicals their political rights and access to education and employment through reservations.

The implications of caste as an active constituent of civil society in the colonial period continued into the postcolonial period, although under different conditions of democracy and the progressive Constitution of India. As understood by Ambedkar,

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[21]Other Backward Classes (OBCs) refers to the socially and economically backward communities other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They were identified for extending the benefits of reservations in education and employment to these groups. Most of the OBCs come from the lower *shudra* Varna.

[22] For elements of Hindu bias in constitution of India see Singh (2005).

India entered a period of contradictions, with equality in politics and inequality in social and economic life. Social and economic inequalities were seen by Ambedkar as a threat that could blow up the new democratic structure (Drèze 2004). Ambedkar preferred to curb the liberties of an oppressive civil society than those of the state (Baxi 2000). The recognition of caste inequality and injustices that Dalits faced were thus imposed on the Indian civil society through state measures, 'by laying Dalit as an exceptional legal subject' (Rao: 2009).

The inequalities of caste further interacted with the scarce opportunities of mobility in social, political and economic life. The structures of the newly independent state besides being sites for resolving conflicts that emerged due to caste discrimination and scarce opportunities was also a site of consolidation of dominance for dominant classes. Civil society thus was 'promoted' by the state, and the borders of civil society and state blurred, with Congress as the bridging institution that straddled the two (Jenkins 2004). In the realm of associational culture, when the state was controlled by Congress and the upper castes one noticed an increase in state supported civil society, be it Gandhian organisations, the cooperative movement or the *Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram* (Welfare for Forest Dwellers) of the Hindu nationalist variety. Most of these organisations relied on government funding, 'gradually little difference could be seen between their work and the government programmes of social welfare' (Sheth and Sethi, 1991: 53).

The 1970s however witnessed growth of organisations, social movements and associations that were beyond the state controlled and promoted civil society. The student's movement in Bihar, *navnirman (*reconstruction) movement in Gujarat, Naxalite movement in West Bengal, Marxist feminist movement, and the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra emerged during this time (Baviskar 2010). The emancipatory role of state had come under serious criticism due to increasing corruption and poverty. 'The catalyst for the social movements of the late 1970s was the state of Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975', observes Baviskar (2010: 4). Civil society also served as a critical space for consolidating ethno-religious solidarities that were linked to Hindutva nationalist aspirations. Non-

political Hindu nationalist organisations like RSS[23] contributed in the formation of Hindu nationalist parties – Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and later Bhartiya Janata Party.

The Gandhian homogenisation project of nationalism under the Indian National Congress could not sustain itself for long as caste, region and religious configurations were growing strong in local level party politics. The consociational Congress system collapsed in part under the pressures of identity politics. The signs of the collapse of the Congress system had started in the 1970s. Under the ideological legacy of Gandhi and the arrangement of the Congress system around patron/client relationship, democracy largely benefited the upper castes. India, according to Jaffrelot, overcame this Hobson's choice (of change), 'thanks to social transformation from below which occurred in the realm of caste' (Jaffrelot 2003: 492-493).[24]

The dynamic nature of caste possessed the inherent potential to divide and create hierarchies, leaving India as a country of fractured minorities in current times. Some castes have been traditionally privileged in terms of access to power and social capital (social, economic, political and cultural) while the others have started reversing the power structure in their favour under the conditions of democracy. Caste-based mobilisation has at times been utilised for securing state patronage and, therefore, has required the support of numbers which cannot be gained merely through specific caste (*jati*) based organisation; mobilisation across caste then becomes a necessity. Rudolph (1965) points to the possible modernisation of caste that could happen through its interaction with democracy and electoral politics. Gellner's (1995) concept of modular civility is thus achieved at times under compulsions of democratic politics. Besides the compulsions of caste arithmetic in electoral politics that facilitated the merger of castes into temporal political collectives, postcolonial politics has also witnessed a real deepening of democracy through the rise of *shudra* castes in party politics (Varshney 2000; Jaffrelot 2003).

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[23] Rudolph (2000: 1766) denies RSS the status of an association that generates social capital for democracy in Putnam mode, it is nevertheless an association.

[24] Rudolph (1965) suggests that revolution was spared in India due to transformation of caste.

Caste, civil society and state remained in dynamic interaction affecting both micro and macro political processes in postcolonial India. Party politics too contributed in flourishing associations locally that got organised around caste and religious identities. Khilnani has made the important point that modern political parties are a crucial point of articulation between civil society and the state and their exclusion in the study of civil society yields an overtly partial perspective (Khilnani 2001: 31-32).

The Indian National Congress for instance shifted from being an association to a political party that accommodated elite caste and class interests in postcolonial politics. In general, the interweaving of caste, religious and regional identities in electoral competition also suggest the centrality of political parties as civil society institutions of self assertion and realisation. In Maharashtra the intersections of party politics and social movements is most visible in Dalit and Hindutva politics. Associationalism can be a result of electoral competition and patronage culture in electoral politics and associations formed for ideological goals can lead to formation of political parties. Such associational mobilisation that took initial roots in the form of BAMCEF (*Bahujan* and Minority Community Employees Federation) in Maharashtra resulted in the formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). This calls for understanding the 'associational' dimensions in the political mobilisation amongst the lower castes, especially their ideological and critical rational dimensions.

The initial foundations of BSP were laid through the formation of 'The Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and Minority Community Employees Association' by organising the middle class elites amongst these groups. This later turned into BAMCEF. In 1980, BAMCEF had around 200, 000 members of which 500 held PhDs, and 15,000 were scientists largely from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra (Jaffrelot 2003: 391). This strictly elite association was transformed into the structure of a political party, the BSP, through intensive grassroots organising. The merger of the middle class interests with those of the rural downtrodden masses in BSP's mobilisation is detailed in later chapters. For our discussion what is relevant here is

the challenges that a naïve understanding of 'middle classes' can pose in studying caste politics particularly Dalit politics. Prakash (2008) problematises the idea of a homogeneous middle class and points to the possibilities of a subaltern middle class amongst Dalits. Like most movements, leadership in Dalit politics came from the comparatively well-to-do amongst them. The 'civil' (elite) and 'political' (masses) are not at loggerheads and continue to intersect in Dalit movements and politics of resistance.

Civil society is not a non-political but a non-state space of solidarity building and collective identity formation. 'Since India is a multiparty democracy, its political parties are part of the nation's civil society along with its unions, business associations, reading clubs, NGOs and so on' (Varshney 2002: 4) . The postcolonial civil society in India thus encompassed growth of associations, social movements and political parties around varying concerns like that of gender, environment, class, caste and religion. Local associationalism intersects with wider politics of identity that may be pursued by political parties and social movements (Mosse 2006b).

Caste has not been at loggerheads with democracy and civil society in postcolonial politics. Therefore the distinction that Chatterjee (2001) carves out between civil society and political society to sustain his earlier proposition of a contradiction between modernity and community becomes problematic. Caste has a Janus-faced nature, continuing to inhabit both tradition and modernity at once (Prakash 2002). The current forces of globalization and neoliberalism that are increasingly transforming the state and civil society seem to merge innovatively with caste instead of displacing it. The growth of neo-liberal state is coupled with increased presence of transnational development organisations and major social movements revolving around 'market' [liberalisation], mandir/masjid, Mandal and Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movements (Baviskar 2010). These conditions create new contexts, challenges and opportunities for Dalit politics of resistance and my research is an anthropological exploration of the same.

Civil society, state and Dalit politics in a context of Globalisation

"The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste." (Ambedkar 1945)

I am preparing to organise masses who have been victimised by the caste system…Caste is not a problem for us but an opportunity and we must know how to use it at the appropriate time and occasion. (Kanshiram, undated: quoted in Mahanayak)

The above quotes by two prominent figures of Dalit movements in India reveal the complexities in the ideology and practice of Dalit movements and the centrality of caste in anti-caste politics. Ambedkar faced the dilemma of caste vs. class as political choices of mobilisation. He moved from the Indian Labour Party (ILP) to the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) and finally back to the Republican Party of India (RPI). ILP could never become a party of labourers as the Maratha-Kunbi cluster distanced themselves from the party (Jaffrelot 2005: 74 - 90). While the Martha-Kunbi cluster rejected Ambedkar's leadership because of his caste, non-Mahar untouchable castes too did no come in full support of socio-political formations led by Ambedkar because of hierarchies and competitions within Dalits.

Ambedkar however aspired for a strategy to annihilate caste so as to create a truly liberal civility and civil society. Civility is a key measure of the success of democracy, besides respecting liberal institutions, 'it involves treating others as, at least, equal in dignity, never as inferior in dignity' (Shils 1991: 12). Local practices of civility however remain embedded in hierarchies of caste. These hierarchies also construct cultural notions and political practices that label Dalit bodies as untouchable and stigmatised. Ambedkar's liberal procedural engagement for political commensuration of Dalits revealed that "Dalits were incommensurable" (Rao 2009: 157). Recognising the limitation of political means for making justice accessible to Dalits and the impossibility of a merger of caste and democracy, Ambedkar

advocated for *en masse* conversions of untouchables to Buddhism. He suggested that this was a path all Indians should follow to revoke a liberal local tradition that was compatible with the modern democratic polity. Ambedkar's measures positioned Dalits as a non-Hindu minority. "*The model of Dalit identity was the model of permanent struggle through exacerbation, rather than the idea of resolution of difference.*" (Rao 2009: 158 emphasis in original).

Kanshiram's quote above sets out the complex strategies that post-Ambedkar Dalit movements enlist to make the ideals of Ambedkarism work. My research is an ethnographic exploration of these complex exchanges of ideology and the substantive practices in Dalit movement politics, and contributes to the understanding of caste, state and civil society as socio-political, economic and cultural processes.

Democracy and civil society are processes that are not merely implemented through the procedures laid out in the Constitution and by the institutions of the state, but through daily negotiations between those with historically consolidated access to socio-cultural, political and economic capital and the excluded others who aspire to unsettle the processes and structures that construct their marginalisation. We need, therefore to, move beyond traditional indological approaches oriented toward culturalism which have contributed toward diminishing of class analysis in South Asian studies (Chibber 2006). I agree and follow Rao's (2009) reiteration of the need for understanding secularism and democracy as cultural objects. A material vs. symbolic distinction does not help in study of Dalit politics. Similar is the liberal insistence for excluding caste or ethnic mobilisation from the realm of civil society which ignores the centrality of caste not only as a source of inequality but as a resource for mobilisation against inequalities.[25]

What does the dynamism of caste, civil society and state mean for Dalit politics in globalised times?

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[25] Chandhoke's (1995) attempt to merge the strengths of liberal and Marxist ideas on civil society is also sceptical of the utility of caste.

There is a debate amongst scholars on the affects and possibilities that globalisation and capitalist expansion have for both civil society and the state. Some scholars highlight the emerging possibilities for civil society in general due to the emergence of transnational/global civil society which can facilitate access to networks and resources (Appadurai 2001; Olesen 2005). A contra-view emphasises the decreased role of the state in the provision of welfare and an increased fragmentation of civil society, both seen as negative outcomes that increasingly de-politicise civil society and weaken the state. With increasing assertion of neo-liberal ideas in India, Harriss has warned: 'Poorer people may be excluded through the 'new politics' and progressively denied the possibility of engaging in politics as self realization' (Harriss 2005: 35). Basille and Harriss-White (2000) argue that various civic-social organisations formed around caste sustain the hegemony of the capitalist class.

A radical left reading of the Dalit situation only class inequality at the core of its analyses may not offer the requisite insights into the fragmented nature of Dalit agency, protests and resistance at the globalised grassroots. Emergence of global civil society is not necessarily a threat. Caste, besides its increasing relevance in local politics has also 'travelled' globally through the linkages of globalisation (Ramaiah 2009; Ilaiah 2006). Nigam (2002) argues that instead of opposing globalisation, Dalit politics is in search of a Dalit bourgeoisie under globalisation. Recent research on Uttar Pradesh has documented substantial improvement in the lives of Dalits and has urged that development be reconceptulalised as 'freedom from social inequality' (Kapur et al. 2010). Dalit movements in resorting to democratic processes and means do not aspire for millenarian intervention or a sudden revolution. In their emphasis on undoing social inequality they also partially challenge their economic exclusion. Caste, state and civil society become key processes that may aid or obstruct the complex practices of Dalit politics.

No doubt, Dalit politics may not seem like 'revolution' to left radicals nor does it neatly fit into what Appadurai (2001) calls 'politics of patience'. Resistance are means to modest goals suggests Scott (1985: 347). The same cannot be said about Dalits and Dalit politics as they engage challenging their inferior social status and in

writing a new contract for themselves with civil society and state. Changing the 'untouchable' status of Dalits involves Dalit assertion and self-realisation and these processes are riddled with conflict and violence. Locally, depending on the regional or the specific village context of politicisation of Dalits, caste may operate either to reproduce hierarchical ritual practices in terms of caste-cooperation or to redefine practices in order to accommodate the radical interests of Dalits.[26] Dalit organising at the grassroots is not always peaceful and can lead to violence and counter-violence. Gorringe (2005: 85-111) refers to violent Dalit protests as extra-institutional mobilisation and argues that the facile correlation between democracy and mobilisation cannot explain the prevalence of extra-institutional mobilisation especially violent protests. He suggests that the prevalence of extra-institutional protests may reflect a failure of the institutions of interest mediation.

Further, the changes in caste do not occur in a cultural vacuum and the fragmented institutions of the state could play a critical role. I am, therefore, cautious of approaches that overemphasise the disciplining and civilising power of the colonial state, coupled with a linear reasoning that stresses governmentality and its role in consolidating caste identities and politics under the colonial and postcolonial state. This approach may overlook the politics of the excluded that surface at the margins of civil society and their critical engagement with both the state and society. Governmentality also helps us understand the complex relationship between structure and agency, and power–knowledge strategies function both as instruments of control and as points of resistance (Lacombe 1996). The state, therefore, is not above or fully separated from society. The daily working of state and society point to blurred boundaries of both and also a combination of state based legal authority and traditional authority (Fuller and Harriss 2001). The threats posed to the state and its welfare potentials under globalisation are real, but, the state continues to have a critical role in local politics despite the growth of NGOs. Whilst pointing to the vital

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[26] An interesting case for comparison is Tamil Nadu and Orissa. Orissa has seen what Tanabe (2006) terms the reinvention of new sacrificial practices based on caste cooperation. Caste in Orissa, argues Tanabe, has withered away in the politico-economic sphere and has been reformulated in ritual sphere. On the other hand, Clark-Deces (2006) describes the radicalism of Dalits in Tamil Nadu in redefining the nature of mourning rituals so as to free the *Paraiyars* (untouchable caste) from shameful ritual obligations.

role that state can continue to play, however, Randeria (2007) regards the Indian state as 'cunning';

> '…cunning states manage to have conveniently few duties towards their citizens. Given the political will, they could exploit the limited degrees of freedom still available under conditions of globalisation to protect the interests of vulnerable citizens.' (2007: 28)

Randeria's attempts to incorporate issues of caste and caste mobilisation in civil society have however ended up, celebrating legal pluralism and marginalising the role of the state (Randeria 2002). Similarly Ganguly (2000) observes that structures of governmentality and Indian democracy make Dalits virtually inarticulate. My study cautions against such conclusions. Dalit politics in India poses a critical challenge to scholars theorising politics and resistance at the margins. The politics of Dalits does not fit neatly into the culturalist critique where state and associated politics are seen as the imposition of modernist ideas from above. Dalit politics on the margins of the state seems to demand more state intervention (Guru 2009), for Dalits the state is a pool of resources and opportunities and they are eager to (mis) use the government administration (Fuller and Harriss 2001). Spencer (2007), critiquing culturalist theses, maintains that the politics at the margins is not anti-politics but counter-politics: a response to and not a rejection of the state.

Under globalisation and the emergence of new civil society spaces, Dalit movement politics continue to revolve both around state and non-political spheres through formation of politicised collective identities of protest. Caste does not necessarily work against class in Dalit movements. Change processes that Dalits movements mobilise for are not merely ones of recognition and redistribution concerns too are involved. As argued by Alcoff (2007), identity politics does not have an inevitable logic that destines it to fracture, border patrolling and internal conservatism and redistribution claims may require identity politics. Further undoing of caste status and privileges is a contentious process and involves more than rational deliberations as Dalits face ritualised forms of political violence.

Within this broader context, my research is an anthropological enquiry into Dalit politics. I describe how Dalit politics attempts to affect changes in power-relations through constant engagement with caste and the state and also reveal role of Dalit politics in the making of civility and civil society. In the following Chapter I will introduce Beed District, where I carried out the study.

Chapter 2

Socio-economic and political profile of Beed

My ethnographic study of Dalit politics was based in Beed district of Marathwada region in Maharashtra [see Annexure I for maps]. This chapter introduces the socio-political and economic context of Marathwada and more particularly Beed. I dwell here on Dalit status and the power processes that construct the external fields within which Dalit politics operate.

Marathwada region in Maharashtra refers to the geographical areas that were part of the erstwhile Hyderabad state under Nizam rule. The Marathwada region, comprised of the eight districts of Hingoli, Jalna, Parbhani, Beed, Aurangabad, Latur, Osmanabad and Nanded, account for around 17 per cent of Maharashtra's population. Marathwada exposes the stark reality of the socio-economic deprivation in Maharashtra, which may be invisible due to the industrialisation and development of Mumbai and the western region of the state. A look at the development indices of the districts of Marathwada reveals that they are well below the state average in terms of human development and poverty.

For instance, the Human Development Index (HDI) value for Maharashtra is at 0.58, In Marathwada, however, all districts with the exception of Aurangabad (0.57), are much lower than the state average; Jalna - 0.27, Parbhani - 0.43, Hingoli - 0.43, Beed - 0.47, Nanded - 0.37, Osmanabad - 0.38 and Latur - 0.47 (Kamdar and Basak 2005). Largely an agrarian society, landholding patterns are highly skewed in favour of dominant castes like Marathas followed by other castes like Vanjaris and Lingayats (Mandavdhare 1989).

Marathwada has slightly higher proportion of Dalits (14.96 per cent) compared to the state average of 10.2 per cent (Census, 2001). [27] The semi-feudal culture of caste

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[27] Maharashtra has 59 caste groups which are identified as Scheduled Castes. Of these, the Mahar, Mang and Chambar/Bhambi together constitute 92 per cent of the Scheduled Caste population in Maharashtra. Mahars are numerically the largest group, accounting for 57.5 percent of the Scheduled Caste population; the Mangs constitute 20.3 per cent and the Chambar 12.5 per cent. All figures from

and the traditional economy were long sustained in Marathwada because of the disinterest of the Nizam administration in developing districts other than Hyderabad (Kate 1987: 86) and due to the unreformed nature of the state of Hyderabad (Guru 1994; Omvedt 1993: 64-66). Under Nizam rule the land tenure systems gave immense power to big landlords (*Jaagir-dars*) constructing a highly feudal economy and society that survived in the post-Nizam period leaving Dalits as landless labourers and *veth begars* (unpaid labourers compelled to work for village officials and village landlords).

The political and economic deprivation of this region merged locally with the traditional hierarchies of caste rule in the postcolonial period. Marathwada still retains some of the semi-feudal elements of a caste based economic system - like practices of *yeskarki* and *gavaki* - that tied Dalits to traditional polluting occupations that were not paid for in cash. *Yeskarki* refers specifically to the cleaning duties attached to the temple and gate keeping in the village that untouchables carried out whereas *gavaki* refers to services rendered to individual *patil* families which included a mix of work considered polluting coupled with farm labour.

Beed

Beed (also referred to as Bhir/Bir in government documents till the late 1960s) is largely representative of the Dalit situation in Maharashtra in terms of their demographic, social, economic and political status and caste violence. The socio-political landscapes of both rural andslowly growing semi-urban pockets in Beed are marked by the centrality of caste and the vibrant presence of Dalit socio-political movements. Most Dalits in villages still continue to be landless or small and marginal farmers who depend on dominant caste lands for their livelihood sources. In Beed, though, we also encounter increased mobility amongst the labourers, particularly Dalits, who migrate out as sugarcane cutting workers and to cities like Pune and Mumbai seeking seasonal employment. As in the rest of Maharashtra, Marathas are dominant castes who control politics and economy in Beed too.

Census 2001, accessed on 22/7/08 from
www.censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_sc_maha.pdf

Beed is located around 450 kilometres from Mumbai and is part of the seven districts that constitute the administrative division of Aurangabad (Marathwada) in Maharashtra. Beed has eleven Talukas (blocks) and the land area of Beed is around three percent of Maharashtra. The total population of Beed as per 2001 Census was just over 2,161,250. The population density in Beed is 203 per sq. km as compared to 318 for whole of Maharashtra. The sex ratio in Beed stands at 904 females per 1000 males when compared to the state average of 922 females. It has a literacy rate of 60.48 per cent as opposed to the state average of 76.88 per cent(GoM 2002: 91-92). Of the total population of Beed over 80 per cent reside in rural areas, and agriculture and agricultural labour constitute the main source of income (GoM 2008). As this suggests, Beed is amongst the most underdeveloped districts of Maharashtra and Marathwada.

Beed falls under semi arid zone and receives from average to scanty rainfall annually. Since most agriculture is dependent on rain rather than irrigation this renders marginal landholders even more vulnerable and entails the risk of limited seasonal work for agricultural labourers. Cultivation is undertaken for both *Kharif* [monsoon/summer] and *Rabi* [winter] crops in Beed, the crops in *Kharif* includes cereals like *jowar* (hybrid), *bajra* and pulses like *tur*, *udid* and cotton and soya beans as cash grops, whereas the Rabi season includes cereals of *jowar*, wheat and pulses like *harbhara*, and oilseeds like *karadi*. Amongst the cash crops, sugar cane and cotton are the main crops; the area under sugarcane cultivation is 3.65 per cent.

Scheduled Castes in Beed

Out of the total population of 2,161,250 in Beed, Scheduled Castes constitute 281,240 (13.01 per cent). The Mahars, Mangs and Chambars are the three largest Scheduled Caste (SC) groups and comprise 95 per cent of SC population in Beed District. In Beed the Mahars are the largest Scheduled Caste group with a population of 160,215 (56 per cent), followed by Mangs who number 84,100 (29 per cent) and the Chambars number 24,485 (8.7 per cent).[28] In Beed during the ninth five year plan

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[28] Accessed on 22/7/08 from http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Dist_File/datasheet-2727.pdf

period 25.84 per cent families were Below the Poverty Line (BPL) and Scheduled Castes constituted 28.63 per cent of the total BPL population in Beed.[29]

Land owning

Beed has a total land area of 10.44 lakh hectare of which 2.47 per cent is forest area and 8.81 lakh hectares (84 per cent) is under cultivation (GoM 2008). Beed has 5, 49, 776 land owners/cultivators (*khatedar*) and below is a detailed breakup of land holding.

Land Distribution in Beed

Holding in hectares	Land holding (%)	Cultivators (%)
.2 – 1	13.88	42.72
1 - 2	26.76	31. 06
2 – 5	40.73	22.28
5 – 10	14.46	3.48
10 and above	4.47	0.46

All figures from GoM (2008: 5)

The landholdings are highly skewed as can be seen from above table. Around 26 per cent cultivators own 58 percent of total cultivable land. There is no detailed break-up of caste-wise landowning for Beed. The figures for Maharashtra present the marginal nature of land holding for Scheduled Castes. Amongst the Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra, 57 per cent are landless and near landless. Including the marginal farmers [land holding below 2 hectares] this share goes over 75 per cent, in 2001, 46 per cent of SCs depended on agricultural labour as compared to 26 per cent for non SC/ST and only 12.9 per cent were self sufficient cultivators (India. Planning 2007).

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[29] Accessed from http://beed.nic.in/htmldocs/drda.htm. These figures however seem to be an underestimate as Dalits from various villages in Beed contested these figures during my fieldwork and maintained that a lot of well-to-do farmers were made part of the BPL list and landless Dalits excluded.

The average size of land holdings amongst the SC and ST land holders was 1.31 and 1.97 hectares respectively in the year 2000-2001 (GoM 2009).

Mandavdhare's (1989) study of land and caste relations in 50 villages of Marathwada offers insights into the domination of Marathas in land holding. His study also includes villages from Ambejogai Taluka of Beed which reveals the intersections of caste inequality and land distribution. The Marathas constituted 50.22 per cent of the total land holders owning 51.48 per cent land, followed by Vanjaris who made up 13.66 per cent of land holders and owned 12.73 per cent of land. Amongst the Scheduled Castes, the proportion of land holders from Mang caste was 0.39 per cent and the per cent of land they owned was mere 0.49 per cent. Of the Chambars 0.49 per cent were land holders of 0.24 per cent land. The Mahars were relatively better off as there were 3.69 per cent of land holders, but they collectively owned 2.67 of land.

The unequal land holding pattern in Beed is one of the important reasons for Dalit deprivation. Contemporary Dalits, however, are far more mobile in search of employment and better paying options than they were till early 1980s.

Changing meanings of Dalit labour in Beed

The village economic organisation in Marathwada was structured around caste occupations which existed in the form of *Balute-dari* system. A close variant of *Jajmani*, *Balutedari* had *Patil* (village head man) and *Kulkarni* (village accountant) who were generally Marathas and Brahmans respectively. Guha (2004) questions the rigidity of *Balutedari* (and Jajmani) as understood by Dumont (1980) and suggests that the practice was always fraught with conflict, occasional breakdown and re-establishment; the society was therefore never static in some 'traditional' mode. Fuller (1989) too critiques the understanding of Jajmani or Baluta as a system that survived unchanging in 'traditional' India. While the debate on the fluidity of labour and exchange practices are important, for the untouchable castes the traditional exchange schema meant dual disadvantages; firstly in their labour (and bodies) being framed as stigmatised and secondly in the exploitative nature of returns offered in kind.

The earlier labour practice of *veth begar* required Dalits to work for individual *patils* and as village servants; these were coupled with newer forms of (bonded) labour which are referred to as *saal-gadi* (Year Worker) in Beed. Those who worked as *saal-gadi* laboured throughout the year for a Patil family for cereal and clothes and a nominal amount of money.

There has however been an increase in labour mobility amongst Dalit workers who have moved out of traditional caste occupations. Migration for coping and accumulation purposes amongst Dalits is increasingly seen in Marathwada and is most visible in Beed. One of the important sources of Dalit livelihood has been seasonally migrating as sugarcane cutting workers to sugar belts in western Maharashtra and northern Karnataka. Of the total sugarcane migrant workers in Beed the number of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is reported to be as high as 60 per cent (SACRED 2005: 7).

Sugarcane migrant workers labour in exploitative conditions. Paradoxically, the workers who previously received payment in kind were somewhat protected and can now be at the mercy of market forces. Women in particular carry the dual burden of managing a mobile household which is coupled with harsh working conditions. Migration however opens a way for labourers to break away from patron-client relationships and change from being semi-free to free (Breman 1993). Recent research has documented the nature of accumulative migration that is on the increase and the relative socio-economic mobility that is noticed amongst the poorest sections of the society (Deshingkar and Start 2003).

Migration as sugarcane workers has facilitated economic mobility amongst various Dalit families. Besides employment as sugarcane cutting workers Dalits also make the most out of other non-farm employment in cotton ginning mills or migrating to Pune for temporary jobs. It is difficult to find families who strictly survive on the earlier practices like *gavaki*. Increased possibilities of non-farm employment for Dalits also means decreased dependency on the land owning castes like Marathas. The changing meanings of labour for Dalits also affect the dominant castes like Marathas both socially and economically. Labour is neither cheap nor easily

available especially when the landless Dalits migrate for sugarcane cutting and Marathas are forced to increase the wages when they are in dire need of labourers. The economic changes though substantial are not permanent, a bad drought or shortage of sugarcane can put the sugarcane worker in a debt trap.

The vibrant civil-political society and Maratha power

While passing through the main roads of Beed city or any other Block head quarter in Beed one easily gets a feel of the vibrancy of civil-political society and the politicisation of public spaces. Be it the streets or the government offices, banners, hoardings and wall paintings are replaced regularly with new ones informing the citizens of new socio-political events. These are all cleared (totally) only during the *achar-sanhita* (code of conduct) of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. Advertised events varied from a mass rally of Hindu Jagruti Sabha (Hindu right wing organisation) to rallies of various political parties or birthday wishes for local and national leaders.

Similarly one can see collective performances either in support or in opposition to something. The Beed Zilla Adhikari's (District Collector) office had some groups protesting or fasting most of the time. Some worth mentioning, that depict the political culture were; by Brahmins against cow killings, doctors protesting against an FIR filed by MHA against a Doctor for his negligence leading to death of three children, Dalits protesting caste atrocities or for regularisation of grazing lands they cultivated, Marathas demanding reservations in government jobs and a small group of Gandhians fasting against corruption.

The politics of protest and civic engagement also includes active participation of people across caste in party politics of Beed. In Beed, party politics is dominated by the Marathas and Vanjaris. During the 2009 general elections, of the total 16 Lakh 33 thousand voters, Marathas constituted 5.50 Lakh, Vanjaris 4.50 Lakh, Dalits and Muslims together constituted 4 Lakh votes and other voters were around two lakhs

(LNS 2009). The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) is synonymous with Marathas and BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) with the Vanjaris.[30]

Beed has six Vidhan Sabha seats, Georai, Majalgaon, Beed, Ashti, Kaij (SC reserved) and Parali. Elections for the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha in Maharashtra were held in April and October of 2009 respectively. The voting turn out in Beed Lok Sabha elections was 65 percent, and it was 58 per cent for the Vidhan Sabha. The political competition in Beed is a bi-polar one between NCP and the BJP-SS (Shiv Sena) combine. NCP's emergence in 1999 has roots in Maratha dissidence within Congress. The dominance of Congress in the politics of Maharashtra was absolute between 1957 and 1977. The real political competition in the state was confined to factions within the Congress and the success of the party lay in its ability to accommodate these factions and keep them under control (Palshikar and Birmal 2004). Maratha elite dissension against the Delhi (Gandhi family) control of Congress was exacerbated in the 1970s, when Indira Gandhi attempted to undo the hegemony of the Maratha leadership.

Sharad Pawar has been a key Maratha leader who engineered the Maratha split within Congress on various occasions. Pawar who was part of Congress led the breakaway factions of Congress (Socialist) formed in 1978, he also led the faction of the Maratha leadership to form the first non-Congress coalition government in the state in 1978 (Palshikar and Birmal 2004). In 1986, however, Sharad Pawar dissolved Congress (S) and rejoined Congress under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, creating political space for Maratha mobilisation against Dalit assertion. Shiv Sena was not active in the villages of Beed till the late 1980s when they mobilised strongly to gain support of Congress (S) dissidents who were not willing to return to Congress with Pawar. Shiv Sena grew stronger in rural areas of Marathwada evoking Maratha emotions against Dalit encroachment of *gaairaan* lands and against the Dalit demand to rename Marathwada University making violent conflicts against Dalits a regular sight in Marathwada. The coalition of BJP-SS, formed in 1989, further combined the Hindutva and anti-Dalit forces. The decision to rename Marathwada University as Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University in 1994 by the Congress under the

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[30] I will deal with in detail with the politics of accommodation in NCP in the Chapter nine.

pressure of RPI factions led to Maratha rage against Congress and the BJP-SS combine gained power in 1995 with strong Maratha support. Pawar rejected Congress again in 1999, questioning Sonia Gandhi's right to become Prime Minister, and formed the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). This emerged as a Maratha Party and made the party competition triangular in Maharashtra (Palshikar and Birmal 2004). Congress and NCP contested elections independently in 1999 assembly election and formed a post election alliance to recapture power.

Since the 2004 assembly elections, Congress and NCP have been contesting elections in alliance. Due to this alliance Congress (I) is almost absent in Beed which is a stronghold of the NCP which contests all the seats for Vidhan Sabha and the Beed Lok Sabha constituency. Shiv Sena contests only one seat of the Beed Vidhan Sabha whereas the BJP contests the other five and the Beed Lok Sabha seat as well. Electoral politics, thus, is competition between Vanjaris and Marathas through BJP and NCP. There is also competition within dominant Marathas who switch to the BJP when disgruntled by the NCP. BJP, though Vanjari controlled in Beed, remains dependent on dissident Marathas.

Violence, money and caste dominate in local dynamics of the assembly elections, and the elections for Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayats[31] are no less political. This is more so due to the increased devolution of development funds to these decentralised bodies of governance. These bodies along with the rural credit cooperative structure are mostly in control of Marathas in Beed followed by Vanjaris in pockets of their stronghold. The development apparatus of the state and Congress (NCP) are thus sites of economic and political power and dominance of Marathas. I have briefly outlined Maratha dominance in political realm here; the dominance of Marathas has particular ritual and social content in Marathwada which distinguishes them from Vanjaris in Beed as dominant castes.

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[31]The decentralised governance structure in Maharashtra is a three tier system with Zilla Parishad at District level, Panchayat Samiti at Block/Taluka level and Gram Panchayat at the village level.

The 'Raje' in Maratha dominance

The term Maratha previously referred to a small social elite that differentiated itself from the mass of the peasants called Kunbi (O'Hanlon 1985). These elite families claimed genealogical links with north Indian Rajput families and Kshatriya status. Overtime, Kunbi (as a lower part of Maratha) was slowly subsumed into the Maratha identity (O'Hanlon 1985). Laine (2003) has specifically suggested that Hindutva and Maratha polemic were not common until recently but were systematically constructed by the writers of the Hindu-Bhakti orientation in the pre-colonial period and later co-opted as a symbol of Maratha pride with strong Hindu credentials by Hindutva nationalists like Tilak and Savarkar.

Marathas constitute the dominant castes in Beed. The term 'dominant caste' refers to the numerical, economical and political preponderance of some castes (Srinivas 1959). In Marathwada the Marathas are numerically stronger than the average 31 per cent in Maharashtra (Vora 2009). Going by the numerical criteria, in Beed district two castes namely the Marathas and Vanjaris can be termed dominant castes, as Vanjaris too are a numerically strong in some villages of Beed. Vanjaris in the past have claimed to be a branch of Marathi(a) Kunbis (Hassan 1920:627-634). The 1885 Gazetteer mentions that a Vanjari eats from no one but a Brahman or a Maratha, they rank themselves with Marathas but Marathas object to dine with them (Bombay Gazetteer, 1885: 429). The repulsion of Marathas to Vanjaris and several other castes lower to them makes them a particular kind of dominant caste in Marathwada.[32]

It is therefore important to emphasise the specific socio-cultural context of caste along with the political and economic power while addressing localised dominance. The emphasis merely on numerical preponderance is rightly challenged by Dumont (1980), something that seems relevant in the case of Maharashtra, as Mahars are the most numerical caste in Maharashtra after Marathas. Dumont (1980: 160) instead emphasises the homology between the caste of the king and the dominant caste and the reproduction of royal function at the village level by dominant castes. This is a key difference between the Vanjaris and the Marathas in Marathwada. The Marathas,

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[32] Vanjaris and the Kunbis are currently identified as OBCs in Maharashtra.

as dominant castes at the village level, try to reproduce the royal function of caste in miniature. They valorise their Kshatriya claims, revere Shivaji (the Maratha King) and also look down upon Vanjaris who have historically claimed to be equal to the Marathas.

While the Marathas and Vanjaris both indulge in violence against Dalits their political symbologies are different. It is interesting to note that the Vanjaris and other smaller castes (Dalits included) refer to themselves as *alpasankhya* (minority) in Beed. During the parliamentary elections of 2009, contrary to BJP's traditional anti-Muslim rhetoric, Gopinath Munde (from Vanjari caste) appealed to Muslims, and reminded Dalit voters of how the family Marathas (NCP) had violently opposed renaming of Marathwada University after Dr. Ambedkar. A dominant caste, thus, is not just numerically predominant but also has material and cultural bases which are reproduced in political fields and performed through dominance in public spaces.

Most Marathas in Beed also refer to themselves as *raje* (king) and it is common to see vehicles (motor bikes, jeeps, cars and rickshaws) owned by Marathas which have *raje* written on them in saffron. The kingly valour of Marathas comes in political performances especially when Dalits violate caste boundaries and roles. I will return to this while discussing caste violence in chapter six. Dalits are not meek victims, however, and organise around multiple Dalit socio-political organisations to contest Maratha's socio-political and ritual dominance.

Dalit politics and political violence in Marathwada

The absence of the non-Brahman (Satyashodhak) movement in Marathwada and repressive monitoring of civil society and associational mobilisation by the Nizam government set a specific terrain for Dalit exclusion. Dalit political mobilisation took roots in Marathwada in the mid-1930s under three important leaders from the state of Hyderabad – B. S Venkatrao, J. H Subayya and Shyamsunder who aligned with Ambedkar and formed associations like Depressed Classes Association and Hyderabad Scheduled Caste Federation. Their activism secured some political,

economic and educational concessions from the Nizam government for the ex-untouchables till independence of Hyderabad in 1948.[33]

Factions of RPI had consolidated their position in Marathwada in the post-Ambedkar period where Bhaurao (Dadasaheb) Gaikwad led the mobilisation for land rights, leading to encroachments on gaairan lands by Dalits. Conversions to Buddhism also followed after 1956 particularly amongst the Mahars in Marathwada radically raising the population of Buddhists. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism had made the Dalit project of liberation more cultural and not merely political (revolving around state).

Amongst the educational concessions derived from Nizam was the grant for the People's Education Society that turned Aurangabad into a centre for Dalit activist-intellectual pursuits. Gokhale (1986) terms these educational institutions in Aurangabad, like Milind College [34], as Buddhist institutions. Milind College was the centre of political conscientisation for Dalit students from its inception, a site for DP activism during its heydays and also a political space where much mobilisation for the contentious Namantar movement took place.

The movement for Namantar is a critical event in the history of Dalit assertion in Marathwada and evokes memories of large scale political violence against Dalits. It refers to the Dalit demand for Namantar (name-change) of the Marathwada University to Dr. Ambedkar University. Various scholars have analysed the violence associated with Marathwada university and have brought out the interplay of caste, class, religion and state in the sustained violence against Dalits (Abraham 1978; Guru 1994; Omvedt 1979; Punalekar 1989; Gupta 1979). Rao (2009: 205-26) notes the ritualisation of political violence and archaic forms of punishment and casts the

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[33] For a detailed discussion over their activism in Marathwada, differences and competition amongst these leaders and their alliance with the Nizam against the Indian government, see Gaikwad (1990). The Nizam government in the mid-40s was positively inclined towards the development of *pasta kaum* (Depressed Classes). See Kakade (1990: 87-89) some political efforts of Nizam to attract untouchables towards Islam and in supporting Ittehad (Muslim loyalist organisation).

[34] Milind College is part of the educational institutes started by People Education Society (PES). PES was registered and initiated by Dr. Ambedkar for promoting education amongst the Dalits. The Nizam Government had funded this initiative in 1940s and these institutions continue to be a hub of Dalit movement activities till date.

state as a perpetrator against, rather than protector of, Dalits. Namantar mobilisation and political violence lasted for 15 years (1979 – 1994) costing Dalits especially the Mahars loss of lives and property as the upper castes, particularly Marathas, attacked Dalits in the villages. The Dalit Panthers (DPs) mobilised radically for Namantar and against the ensuing violence in Marathwada particularly in small towns and cities.

It was during the Namantar period that SS made an entry into rural Maharashtra particularly Marathwada. SS was the only political party that overtly opposed Namantar tooth and nail. SS merged the anti Namantar sensitivities with acts of Dalit militant behaviour like anti-Hindu positionality[35] of Dalits and grazing land encroachments. Religious conversions of Mahars, critique of Hindu religion by DPs, caste based reservations and the special acts in the constitution that prohibited violence against Dalits were amongst the constituting factors that SS capitalized upon against Dalits in Marathwada. Members of SS (mostly Marathas) thus launched campaigns to reclaim grazing land that Dalits had encroached for cultivation under various movements. Dalits (mostly Mahars) and Muslims were targeted particularly and lower OBCs (Malis and Vanjaris) were mobilised along with Maratha youth to save the pride of Maharashtra (Lele 1995; Palshikar 2004). *Jai Shivaji Jai Bhavani* (Hail Shivaji Hail Bhavani), *Shivaji Maharaj ki Jai* (Victory to Shivaji) were the slogans of Marathas attacking rural Dalits, turning the Namantar struggle into a war between Shivaji (Kshatriya king) and Ambedkar (untouchable's icon of pride) resulting in large scale desecration of Ambedkar symbols.

As this thesis demonstrates, however, large scale political violence against Dalits and Dalit symbols of pride has not tamed Dalit movements. The deepening of Dalit politics in Beed is best witnessed during Ambedkar Jayanti. In Beed city almost all the Dalit socio-political actors come together for this event. The Jayanti is organised jointly by a committee with representatives from various non-political Dalit groups for one week and the contributions (mostly from Dalits) are anywhere between 8-10 lakhs rupees. The celebration comprises various activities like talks by intellectuals from Pune or Mumbai University, plays, musical performances, exhibitions, selling

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[35] The Mahars converted to Buddhism and are also referred to as Nav-Buddhas or Bauddhas. While in 1951 no Buddhists were returned in Beed district, in the census of 1961 there were 21,769 Buddhists in Beed district (Bhir Gazeetteer: 1969).

literature and the grand march with Dalits, both men and women dressed in white on the streets through Beed to meet at the Ambedkar statue. The week ends with a carnival like performance on the evening of 14th April where Dalit families are out enjoying the view of men dancing to tunes of Hindi, Marathi and at times English songs almost conquering the streets of Beed till late mid-night.

Dalit politics of resistance blurs the boundaries of the state, society, civil society and caste. In the political fields of Beed, Dalits engage in political assertions around public spaces and mobilise for issues of redistribution through cultivating government gaairan/grazing lands, these evoke a violent response from the dominant castes and the state machinery. Besides these conflictual processes, Dalit movements also engage in civil and democratic processes by forming collective identities and alternative political communities that challenge their 'untouchable' status, leading to politicisation of Dalits and changing of caste relations. The participation of Dalit movements in electoral politics and democratic procedures further complicates the nature of Dalit belief in politics surrounding the state.

Conclusion

The political fields of Marathwada continue to stage Dalit politics for dignity and full citizenship. Marathwada also represents a peculiar context within Maharashtra where the socio-economic changes have been slow and the vertical mobility of social groups has sustained the domination of Marathas leaving not just Dalits but also other non-Maratha castes at the margins of local politics. The changes in labour practices and rise in labour mobility have partially undone the casteist nature of labour exchange that stigmatised Dalit bodies. Dalits however continue to face new humiliations and political vulnerabilities that deny them full citizenship.

BSP and MHA in Marathwada constitute two key socio-political organisations of Dalit politics that sustain the political and ideological struggles against the inequities of caste in different ways. It is through the study of their functioning in their relational contexts, that I analyse the intersections of caste, anti-caste ideology, politics and the political culture that (re)locates Dalits to margins and also the Dalit struggle to reform state and mainstream culture, to gain recognition and self respect

for Dalits. Before introducing the context of post-Panther Dalit politics and MHA and BSP in chapter four, I will detail the methods used and the importance of ethnography in studying Dalit politics in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The key objective of my research was to study the intersections of caste and civil society through study of Dalit politics and mobilisation at the grassroots. Besides comprehending the diversity of Dalit agency and politics in their (g)localised contexts, I hoped to develop a nuanced understanding of the working of civil society within the context of caste inequality and Dalit mobilisation. I followed an anthropological approach to understand the processes and politics of Dalit civic engagement and its role in defining local politics and political culture. In this chapter I detail the fieldwork processes, my reasons for pursuing ethnography, my activist orientations and insider-outsider status, methods of data collection, analysis and ethical considerations.

Some of the key questions that I planned to explore at the outset and which remained unchanged were; why do some Dalits organise and others do not? What are the different forms of Dalit ideology/ies? In what forms do Dalits organise in civil society/ the public sphere? What are the social, economic, cultural and political factors that facilitate Dalit mobilisation? What are the challenges that Dalit movements face -both internal and external? How are gender or *jati* identities and inequalities dealt with? What is the impact of Dalit politics on Dalits and non-Dalit society and the wider polity?

Why Beed? And why MHA and BSP?

I developed the above research questions and chose Beed as my fieldsite after I developed initial contacts with MHA for preliminary fieldwork in May 2007. Though there was an element of convenience in studying Beed due to the contacts I had developed with MHA, the backwardness of Beed, the general deprivation of Dalits, violence against Dalits and the politicisation of Dalits make Beed a good representative district for studying Dalit politics.

My decision to study Beed and MHA was also partially influenced by my experience of working in a Brahmin-run NGO in another district of Marathwada in 2001 (Waghmore 2002). The CEO of this NGO would criticise Eknath Awad in our informal conversations for doing 'politics' and not 'social work'. Though I could not contact Eknath Awad or RDC till 2007 I came to know about the activism of MHA with Dalits during my stay in Marathwada and was intrigued by the nature MHA's engagement with Dalits.

My preliminary fieldwork with MHA in Beed gave me insights and contacts and also helped me decide on a focus. During this time I went around with the activists of MHA and interviewed some Dalits who were part of MHA's mobilisation and were involved in cultivating gaairan. Given the presence of diverse Dalit socio-political organisation I was cautious of focussing on a single organisation and was aware of the shortcomings of such a study. In 2007 I particularly noted the celebration amongst Dalits across castes after BSP secured full majority in 2007 Vidhan Sabha elections of UP. BSP in Maharashtra had not been studied ethnographically so far and BSP's overshadowing of RPI groups since the 2004 Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections of Maharashtra made it a critical case to pursue.

Since MHA and BSP have a strong presence of Mangs and Mahars respectively I also included Charmakar Mahasangh (CM), a Chambar organisation functioning in Beed in my study. I decided not to focus only on MHA so as to broaden the scope of my research beyond one movement-organisation and caste constituency to gain a deeper and broader understanding of Dalit politics.

After few months of fieldwork in 2008 I had to change the plan of studying three socio-political Dalit organisations. I had to drop CM from the study after following it for a while and interviewing some of its key leaders. I realised that CM is a small time registered organisation with no mass base or regular activities. The main leader who formally registered CM is a fulltime assistant lecturer in a college in Beed and was actively supporting BSP during fieldwork. I decided to drop CM from my study; primarily because it lacked active organisation. The key reason for selecting CM was specifically to include Chambars in the research, as BSP and MHA are dominated by

Mahars and Mangs respectively. This assumption, however, proved wrong as many Chambars in Beed were active in the BSP. I however interviewed the leaders of CM and meet them in the meetings of BAMCEF and BSP in Beed. Chapter four further details why MHA and BSP are critical cases for studying Dalit politics in post Dalit-Panther phase.

Given the specific nature of my study which hoped to explore Dalit agency (culture, world-view and action) through Dalit social-political movements, a qualitative methodology, particularly ethnography, best suited the purpose. This study was not just about the general deprivation and exclusion of Dalits which could be achieved through quantitative techniques. It focused on the socio-cultural, political and economic aspects of Dalit exclusion and more specifically on Dalit responses to their exclusion in diverse forms of mobilisation. The dynamism in objectives and interventions of Dalit movements need to be observed in their complex social environments on a day to day basis and ethnography served as the best methodological approach in achieving this.

Anthropology of Dalit politics

The role of social anthropology in the study of politics has been a contested one in the past. The cultural as "apolitical" is generally handed over to anthropologists for interrogation, thus constructing a futile distinction between civil society and the state (Hearn 2001). Despite this the post-colonial phase has also seen a simultaneous increase in anthropologists pursuing study of politics, particularly the interface of old societies and the new states (Geertz 1963). The key contribution of social anthropology to political science is the analysis of the symbolism in power relations, argues Cohen (1969); he also calls social anthropologists to drop their nausea of studying the state. Spencer (1997) urges anthropologist to move beyond dichotomies of tradition and modernity and politics as opposed to cultural and symbolic, he argues for a radical re-introduction of 'transculturation' and 'obsessional empiricism' for an anthropology of 'actually existing politics'. My thesis furthers such an effort and transcends assumed dichotomies of caste vs. civil society and civil society vs. state through an ethnography of Dalit politics.

The importance of participant observation in exploratory and descriptive studies is well acknowledged. Participant observation is best suited when the problem is concerned with human meanings and interactions viewed from insiders' perspectives (Jorgensen 1989). In the case of social movement research, participant observation produces the most direct evidence on action and the phenomenon of investigation is thus observable within an everyday life situation (Lichterman 1998). Participant observation in movements can best explore the everyday meanings of the concepts identified before or during the study. Ethnographies of everyday participation in mobilization also help to counter the popular image of social movements as coherent, well-bounded entities consisting of individuals committed to the goals of the collective (Wolford 2006). Ethnography is important in understanding the perspectives of people, and the use of multiple data sources in ethnography is a great advantage (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 25).

A recent addition to the anthropology of Dalit politics in Marathwada is Rao (2009) who uses historical anthropology as a critical strategy to explain the paradoxical centrality of 'Dalit' to Indian democracy. My concerns are more with the daily working of Dalit politics and this research is thus an exercise in political anthropology where I also explore the intersections of Dalit movements with the fragmented institutions of the state. My study however moves beyond a micro village study framework to follow the dynamism of Dalit politics in their external contexts. Various studies have productively used similar anthropological approaches in empirical study of Dalit politics. Such studies have successfully used ethnography, in particular participant observation, to study Dalit movements and ideology (Khare 1985; Gorringe 2005; Jaoul 2006, 2008; Hardtmann 2009).

Ethnographic approaches have contributed immensely in understanding Dalit perspectives and their strategies of anti-caste mobilisation. They have done well in the study of Dalit movements and help in comprehending non-class issues like identity and culture and their interface with class structures. The dynamism in objectives and interventions of Dalit movements need to be observed in their complex social environments on a day to day basis. I participated and observed in the daily socio-economic, cultural and political processes of Dalit mobilisations to

examine the centrality of state (political opportunity structures) and caste (inequality and social capital) in the context of globalised grassroots. The blurring of national political and economic boundaries and the expansion of transnational/global civil society organisations in global democratisation processes is seen in the grassroots of Marathwada as well. It is particularly reflected in the presence of transnational advocacy NGOs that attempt to influence the politics and practice of local governments.

Ethnographic study of civil society or Dalit politics can capture the local and the global and the interaction between the two on the ground. Dalit activists had forged links not only with activist groups in Mumbai and Delhi, some from MHA also participated in the Durban Conference and UNHRC general meetings in Geneva. Suggesting methodological innovation especially in anthropology under globalisation, Appadurai (2000), calls for a shift from study of trait geographies to "process" geographies to map the flows and disjunctures of globalisation, and intersections of globalisation from above and below. Multi-sited ethnography has emerged as a key methodological innovation to study the blurred boundaries of local and global (Marcus 1995). I pursued a multi-sited ethnography to follow the dynamism of Dalit activism wherever it flowed, coupled with regular interactions and staying with participants.

My ethnography of Dalit politics has helped me transcend ritual and symbolic emphasis in studying caste to comprehend its dynamism in interaction with modern politics. It also helped me gain insights into alternative politics and political culture that Dalits seek to construct through the merger of modern and traditional symbolism and also the challenges they face in real substantive politics of caste. Below I detail the process of my field work in detail.

The fieldwork process

I carried out fieldwork between August 2008 to June 2009 and later briefly in January-February 2010. My focus during fieldwork was on understanding the evolution, growth and functioning of BSP and MHA since their inception in Beed, changes over time in organisational structure, socio-cultural and economic

dimensions of worldview and ideology, their principal and peripheral constituents and stakeholders in terms of caste, class and gender, strategies of mobilization and empowerment, socio-economic and political networks, engagement with their environment and cooperation and conflictual processes. These organisations were ethnographically explored to understand the dialectical relationship between the Dalits, Dalit movements, the state and non-Dalits so as to include an analysis of political culture and political economy, and also to critically appraise the formation and functioning of collective identities - both *jati* and Dalit (or Bahujan) -- in Dalit politics and civil society at large.

I did not divide my fieldwork into two halves to study one movement at a time and moved between MHA and BSP during fieldwork based on the field situations. Moving between MHA and BSP did not noticeably affect my relationship with either group. Though some BSP members doubted if I was a spy of NCP because of my proximity to MHA, there were various others who understood my research and helped me gain access to party processes, procedures and politics.

My ethnography of the BSP and MHA was multi-sited at three levels, one with the activists/leaders of these movements, second with participants/supporters/volunteers and finally with the networks of movements. In each case I moved around with people from each level. As compared to the time I spent with the activists and participants of MHA and BSP I spent less time with the network respondents. Use of multiple data sources however helped me reach out not just to the activists and participants of the movements under study but also to their networks, those with whom they competed for votes and mass support as well as those with whom they co-operated in various ways. Dalit activists engage in a varied range of activities, which can be categorised as brokering around the state (providing Dalits access to benefits offered by the developmental state), protest for Dalit rights (mostly anti-caste atrocity or to establish rights over gaairan cultivation), mobilising support/opinion for the movements and building organisation, activism/brokering during elections, and ritual roles during Jayanti (Ambedkar, Annabhau Sathe[36],

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[36] Annabhau Sathe was a prominent writer, novelist and communist leader who belonged to the Mang caste.

Savitribai and Jyotiba Phule) and other similar celebrations. The activists of MHA were those who were paid staff working in RDC projects. Others who were not paid were mostly lower down the hierarchy. Similarly in BSP there were village based, Taluka level and district level workers. I moved through this hierarchy of activists in both MHA and BSP.

I had support from above in both. In MHA, Eknath Awad and other senior leaders were supportive of my research and would urge other workers of MHA to help me. Awad and some other workers were appreciative of my research and they would regularly suggest readings for me. Their support enabled me to have easy access to the activists and supporters of MHA. In the case of BSP, the district-in-charge and one of the Maharashtra state–incharge provided contacts locally. One of my ex-student's brothers-in-law in Beed was a key BSP volunteer who provided me valuable contacts and information of meetings. I gained trust from below as I spent time with activists and participants. Getting support from below entailed living with some of the activists and participants. Discussing food, especially my liking for beef (*motyacha*), brought me close to respondents, also some would share more about their life because of my being from Athani Taluka as most sugarcane workers had at some point been to the sugar belt in Athani. Conversations around caste would turn into productive exchanges as respondents at times too would enquire more about my caste (Holeya in Karnataka and Mahar in Maharashtra) or caste practices and politics in Karnataka. I spent time with the activists at the government offices, meetings, protest rallies, tea stalls, liquor bars (only men), Jayanti celebrations, sang and enjoyed listening to movement songs, danced with them in Ambedkar Jayanti, and simultaneously observed their daily activism practices in varied locations.

During my fieldwork I mostly stayed at the RDC office near Telgaon village or at the Savitribai Phule Mahila Mandal (SPMM) office (another NGO in MHA network) in Beed city and travelled from here to multiple sites in Beed and at times to other neighbouring districts (Aurangabad, Latur and Osmabanabad). At RDC there were personal rooms whereas at SPMM the office in the day was also sleeping space for some workers at night. I had offered to pay for my stay and food at RDC which the workers declined. The workers would tell me that I am one of them and there was no

need to pay. I was also not treated like the funders for whom special meals would be cooked. Staying at RDC did not affect my relationship with the workers of RDC or MHA. No worker or leader interfered or tried to influence the research process. They would help me when I asked and leave me on my own when I was following other networks and people

At RDC besides participating in some of the office activities I had regular access to Eknath Awad, since if he was not travelling he would largely be in the office till late evening, Besides observing his interaction with those visitors who visited him throughout the day, I would also engage in informal conversations with him and the visitors. The RDC office was a site for activist meetings and training and also had officials from funding organisations, politicians, social workers and grieving Dalits (and, at times, non-Dalits) as visitors.

I started fieldwork in August 2008 by accompanying the activists of MHA in Annabhau Sathe Jayanti celebrations in villages and towns and also attending the meetings of gaairan cultivators mobilised by MHA. I also attended rallies of RPI occasionally. While I would voice record the speeches, my observations on the political performance and informal conversations amongst the activists were recorded in Fieldnotes. I would mostly be sitting amongst the participants in the gatherings of BSP and MHA (unless requested vehemently by the activists to be on stage) which helped me also gauge why some of them were participating in these meetings. I would follow the daily practices of activists of MHA by spending most time with the workers of MHA in Dharur Taluka. In addition to government offices like Tahsildar and Mandal Panchayat office, our meeting point was often at a tea stall near the bus stand. I would travel to Dharur from Telgaon -- a journey of about an hour -- by bus. I also stayed for some days in Tandalwadi, Rajewadi and Sonimoha villages with families who were active supporters of MHA. While these families were very welcoming and we had long engaging discussions on caste and ensuing changes in their lives and their understanding of MHA, I did not continue staying with them as it also meant inconvenience to them.

Some senior workers of MHA had a past in BSP and they introduced me to current

BSP workers who in turn took me into the thick of BSP in Beed. I met them till the end of my fieldwork, and they informed me about the events and changes that they were aware of. While workers of BSP in Beed city helped me in getting to know better the district committee and activities of BSP, I followed BSP at the grassroots in Majalgaon Taluka where I spent time regularly with BSP workers. I particularly visited Phule Pimpalgaon village as it has a strong BSP presence and is amongst the few villages that plunged into Dalit assertion in the 1960s. I participated in the cadre trainings, meetings, election campaigns, rallies of BSP in Beed. I also travelled to Nagpur with the workers of BSP to listen to Mayawati during the campaigning for parliamentary elections of 2009, attended a BAMCEF cadre camp in Mumbai, and some of the meetings of BAMCEF groups other than that of BSP in Mumbai and Delhi.

My field plans were influenced on a daily basis by the nature of activism. After spending sometime in the field I also learned to avoid some suggestions and friendly persuasions of activists on what I should be studying and made decisions on field sites specifically to understand and participate in diverse engagements of activists. My field engagements thus varied from attending Awad's birthday celebration in a village, Awad's speech at a Pune University seminar on Dalit movements, and activism around caste atrocities in villages in Kaij Taluka. There was a moment of union in the activism of BSP and MHA and various other movement actors when both were involved in protest and mobilisation against incidents of caste violence. I switched in my field engagements between BSP and MHA based on what I thought would add new value to the data I already had.

Besides field notes based on my participation in the movements I also conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. For interviews, besides the regular set of questions on the personal background and factors leading to their participation in Dalit politics, I used to jot down some specific questions for each individual I was interviewing based on the background information I had about the person or the information I was looking for from the concerned individuals. Not all interviews turned out to be personal interviews and there used to be others like family members and friends present while I conducted interviews. Some individual

interviews also turned into group interviews. I recorded some of these as the discussions were turning out to be productive for research purposes.

Life histories and oral histories have helped in exploring the trajectory of multiple movement participation in individual lives of both activists and movement participants. Life histories and oral histories face the shortcoming of being individual-centric. These were however checked with other sources of information and participant observation. Focus groups interviews were not restricted to Dalit participants and non-Dalits were engaged when possible/required to suit the research questions. I reached out to a diverse group in terms of gender, caste and class to understand varied views, voices and strategies (see the table in Annexure II for details).

Following networks

Until recently, anthropology has lacked methods that could deal with *collective* political actions particularly due to its focus on a demarcated field (Hardtmann 2009: 26-27). While a processual approach has always been a reality to the anthropological fieldworker, the revival of the concept of 'network' in anthropology marked a departure in the study of social movements. Now, depth is no longer a question of staying long enough at one, two or three localities, or travelling between them, but of extensive following in *any* direction of importance to the people in the field (Hardtmann 2009: 27). Hardtmann (2009: 35) thus, '*went wherever Dalit activists happened to be*' in her study of Dalit movements.

I followed a similar approach but focused more on Beed as my objective was to develop a nuanced understanding of the functioning of Dalit movements in the localised context of Marathwada. While I worked with Awad and others on the presentation that he was to make at UNHRC in Geneva, I did not travel with him. Rather, I observed how his foreign visits were translated locally into the making of his (contested) charisma. Thus the universe of my study was in one sense limited to BSP and MHA in Beed district; however I also partially studied important players located outside Beed having implications for Dalit mobilization (movements under study) in Beed too. I was not based in a particular location for a long period but was

moving around to important sites of movement activity. I followed the BSP and MHA to comprehend their external relational fields.[37] In the case of MHA besides interacting with and interviewing officials from funding organisations who shared their critical insight into functioning of NGOs and MHA, I also followed MHA in electoral politics and its temporary alliance with NCP during elections. I attended political rallies and meetings organised by other groups like NCP, RPI and factions of BAMCEF.

The activists of various Dalit formations including MHA and BSP engaged in critical discussion within and between themselves. Thus Mang members of BSP too would give me critical insights on MHA and Awad's politics, it was not rare to see heated discussions between BSP and RPI workers, and while moving around with Dalit activists I would also observe their interactions with members of dominant castes and their socio-political formations. I traced some of the older members of BSP who were no more part of BSP but were key sources of information for me on the history, shortcomings and challenges for BSP in Marathwada. This helped me understand the fluid nature of institutions or organisations through individuals like journalists, politicians and government officials and individuals who sympathised with or opposed BSP and MHA.

One of the key issues that emerged during fieldwork was multiple memberships with various organisations/movements of Dalit movement participants. The movement participants did not have rigid movement alliances and had multiple memberships, for instance *gaairan* cultivators supported from Mang caste by MHA would also attend the rallies organised by RPI on gaairan. Similarly, women supporters of BSP would be part of SHGs formed by RDC and attend MHA rallies/meetings regularly, and some Mangs supporting Awad would also participate in political rallies organised by another prominent Mang political leader of Congress. The reasons for

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[37] I follow Goldstone (2004) who calls for study of social movements in their external fields and relational contexts. External fields include other movements and counter-movements, political and economic institutions, various levels of state authorities and political actors, various elites – economic, political, religious, media various publics; symbolic and value orientations and critical events. Goldstone makes a case for 'relational' approach as it is the, '*relations* among these elements of the external field – both relations among them and of them to movement claims and actions – that shape movement dynamics (2004: 358).

the multiple memberships would vary from identity, interests and ideology and their intersections. Discussion with participants helped me further understand the competition within Dalit groups who had to create, sustain and satisfy their constituencies to retain their role as representatives of Dalits. This contributed in understanding specificities of modularity in Dalit organisations where membership is voluntary and Dalits may switch their loyalty or have multiple loyalties.

Documents and other sources

One of the important features of Dalit movements has been the use of literature and print media in strengthening the movement (Punalekar 2001; Narayan 2006). The literacy rate amongst Dalits in Maharashtra is as high as seventy one per cent and Dalit literature continues to play a vital role in Dalit mobilisation. Documents ranging from publicity/campaign pamphlets, letters to state officials, posters and publications pertaining to ideological dissemination or action are widely used in MHA and BSP. I collected these materials and their analysis has further added to contextualising of movement ideologies, strategies of protest, mobilisation and dissemination.

Organisational records/documents like annual reports, project proposals/reports of RDC and other publications of MHA have helped as supplementary sources of information, and have helped to understand the growth and changes that have happened in MHA since its inception. These documents enriched the information collected through interviews and participant observation. MHA has retained various news clippings and older records pertaining to Dalit and land rights movement since the late 1980s. These also include report of projects implemented by RDC since its inception. News coverage of MHA was available almost since the inception. These records have too helped in mapping the activities, role and growth of MHA along with interviews. The official records of RDC-MHA have specifically enabled me to evolve a detailed understanding of the land rights and Dalit rights activism that MHA leads. MHA also provided me access to the data that they had collected in 2009 on caste atrocities in Marathwada from the PCR offices of all the districts in Marathwada. I also had access to emails relevant to the land rights activism that I

studied in MHA. Not all the documents were about the positives of MHA and documents critical (especially communication with funders) of RDC helped me to contextualise its functioning better.

Documents like District statistical handbook from Beed district information centre, schemes for specific Dalit sub-castes, and government orders on land allotment to landless/encroachers have enhanced the understanding of local political economy and also the interaction between state institutions and the movements at the micro level. Besides documents, artefacts like symbols of protest used in the movements have also been sources of data. I have analysed their meanings and politics for selective presentation in this study.

Participant observation, reflexivity and emotions in Dalit movements

It is more or less agreed now in ethnographic studies that acknowledging 'self' and personal element of the researcher is an important exercise for checking the glossing over of researcher's biases and for allowing the readers to understand and interpret the field and the author better. Location and analysis of self and reflexivity as a methodological issue in anthropology though not recent is a product of reflexive progress in ethnographic studies (Davies 1999). The impersonal, all-but-invisible – status of ethnographic narrator was questioned by scholars from poststructuralist and feminist quarters (England 1994). Spencer (1989) emphasises the acknowledgment of personal elements to rescue anthropological work and writing from what he sees as the literary denial of anthropological presence in ethnographic writings.

The principles of anthropology and the dynamism of caste hierarchies can put ethnographers in odd spaces and identities. Anthropological approaches appreciate the value of participant observation and the involved intensive interaction with the population under study. Interviewing itself is seen as social interaction and not social encounter that happens under survey-interviewing (Santis 1980). In contrast, the elements of hierarchy and repulsion in caste can affect social interaction between various caste groups. Social interaction with those caste groups located *below purity line* is most regulated and culturally prohibited. Caste in its dynamism reproduces new modes of exclusion or inclusion under the new politicised contexts.

Such dynamism of caste may also affect the access of researchers to field situations due to their caste identities[38]. However locating the insider/ outside researcher in a caste based society is a complex process (Narayan 1993; Srinivas 1997). To follow a simplistic approach, anyone outside the immediate geographic location e.g. village may be an outsider or an Indian may be an insider compared to a foreigner, thus a foreign researcher (not born in South Asia) maybe an obvious outsider. However a beef eating Dalit, Muslim or Christian may be an insider compared to a non-beef eating shudra/ Brahmin researcher especially if the research involves comprehending food cultures of natives.

Acknowledging of insider or outsider location of researcher with self reflexivity is also a political process for researchers in India. Identity of self as an Indian may be a most secular and safe route of acknowledging self for glossing over the identities of caste and religion, personal socialisation, belief systems and their influence on one's interpretation and analysis. The problematic of self in ethnography of caste society lies in the cultural politics of inclusion and exclusion in caste society. Acknowledging self and the insider status *critically* therefore becomes a necessary exercise for the ethnographers to strengthen objectivity.

This research is also part of my passion against caste violence and exclusion. I come from Mahar caste, also called Holeya in northern Karnataka. Facing instances of untouchability and also being exposed to varied means of challenging untouchability had turned me into an assertive Dalit by the time I turned eighteen. From being someone who would hide caste in my schooldays to someone who would assert (and not be ashamed of) in college. I would go all out to make friends with Dalits but was slightly cautious while dealing with non-Dalits; I would particularly look for those who would openly discuss caste and not humiliate me in my absence.

My personal experiences with caste and untouchability and poverty have helped me in understanding the field context better. Further the rural context of Beed was not totally alien to me, both in terms of rural livelihoods and general topography. My

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[38] See Shukra (1994) for reconfiguring of caste biases even amongst educated British citizens of Indian origin.

native village in northern Karnataka (bordering Maharashtra) in Belgaum district has similarities to other drought prone villages of Beed with rain fed agriculture dominating the rural economy. I have had my close relatives including my maternal grandfather work as migrant sugarcane workers; I have had very brief stints of working as a daily wage labourer (unlike one of my elder brothers who bore most of it) but have been a landowning farmer fulltime for three years between 1993 to 1996 and later part-time as I interspersed farming with my undergraduate studies. During fieldwork it was therefore easy to relate with Dalits – both men and women who worked as sugarcane migrant workers, some of them had laboured in Karnataka and had therefore visited Athani (the Taluka I come from where the area under sugarcane is high in the villages on the banks of Krishna River). It was also not difficult for me to relate my passion for challenging caste and untouchability with those of the activists of MHA and BSP, mostly because of their (and my) Ambedkarite leanings.

There was also competition along caste lines within activists despite their Ambedkarite leanings. Some Mang activists who would despise Mahar presence or higher clout within MHA would openly share it with me and so would Mahar workers of MHA share their discomfort with some Mang activists. I would try to play neutral and would consciously try to be someone who does not merely take a position as a Mahar. I also developed genuine friendships with activists across castes. As time progressed I was also part of the humour that surrounded caste within the activists.

> I went to the quadrangle (at RDC) where two Mang workers of MHA, Tatya and Chandrakant sat reading newspaper. Tatya saw me approaching the quadrangle and greeted *Jai Bhim*[39] *sir*. Just to humour I replied, *Jai Matang*[40]. Tatya responded, *Jai Matang tar jai Mang* (if you say Jai Mang I will too). As I pulled a chair to join them, Chandrakant asked Tatya in *farashi*,[41] if I was

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[39] Jai Bhim means victory to Ambedkar and followers of Ambedkar greet each other with Jai Bhim instead of the Hindu ways of greeting like *ram ram.*

[40] Jai Matang (Victory to Matang) refers to a form of greeting that was coined by a particularistic Mang formation, Jai Matang is generally criticised by Mangs of MHA who prefer Jai Bhim.

[41] I was told by various activists that Farashi was a language used by old criminal tribes including Mangs to communicate within themselves. Though I did not learn much of this language, I had picked

Ambuj. Tatya said yes. I too sensed what he was asking and added, 'yes.. *Ambuj*'. There was some excitement about me being *Ambuj* in Chandrakant. He further asked Tatya where I was from. He is from far away, said Tatya.. Karnataka, I added. And we all got back to reading newspaper. After a while I realised that I should clarify with Chandrakant that I was not *Ambuj* and I told Chandrakant that I was a Mahar. There was slight disappointment on his face. It was Tatya's turn now to question my so called anti-caste credentials and he asked; are you a Mahar or a Buddhist? I told Tatya smilingly that if he called himself *Ambuj*, I would become a Mahar. Tatya then told Chandrakant that I was a very nice person and that he would not find any qualities (of mahars) in me. He is a human being, he added. Chandrakant responded to this by saying that caste does not matter what matters is *vichar* (thought/ideology) [Fieldnotes 7/6/09].

The Mahar dominance of the Dalit movements in Maharashtra is well researched and documented. However, the resistance and agency of Mangs and other ex-untouchable castes both within and outside Dalit movement still have to be studied. Since the activists at MHA were Ambedkarites, a sense of Dalit bonding had forged between us. Though my shared experiences of untouchability would have brought me closer to the Mang activists, an acknowledgement of my difference and my appreciation of Mang assertion in principle also helped me gain greater trust. While the activists understood the category of Dalit well due to their Ambedkarite orientations, I would problematise the category of Dalit both for clarifying my positionality and to understand the reflexivity of the Dalit idiom. The activists in turn shared their ideas of caste and criticism of other castes.

In multi-sited ethnography I changed my identities according to the context and was what Marcus (1995) calls a 'circumstantial activist'. My participation in both MHA and BSP varied from being a photographer, giving career advice to those interested in higher studies, and a sounding board for the activists who shared personal and political problems and criticism of the movement they were part of. In MHA I was at

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up three key words of my interest, Ambuj (meant Mang), Bhukar (meant Mahar) and Dandyal (meant Maratha).

times helping as translator for foreign visitors, editing reports, making power-point presentations and participating in planning some meetings. In BSP I was seen as researcher who was clearly supportive of its politics. I spent time with the activists, listening and participating in various informal conversations. Though I had planned to be a non participant observer in formal meetings, I was also asked to address the Kanshiram Jayanti gathering in Beed as chief guest by the BAMCEF (affiliated to BSP) workers and my name was printed on the pamphlets. Similarly on some occasions I had to be on stage in the gatherings of MHA and BSP where I was felicitated or welcomed with flowers or was asked to garland pictures of *mahapursush*. While my Dalit identity had benefits it did not make me a natural insider and I travelled through multiple identities during fieldwork.

Throughout my fieldwork with activists and participants I rarely felt like an outsider. But there were moments of unease. For instance those Dalits who did not know me would at times poke fun at me, especially my long hair which seemed like that of a Potraj[42] to them. Others checked my commitment, some would ask me if I was planning to return from UK after my PhD, and others enquired how I would contribute to the movement after the PhD. Some of the BSP workers in Majalgaon suspected me of being a spy of NCP. However the activists I knew or the activists who knew me were always there to help and to explain the purpose (and importance) of my being there.[43] In turn I used the kindness of the activists in making new friends and finding varied respondents. Some of my respondents were themselves well read and appreciated the value of my research. They would suggest readings and also test my knowledge. With the activists in Beed my Dalit identity and commitment to Dalit issues coupled with the fact that I was pursuing PhD abroad and was assistant professor at TISS were of help. Dalit workers from various castes told me that *mala*

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[42]In Maharashtra, 'Mariaai or Laxmi aai are symbolic of the virgin *gramdevata* [village goddesses] and the potraj belonging to Mahar or Mang caste is the official worshipper. The potraj wears feminine attire (a long skirt) *haldi-kumkuk*, green bangles and leaves his long hair loose on the back' (Rege 1995:231). The practice of potraj are referred to as potrajki and are most criticised by the activist in public discourses for being a practice which turns a masculine Mang man into helpless feminine individual who has to beg for his living.

[43] In both BSP and MHA, there were participants and activists who knew me or about me without me personally talking to them. This was because of me hanging out with the leaders at times, or being on the stage. In some of the MHA programs Awad would call me on the stage to do my *satkar* (felicitation) to motivate Dalit participants to pursue education.

tumcha abhiman vatato (I am proud of you). This also translated into Dalits sharing their humiliations and (manipulative) strategies of protest.

While interacting and interviewing with non-Dalits my identity of a researcher doing PhD abroad or that of faculty at TISS worked best in my favour and helped in diluting my Dalit identity. Bhonjal a Brahmin of BSP would appreciate me for the education I had accessed and would like to invite me for drinks and discussion and he would regularly talk to me in English and Hindi instead of Marathi.

The workers of BSP and MHA would also was ask about my personal life and I did not hesitate in sharing whatever people were interested to know. Though most activists knew that I was a Dalit, not all were sure of my caste. Kailash, a BSP worker from Mahar caste who had become a close friend assumed that I was a Chambar because of my surname. I would not always reveal my caste and would continue conversations in *'aapla'* (our people) mode. This would translate into 'particular' caste (like Mang, Mahar and Chambar) or Dalit based on the content and context of the conversations. I had become friends with some Mang activists of MHA who would vehemently criticise Mahars despite knowing that I was one. Awad once jokingly asked me how I as a well educated person could get along so well with Tatya who was not even 10th pass and was radically Mang centered (anti Mahar).

Some activists visited my home while they were visiting Mumbai and some stayed back for a night halt. Informal discussions and the time spent with some activist friends have been of much more value at times than interviews which I always noted down in Fieldnotes. I also did not interview some people because I did not want to record something that I was listening to and was part of on a daily basis. I continue to have this bonding with some of the activists who I am in touch with on phone as frequently as I am with my family members.

I was mostly addressed as 'sir' in both the BSP and MHA which was due to my teaching position at TISS. The activists were very supportive and went out of their way to make me part of the movement processes, their personal lives and in helping me get access to information and information sources I was looking for. I was aware that the support and respect of activists came with a lot of responsibility. I was

someone who persistently asked questions to activists and participants but I also knew when to withdraw from such persuasive behaviour.

> When Radhabai, MHA worker reached the Beed office from Majalgaon for a night halt to participate in the next day's meeting at Beed, she was looking visibly tired and I offered to make a cup of tea for her. While the tea was not made with the intent of getting any 'data' we ended up discussing political strategies that she adopts to counter Maratha dominance at the village level (Fieldnotes: 21/1/09).

Activists and participants of movements did not always perceive me as a researcher. They also saw me as a friend and provided me insights into their lives and political strategies. Despite all my commitment and interest in Dalit assertion and politics, it remained a fact that I was there also for the selfish purpose of research but I also let Dalit participants and activists make use of my presence, below is an instance.

> Bhagwan got down of the jeep (at Adas) and after 5 minutes came with a Maratha man, who he introduced to me as the chairman of the credit cooperative society and told him pointing towards me, 'this sir has come from England, he can speak 12 languages Marathi as well. He is here to study atrocity that happened on me, there are two other women from Germany along with him they have gone to other villages [...] I said *Namaskar* and asked the chairman his name, since my scratch book was open, I thought of noting it down. The man told me his name, but added; 'don't write it, I have nothing to do with that case'. I stopped penning down. Bhagwan then took the man and returned alone after sometime into his seat while getting in he winked at me and I smiled. [..] He later told me that man is a Deshmukh [landlord Maratha], earns at least 55-60 000 per month from money lending. [..] All these are big land lords [Sahukars] here. (Fieldnotes 30/9/08)

Bhagwan trusted that I would not question his minor manipulation of my identity to size up to a powerful Deshmukh Maratha. Due to the friendship and trust that I had gained of the activists I was always cautious not to seem obsessed with my research all the time. When there was an internal conflict between workers of BSP during

elections and a BAMCEF worker (who I did not know) from Nanded had come to intervene, I attended the open meeting that went on till late at night of the workers and decided to stay away from the closed-door meeting that followed where the committed cadre were to meet. I did not want to be a source of distraction in the meeting of 'familiars' in this stressed moment despite having access to most of the committed cadre.

Emotions in Dalit movements

One of the volunteers of BSP, who laboured in a hotel on a daily wage of Rupees 120 in Beed city, had lied to his reluctant employer that his pregnant wife was supposed to deliver so that he could volunteer in erecting a huge tent for the BSP rally. He explained this bizarre behaviour of lying for losing wage to volunteer for a political meeting where he was everything but visible, 'the waves of emotions (*bhavana, sahanubhuti*) are like this… like they say love is blind, it is like that' (September 22, 08). Movements are a passionate affair (Goodwin et al. 2001), something that I kept stumbling into during my fieldwork. These emotions translated into tears, anger and the continued practice of hope on various occasions.

Rajbhoj (78) while being interviewed could not control his tears when he recalled how his illiterate and widowed mother had fainted with a grass stack on her head on hearing of Ambedkar's death in 1956. Awad's eyes had turned misty in Shindi when the parents of the humiliated Dalit girls narrated how their daughters were beaten up by Maratha men and women (Fieldnotes: 27/1/09) Emotions also turned into anger as MHA worker Alka (a Mang) saw one of the Mahar victim girls in an unconscious state. After wiping her tears, Alka hurled rusty abuses against the Maratha women who had participated in beating the Dalit girls (Fieldnotes: 20/1/09). Similarly when the chief doctor at the hospital in Kej gave technical answers to justify his subordinate's negligence in treating the badly injured Dalit girl, Dalit activists of various groups resorted to stone pelting smashing the glass of hospital windows and vehicles. Though I did not participate in stone pelting at the hospital I was as passionately involved as the activists in questioning the doctor as to why a girl so seriously injured was not hospitalised.

One of the most adventurous and disturbing days during my fieldwork was on 26th January 2009 when I was picked up twice by the police. In the first case they had mistaken me for one of the BSP workers who had blocked the district guardian minister's car and had staged a self immolation. The police inspector who pushed me inside the police jeep particularly asked the constable to check my camera. After getting into the jeep I immediately deleted all the pictures on my camera so that nothing on it could be used as evidence against the activists. A call from the women's wing leader of MHA ensured my immediate release from the police station as this activist warned the police that they would get into trouble if they mistreated me. I returned to join the women activists of MHA who were planning to corner the minister again and attack him with bangles as a sign of shame. I was warned by the women activists to stay at a safe distance this time but after the women activists had done their job, the police to me seemed to be turning violent I rushed closer again to join in sloganeering and also clicked some pictures of the police pushing the workers. After the activists were arrested I was picked up again by two constables who snatched my camera and later my mobile when I tried to make a call. This was a scary experience as these constables took me on the motorbike with them to SP office and not to the police station where other activists were. The next time too the police were concerned about my camera as they felt it may contain images of Dalit activists attacking the minister. While the activists were protesting against the case of violence against Dalit girls in Shindi village, I was most disturbed when the news of more violence against Dalits in some other villages flowed on the same day.

Following this incident some BSP workers who were earlier apprehensive of my commitment and identity became friendlier. I on the other hand reduced the use of camera and my expected role of photographer after being picked up by the police. I also learnt to say no to activist persuasions and avoided rushing everywhere with them. Dalit activists also came across as intellectuals who analysed the macro and micro political situations on a daily basis. A Dalit activist who was neither part of MHA or BSP asked me why I was using the word Dalit and what I meant by Dalit. When I told him that I was referring to Scheduled Caste and used the word Dalit as it was used by most Dalit organisations, he asked me to think differently and not to follow the tide (Fieldnotes: 11/4/09). He was of the view that the word Scheduled

Caste was constitutional and should be used instead of Dalit or they should be called 'nationalist' Indians. I have used the word Dalit interchangeably with other words like Scheduled Castes, Mang, Mahar and Bauddha. The word Dalit dominates in my thesis to retain the radicalism it entails and also because it was used widely in both the movements I studied.

I did not always get carried away with the activist persuasions. I would keep my ethnographic eyes open, not looking just for linear developments but for events, actions and process that contradicted my evolving analysis and thinking. Writing Fieldnotes and taking regular breaks from fieldwork, listening to interviews helped me to think and rethink the shortcomings of my data and also to use my emotions productively. It also helped me de-stress from the some of the above mentioned field situations.

Analysis and Ethical issues

This study generated a large amount of data derived from participant observation, interviews, and recorded speeches. Data from semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were selectively transcribed after listening to the recordings and reading field notes. Most interviews were done in Marathi except a few which were a mix of English and Hindi. I did the transcribing and translating on my own due to my fluency in all the languages (Marathi, Hindi and English) that respondents used in the interviews. This helped in including my field observations and notes in the translation process. I transcribed data directly into English to save time whereas regional words and sentences are selectively used to present the findings.

The analysis however began in the pre-fieldwork phase and continued till writing (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 174). Data analysis was an ongoing process both in the field and later - in the field it contributed in enriching the data and post data collection enabled comprehending the theory, field linkages and to reinforce or to reconstruct them (Lichterman 2002).

Data was initially organised according to movements and research methods within movements, followed by categorising and coding data according to themes

particularly the activities and events that the movements were involved in. Some key themes like violence, activism around *gaairan* and use of caste repertoires emerged out of fieldnotes,

Themes and concepts were thus based on inter-case and across case analysis for movements and individuals. The evolving themes/concepts were abstracted and categorized across individuals (respondents), and movements. Data thus included evolving new codes and categorization based on data reading and field experiences/observations. Specific efforts were towards answering the research questions based on the emerging themes. The abstraction process helped in formation of concepts to evolve an understanding of the processes of Dalit movements. While data reduction was important, it is not valuable in all research circumstances (Flyvbjerg 2006 : 237-241; Schwandt 1996). I have decided between abstraction of data and detailed case presentation based on the nature of content in the cases/interviews and field experiences. Some cases are presented in detail to avoid losing the thickness and self explanatory material of such cases. However data from field notes, focus groups, and documentary sources have been largely put through reduction and abstraction.

Some ethical considerations

As Mosse (2006a) argues, the very act of ethnographic writing is an anti-social act. Some Dalits asked me not to write about internal Dalit conflicts and not all Dalit activists and respondents were convinced that this research would aid Dalit movements. One of the elder workers of BAMCEF asked me not to write all that I was seeing and listening to as the opponents (Congress-Gandhian and BJP-Hindutva) would use this information to tame 'our' movement (Fieldnotes: 28/6/09).

Arriving at decisions of what should be mentioned and not in this research has been a difficult one as Dalits despite their assertiveness are vulnerable. Dalit movements/ activists/participants are at the risk of state violence and violence from the dominant castes. I experience this fear at close quarters when I was picked up by the police for merely an hour and also when the husband of one of my female respondents whom I interviewed in March was murdered in caste violence by Marathas in June.

To reduce risk to individuals and movements from any third party, I have anonymised names of activists and participants who gave me information that could cause them harm. These include names of villages and people who are cultivating *gaairan*, and their criticism of dominant castes. I have also not mentioned names of government employees who worked for BAMCEF as requested by the members. Similarly, I have not included names of activists who shared criticism of their movements and leaders. I haven't included some information even in my fieldnotes as these could be used against the movements I studied. The network respondents shared valuable information which helped me contextualise and understand the movements critically. I have not included all of it in this research as it may affect relations between the movements and the networks. Anonymity is assigned to the descriptions which I think will affect individuals negatively. Such data is used only after discussion with the providers of the information and the leaders of the movement.

The outcomes of this study are designed cautiously so as to ensure that no third party misuses the research outcomes against the movements/organisation or individual research participants. I have however not compromised in offering a critical view and analysis of both the movements by triangulating data, collecting multiple perspectives and being open to both internal and external critiques of the movements. I plan to share the final outcome of the research with the research participants, particularly organisations under study, before submitting it for publishing. If the movement leaders have major disagreements with my analysis and findings I will consider anonymising the movements and study region.

Conclusion

With the increasing intersections of local and global there has also been a shift in utility and practice of anthropology. It is no more a colonial instrument of power. The possibility of ethnographic subjects contesting the anthropologist's description is more and more likely (Spencer 1989). Some Dalits too have reached a stage where they can contribute and collaborate in their own representation both in theory and practice of ethnography. One of the most important biases Dalit ethnographers may

carry due to their life experiences is of caste inequality being omnipresent. It is also a product of the upper caste anthropological groundings that make caste 'invisible'. While Dalit self narratives are important in ethnographic research, they should cross the boundaries of standpoint theory to acknowledge fractured foundationalism and refrain from constructing caste as sociologism. Only such an approach would advance exploration of the changing forms of oppression and resistance and enable us to understand the inter-linkages of gender, caste, class and the state in the localised political culture.

Like the activists I moved beyond the hopelessness of the situation in my analysis to comprehend and analyse the possibilities of civility and civil society raised by Dalit movements and Dalits through politics at margins. Doing anthropology of Dalit politics has helped me gain a top-down and bottom-up understanding of Dalit mobilisation, and the political strategies of not just Dalit socio-political formations but also individual participants. It has helped me explore the complex nature and dynamism of caste and reconstruction of hierarchy, violence and exclusion of Dalits in insidious forms, and most importantly to map the politics and processes of fragmented but vibrant Dalit contestations in the localised contexts.

This thesis provides thick description and analyses of the intersection and co-evolution of caste, state and civil society through the study of Dalit politics. Dalit mobilisation into the civil realm offers immense scope to understand the politics and perspectives of micro and macro Dalit formations, their role in Dalit politics, empowerment and democratisation of state and civil society. Besides comprehending the diversity of Dalit agency in their (g)localised contexts, I develop a nuanced understanding of civil society and political society and their intersections within the context of caste and class inequality.

Dalit Politics in the Post Panther Period

Contextualising the BSP and MHA in Marathwada

Chapter one has described the blurring of socio-cultural and political boundaries in Dalit politics of self realisation under Ambedkar. This created a mass of Dalits that was highly politicised. According to Chatterjee (2004: 24), Ambedkar died in 1956 after his conversion to Buddhism, 'only to be reborn some twenty years later as the prophet of Dalit liberation'. However, this identification of Ambedkar as prophet to follow Chatterjee's idiom amongst the Mahars of Maharashtra was a process that had set in much before Ambedkar's death.[44]

This chapter presents in brief the post-Ambedkar deepening of Dalit politics in Maharashtra and proceeds as follows; it first provides an overview of the history of Dalit politics in Maharashtra, to argue that Dalit movements have not reached an impasse as suggested by some scholars (Guru 2004; Wankhede 2008; Omvedt 2001; Deshpande 2004b; Teltumbde 2010). While in the non-party politics the movement has thickened, there has also been a recovery in the party politics since the mid-1990s with the growth of the BSP. The chapter then moves on to introduce the two critical cases of my ethnographic study that are representative of the nature of this growth that is ensuing in Dalit politics, those of the BSP and MHA. In the case of the BSP, I chart its ideological and non-party roots in an organisation of government employees (BAMCEF) before demonstrating how Kanshiram's new vision of politics made 'party' politics central to BSP and its ideology. Finally, I present the case of MHA, a movement organisation that builds on NGOs to strengthen Dalit assertion, particularly amongst Mangs.

The conclusion summarises the context of Dalit politics in Maharashtra and, in particular, highlights the marginal location of the Dalit party and non-party actors who together constitute Dalit politics of resistance. From their marginal position they

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[44] See Moon's (2001) autobiography which has detailed insights into the political and philosophical bond that lay Mahars developed with Ambedkar.

survive the politics of challenging and reforming state and civil society through innovative strategies which are discussed in the following chapters.

Post-Ambedkar Dalit politics in Maharashtra suffered from the immediate shock of losing its leader. Miller (1967) notes the sense of lack of direction within the Mahar community, especially within the Buddhist movement after his death. Ambedkar, however, continued to be a political icon of protest and all that he had touched or done became sacred for his followers, who even regarded the constitution of India as a sacred document because it was 'written' by him. Various protest groups and local associations that merged political and cultural activities rose up to pursue the task of politicising Dalits. Through interpreting and following Ambedkar in different ways, Dalit movements pursued strategies which included: criticism of Hindu religion; pursuing education; and motivating untouchables to abandon Hinduism (through conversions to Buddhism), stigmatised occupations (village/caste economy) and corrupt politics (Congress).

These movements thus grew too strong to be stalled by the loss of its leader and, though factionalized in Maharashtra, Dalit politics continues to spread at the grassroots in the post-Ambedkar phase. I categorise this growth process into three broad phases: first, the expansion and splintering of the Republican Party of India (RPI) in the period until the early 1970s; second the growth and decline of the Dalit Panthers (DP) until mid-80s; and finally the post-DP phase. In this chapter, I briefly provide an overview of the first two phases and then move on to discuss in detail the third phase which has seen a growth of diverse localised collectives and also some major political parties in Dalit politics. It is in this phase that I situate the formation and growth of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan (MHA) in Marathwada.

Have Dalit Movements in Maharashtra reached an Impasse?
Dalit movements in Maharashtra attracted attention of various scholars due to large scale politicisation of Mahars who converted to Buddhism following Ambedkar's call. The growth of RPI and its fragmentation was followed with the rise of the DPs.

The fragmentation of the DPs and the simultaneous rise of Hindutva politics made scholars sceptical about the future and potentials of Dalit movements and pointed to an impasse that Dalit movements had reached. Scholars following an instrumentalist analysis tend to deploy dichotomies like party politics against socio-cultural mobilisation (Wankhede 2008), *jati* politics against anti-caste politics (Omvedt 2001), NGOs against Dalit politics (Teltumbde 2010), globalisation against Dalits (Guru 2004) and the symbolic against the material (Deshpande 2004b). These studies suggest an impasse that Dalit movements have reached in Maharashtra in the post-Panther period. The impasse is critically explored both in the contours of ideology and praxis in Dalit movements of Maharashtra. For example, Gokhale (1986) argues that the ideological change of conversions amongst Mahars instead of collectivising the Dalits, separated the Mahars from other Dalit castes. Gupta's (1979) class lens analyses the Mahar assertion for symbolic space in the Namantar movement as a matter of Mahar 'class' dominance. Commenting on the fragmented nature of Dalit politics and its limited negotiating power, Palshikar (2007b) emphasises the competition between Mahars and non-Mahars that acts as a deterrent to effective Dalit politics. For him the fragmentation of Dalit politics has resulted in the absorption of Dalit politics into bourgeois politics. The affinity of Dalit politics to electoral politics is argued to have made the category of Dalit (both identity and ideology) amenable to the pressures of numbers and alliances, Deshpande (2004b) argues that Dalit movements form conservative alliances and remain concerned only with symbolic issues which throws them into crisis. The emphasis on 'party' politics and backtracking from the 'socio-cultural' issues, leads to a politics of compromise and not the annihilation of caste. Wankhede (2008: 57), thus, maintains, 'Post-Ambedkar Dalit movements by not giving the needed importance to the socio-political and cultural notions of Buddhism have developed a strategy that is limited to the issues of political democracy'. In current neo-liberal times Dalit politics is viewed as antithetical to radical politics, and NGOs - as means of de-politicisation - offer soft resistance to the states' neo-liberal agenda (Gopal Guru and Chakravarty 2005). Omvedt (2001) emphasises the failure of the Dalit movements in their consolidation of *jati* politics thus failing to evolve an alternative agenda of development.

Most of the above analysis is a commentary on macro social movements with a mass Dalit base and not on micro Dalit formations, outcomes and daily working of movements. They remain insufficiently attuned to grassroots initiatives and fail to capture both the dialectic relationship between grassroots movements and macro political movements within the broader context and the dynamic nature of caste inequality. Therefore, these analyses render parts of the complex processes and daily workings of Dalit movements invisible. Contrary to these macro-level analyses, I argue that Dalit politics has grown both in the arenas of party politics and in non-party spaces. The post-Panther phase of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra is characterized by growth of diverse localised collectives, movements and organisations that coordinate and associate with Dalit and non-Dalit political parties and carry out daily struggles for survival with dignity. These movements are varied in nature, protesting socio-political and economic issues that affect the Dalits on a daily basis. Below I detail the process of this growth that has occurred in Dalit politics and ideologies, in spite of factionalism.

A History of post-Ambedkar Dalit activism: From the factionalism of RPI to the radicalism of DP

The scholars cited above are right in noting the fragmentation that Dalit movements faced, however the fragments have continued to work in unity in non-party political fields. The rise of factions has not translated into these organisations ceasing to raise Dalit issues and efforts of uniting the factions have been continuous.

Formation and splits in the RPI

Toward the end of his life, Ambedkar initiated two political processes; conversions to Buddhism and the formation of the Republican Party. Omvedt (2001) calls these as a spiritual force and a political platform respectively. The merger of the socio-cultural and the political in Dalit politics continued in the post-Ambedkar phase. The Republican Party of India (RPI) came to be an important Dalit political force dominated by Mahars in Maharashtra, and many local social organisations and

groups worked on spreading Buddhism amongst Dalits. These party and non-party processes did not exist independently, rather they grew in interaction. The political parties, however, remained fickle, due to their regular assimilation (and annihilation) in mainstream politics. The non-party movements on the other hand, continued to disperse and grow through processes like production and distribution of Dalit literature, protests, and rise of commemorative politics around the prophet-like symbol of Ambedkar.

The post-Ambedkar period in Maharashtra also included the rise of linguistic nationalism and mobilisation of multiple political forces under the *Samyukta Maharashtra* (United Maharashtra) Movement, which consolidated the political boundaries of Maharashtra on a linguistic basis. The RPI also played a part in this. After the formation of Maharashtra state on a linguistic basis, the RPI was relocated to the margins of Maharashtra politics as language became an ideology and collective identity, rendering 'caste' marginal within the macro politics of Maharashtra. Large masses of Dalits continued to remain socially, economically and politically marginalised and the newly independent nation-state followed by the linguistically defined regional state offered little hope to them. The marginalisation of caste in the macro politics of Maharashtra was coupled with political and economic consolidation by dominant Marathas. Though fractured, they tilted the new political economy in their favour: they dominated state politics, controlled the state aided education sector and controlled the rural cooperative economy (credit societies and sugar industries), making the most of the new agrarian and industrial policies (Rosenthal 1974; Dahiwale 1995). They, thus, consolidated their dominance throughout Maharashtra and turned Maharashtra into what Vora (2009) has called the Maratha *Rashtra* (nation).

The idea of RPI was conceived in 1956 by Ambedkar, it became formally organised in October 1957 after his death. Shortly after its formation, the RPI was faced with the problem of factions: the first split came about in 1958 (led by BC Kamble and Dadasaheb Rupwate) alleging the domination of Communists in Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti; the second split came about in 1967 as Y B Chavan, the veteran

Maratha leader wooed RPI leaders into Congress. The anti-Congress ideology that Ambedkar had carved out through his critique of Gandhi and Gandhian nationalism could not survive for long as factions of the RPI continued to be co-opted by Congress. Dadasaheb Gaikwad, a key leader of the RPI, shifted to extra-parliamentary methods and massive protests demanding land for the landless were held between 1953 to 1966 in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh under the RPI he led (Zelliot 1996; Omvedt 2001).

The Rise and fall of the Dalit Panthers

The failure of RPI and its compromising politics paved the way for non-party Dalit assertion. The 1970s thus witnessed the resurgence of a Dalit assertion which was dualistic in nature, creating disturbances in political and mainstream literary circles. Disgruntled by the compromising politics of the RPI leaders, Dalit youth from the Bombay slums formed the Dalit Panthers in 1972, inspired by the Black Panther movement in the United States. This was also the time when the word Dalit gained much currency. The Panthers called themselves "Dalit", meaning downtrodden or ground down, because it was a casteless term that both acknowledged and challenged their history of caste oppression; and "Panthers" because 'they were supposed to fight for their rights like panthers, and not get suppressed by the strength and might of their oppressors'(Murugkar 1991: 64). Panthers equated Congress rule with Hindu feudalism and attacked the RPI for its corrupt politics. Power, wealth, landlords and capitalists and moneylenders were seen as enemies of Dalits. The DPs distinguished themselves by openly advocating violence for violence, raising class issues and bringing in revolutionary Dalit literature that attacked Brahmanic (Hindu) cultural hegemony, which contributed to consolidating Dalit identity further. [45] The DPs made a formidable contribution to raising revolutionary consciousness amongst the Dalits, however, infighting and splintering weakened it considerably. The DP movement carried in it the tension between Buddhist (peace) and Socialist (violence)

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[45] See Punalekar (2001) on Dalit literature and identity formation; Murgurkar (1991) for a comprehensive study of rise and fall of Dalit Panthers; Gokhale (1979) on the radical politics of Dalit Panthers and Contursi (1993) for her empirical study of Bharatiya Dalit Panther (a faction of the divided Panthers with Buddhist leaning).

as approaches to emancipatory politics, which led to a split in 1974 (Contursi 1993). The DPs were further factionalised by personality clashes and competition within the leadership. Omvedt (2001) suggests that although the DPs pursued radical politics, they failed to envisage a socio-economic programme for the new society and Murgurkar (1991) attributes this to the failed leadership of the DP. Nevertheless, even the factionalised DP remained a formidable power against the Shiv Sena during the riots of 1978 that followed the announcement of Marathwada University being renamed after Ambedkar (Contursi, 1993). After the split of 1974, some Panthers united and continued the DP movement under the leadership of Prof. Arun Kamble, Ramdas Athawale and Gangadhar Gade in Maharashtra (Paswan 2002: 326).

While the DPs criticised the docility and compromising politics of the RPI leaders and initially boycotted elections, they found it difficult to stay aloof from party politics. Some later leaders like Ramdas Athawale were accommodated in Congress through an alliance with factions of RPI. DP's distrust in electoral politics could not take root amongst all its leaders, however their non-party, radical mobilisation partially institutionalized the collective performance of anger/violence by Dalits as a necessary Dalit response to caste atrocities and other stigmatised exclusions of Dalits. The reliance on electoral politics continued to form a central constituent of Dalit politics for most Dalit formations, including within the DP. The intersection of non-party political formations and party-political formations has remained at the core of Dalit politics. This is at the core of the ambiguous relationship of Dalit politics with the state, a muddled relationship where there is both trust (in the Constitution) and distrust (because of the upper caste dominance in the state).

In the realm of party politics there were regular efforts to unite the RPI factions. In 1989, students went on a fast until death demanding unity of the republican parties that forced the leaders to come together for a while (Morkhandikar 1990). However, these efforts had limited success and the splintering of RPI continued. For instance in 1999, the election commission was concerned over which faction was to be allotted the RPI election symbol of the rising sun (Indian Express: July 31, 1999) and currently the RPI has more than ten factions. Some leaders of RPI factions like

Ramdas Athavale who heads RPI (Athawale) are accommodated on and off in the Congress/NCP through paternalistic alliances. Another important political party among the RPI factions is Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh (BBM) led by Prakash Ambedkar (grandson of Dr. Ambedkar), which has a strong presence in Vidarbha, particularly Akola district. Prakash Ambedkar has striven to create broad-based support for BBM by moving beyond Dalits (Gavaskar 1994). Workers of BBM are also part of Boudha Mahasangh, a Buddhist organisation that works on propagating Buddhism amongst Dalits.

While the factionalism within RPI may present a sorry picture of Dalit party politics in terms of performance in elections, they have retained their cultural roots and continue the politics of commemoration and propagation of Buddhism. The arrival of BSP in Maharashtra has seen a return to assertive Dalit parties in the arena of party politics. The BSP has a dominant presence of Mahars most of whom have moved to the BSP from the factions of RPI, however, the BSP also has a good presence of non-Mahar Dalits in the party organisation. The growth of the BSP hints at the possibility of the consolidation of Dalits as a political community through the consolidation and politicisation of non-Mahar Dalit castes, particularly the Mangs and Chambars. While Ambedkar's being a Mahar helped attract Mahars to Ambedkarite ideology, it had also affected Ambedkar's efforts of enrolling non-Mahar untouchables in Dalit politics, a trend that continues till date.

Dalit politics beyond Mahars: Mang and Chambar consolidation

The frontiers of Dalit politics also moved beyond Mahar dominance in the 1980s with independent mobilisation and politicisation amongst the Mangs, the second most numerical Scheduled Caste in Maharashtra after the Mahars. Key amongst the non-party formations was Akhil Bhartiya Matang Sangh (All India Matang Organiation, ABMS hereon) under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb[46] Ghopale who organised the Mangs. Ghopale managed to establish a separate political identity for

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[46] Ghopale does not hold a doctorate or medicine degree. With the growth of his political clout amongst the Mangs, 'Dr' and 'Babasaheb' were eventually added to his name making him the 'Babasaheb' of Mangs.

Mangs as Matangs (a sanskritised term) through grassroots mobilisation against traditional practices like *potraj* and economic deprivation. Following a 26 day fast in Mumbai which he undertook, a separate development corporation for Mangs was approved by the government and the Lokshahir Annabhau Sathe Development Corporation (LASDC) was established in 1985. Another important demand, ABMS mobilised for was the separate allotment of 8 per cent separate reservations for Mangs within the Scheduled Caste quota. This demand received some attention from the state government in 2003 which formed the Lahuji Salave[47] Commission to study the socio-economic status of Mangs in Maharashtra. Ghopale was also accommodated within the state apparatus by making him the chairman of LASDC. Various other Mang organisations like the Dalit Maha Sangh (Dalit Great Organisation, led by Machindra Sakte, a lecturer), Bahujan Rayat Parishad (Bahujan and Peasant Conference, formed by Dhobale, a NCP political leader) and Lahuji Sena (Lahuji's Army, visible in the Mumbai region led by Reddy) and political parties like the Democratic Party of India and Bahujan Majoor Paksha (Bajujan Labour Party) that advocate equality for Mangs, have emerged over time. Since the early 1990s, one particular organisation in Marathwada, Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan, has emerged as an important Mang socio-political organisation.

While some mobilisation amongst Mang groups is a product of anti-Mahar sentiments, not all pursue such an agenda. The term Dalit is not totally rejected and Ambedkarism is pursued as a political ideology by some of these groups, alongside the politicisation and consolidation of Mang identity. For example, Machindra Sakte, of the Dalit Maha Sang, and Sukumar Kamble of Democratic Party of India (DPI) are known for their critique of Hindutva mobilisation, and some exceptional Mang leaders who have also converted to Buddhism.

While Mangs are part of Dalit politics despite Mahar domination, the Chambars largely remained outside the purview of Dalit politics. In Maharashtra, the

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[47] Lahuji Buwa Vastad was a Mang who ran a gymnasium in Pune in the mid-nineteenth century. He imparted physical training to revolutionaries like Phule and Vasudev Balwant Phadke. Lahuji Buwa assisted Phule in his attempts to gather untouchable children and make them attend school (Paik 2007: 184)

comparatively pure and higher status of Chambars, compared to Mahars and Mangs, was made use of by Shiv Sena who portrayed itself as the protector of 'non-Dalit' Scheduled Castes (Morkhandikar 1990), to accommodate Dalits who were Hindus and not Ambedkarites or Buddhists. Vicziany (2002) observes that the Shiv Sena's strategic response to the BSP threat was, 'to foster the establishment of the Maharashtrian Charmarkar Sangh.' Maharashtra Charamkar Sangh (MCS), a social organisation, was formed under the leadership of Babanrao Gholap, a Chambar political leader of Shiv Sena. Within Chambars, there are other non-political organisations that resist the strong influence of Shiv Sena and the BJP like Guru Ravidas Samata Parishad (Guru Ravidas Equality Conference) and Guru Ravidas Satyashodhak Sanghatan (Guru Ravidas Satyashodhak Organisation) in Marathwada, which mobilise opinion in favour of Dalit identity and the BSP.

Those Dalit non-party socio-political organisations that have grown in political clout and performance are also necessary sites of accommodative aggregation for mainstream political parties like the Congress/Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)/Shiv Sena (SS). Non-party political organisations are also formed by Dalit leaders of mainstream political parties to serve the interest of these parties. MCS discussed above was promoted by SS to capitalize on the differences between Mahars and Chambars, similarly Bahujan Rayat Parishad (Bahujan Peasant Conference) a Mang organisation, dominated by its leaders, is active mostly during elections to mobilise Mang support for NCP.

The paradox of political cooptation, thriving Dalit politics and political violence

Dalit movements, though fractured, continue to play a vital role in the democratic politics and democratisation processes of Maharashtra. While some of the Dalit political parties and leaders were co-opted within the non-Dalit mainstream parties, Dalit non-party politics did not succumb to the failure in party politics. The politicisation of Dalits is a process that has continued in the post-Panther period. 'Ambedkar' entered villages, small towns and slums in multiple symbolic forms as a saviour, prophet, symbol of protest, constitution and Buddhism that contested the

hierarchic boundaries of caste in public spaces. Various non-party political organisations worked on spreading Ambedkarite politics and ideology beyond Dalits. For instance some factions of BAMCEF and others like Boudha Mahasangh continue to form vibrant non-party organisations in Dalit politics, holding mass awareness meetings and producing movement literature and a culture of volunteerism in Dalit politics. In 2007, around one lakh Dalits and other lower tribes converted to Buddhism to mark 50 years of Ambedkar's conversions to Buddhism (Bavadam 2007).

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism and the Panther radicalism gave rise to various localized groups of educated youth who mobilised to demarcate the Dalit-Buddhist boundaries as against those of Hindus. The rise of Dalit politics in Maharashtra despite its factionalism, is also a function of the intertwining of culture and politics in Ambedkar's schema where conversions to Buddhism and party politics were both important in turning politics of resistance into a culture. Dalit politics thus has deepened over the years also due to pressures from below, where Dalits become Ambedkarised by reading Ambedkar and listening about Ambedkar in rallies organised by numerous organisations.

Dalit cultural-political assertion and simultaneous consolidation of commemorative political symbolism in Dalit politics also resulted in increased political violence against Dalits (Rao, 2009). The interlinked economic, socio-political and religious landscapes in Maharashtra, particularly Marathwada, sustain the dominance of Marathas and have been a site for the regular and sustained conflicts where the dominant castes and the Dalits from their marginalised locations engage in manoeuvring and violence. Dalits too participate in performing violence, or what Jaoul (2008) terms as 'righteous anger'. Violence against Dalits co-exists with Dalit assertions. Maharashtra has seen a steep rise in cases of caste violence against Dalits and also the registration of such cases under pressure from Dalit movements. The number of cases registered under SC, ST (Prevention of Atrocities Act) have increased from 689 in 2004, to 844 in 2005 and 1,173 in 2008 (Sonawane 2010). The politicisation of Dalits and political and ritual violence against Dalits are thus

parallel processes.

Like the non-party arena, Dalit resistance in party politics continues in the presence of assertive organisations that criticise dominant mainstream political parties and the state. BSP and BBM have more particularly sustained the critique of compromises that Dalit leaders make in party politics.

Post-Panther Dalit politics is thus marked by mobilisation in socio-cultural and electoral fields and their intersections. BSP and MHA are two critical cases that best represent the fractured geographies of Dalit politics in post DP phase because of their varied oganisational forms, their main constituent castes, strategies of mobilisation and possible empowering impact on Dalits. BSP represents the homogenising current within Dalit movements which tries to include non-Dalits. This attempt to 'go beyond' the identity of Dalits as an oppressed category is an effort to establish the identity of 'Bahujan'. The political strategies of BSP revolve around the belief that they can bring about change from above through securing political power. In the context of Dalit movements in Maharashtra that are largely dominated by Mahars. MHA represents an interesting case of grassroots Dalit politics with an NGO face and global civil society intersections, largely representing Dalit interests with a focus on Mangs. MHA is a Dalit Movement that includes NGOs and a critical site for studying intersections of the local and the global in the civil society arena. In the following section I will present the rise of BSP in Maharashtra and its meanings in Marathwada through ethnographic material. I will then turn to describing the formation and growth of MHA and the vernacularisation of NGOs in MHA's politics.

BSP in Maharashtra

The BSP's growth in Maharashtra, despite the presence of various Dalit parties, is interesting to note as it marks a departure from the impasse that Dalit party politics had reached. The BSP's performance in Maharashtra cannot be compared to Uttar Pradesh where it came to power with full majority within 23 years of its formation. The socio-political context in Maharashtra is different from UP primarily in the

numerical marginality of Dalits. While in UP Dalits constitute around 21 per cent of the total population, in Maharashtra the average population of Dalits stands at 10.2 per cent. It is not surprising, therefore, that BSP has not won a single seat in Maharashtra either in the Lok Sabha or in the Vidhan Sabha since its formation. BSP has however grown as a major Dalit political party in Maharashtra over the years, marginalising the factions of the RPI (Jha 2006).

BSP's vote percentage in Maharashtra in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Elections[48]

	1990	1991	1995	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009
Vidhan Sabha	.98		1.49			.29	4.00	2.35
Lok Sabha		.48		.29	.75	.32	3.05	4.83

While other Dalit parties have declined, the BSP has managed to emerge as the single largest Dalit political party in terms of vote percentage in Maharashtra (Jha 2006). In the 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha elections, besides emerging third in various constituencies, the BSP spoiled the chances of various BJP and Congress candidates in Vidarbha and Marathwada (Sainath 2004; Gaikwad 2009). Eastern Vidarbha and Marathwada have a visible presence of BSP, where it polled 11.4 per cent and 6.1 per cent of the vote respectively in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. In 2009 the BSP polled more than 10 per cent votes in five constituencies of which three were in Vidharbha (Wardha, Nagpur and Gadchiroli) and two in Marathwada (Hingoli and Nanded). These figures tell us about the growing visible presence of BSP in Maharashtra's politics despite not forging alliances with any political party. BSP however faces competition from various other Dalit political parties, below I will elaborate upon BSP's specificities and how it claims to be different.

How BSP claims to be different?

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[48] All figures are from Statistical Reports of Lok Sabha and Assembly Elections published by Election commission of India.

The social structure of India is based on inequalities created by caste system and the movement of the Party shall be geared towards changing the social system and rebuilding it on the basis of equality and human values (Constitution of BSP: pg.5)

To eliminate caste you must take note of caste [...] Caste is a two-edged sword it cuts both ways. It cuts one way and it can also cut the other way when you use it in the opposite direction. I decided to handle caste to our benefit and deprive the Brahmins of its benefit (Kanshiram cited in, Mane 2006: 251).

The above two quotes reveal the dynamic nature of BSP's politics. While the first one casts BSP as a 'party of ideology', the second exposes BSP as spoils faction with conservative interests. Sartori (2005: 67-68) makes this distinction between parties of ideology and the spoils factions to distinguish between those who are principled ones against those that are a mechanism for settling a bargain between two or more parties. The distinction of ideology and spoils faction is blurred not only in the practice of BSP but more generally in Dalit politics in Maharashtra. The BSP's success also lies in making 'party politics' and the securing of 'political power' central to achieving its ideological goals: seeking political power has become part of achieving what is termed the 'Ambedkarite mission'. Therefore, my approach here is not to evaluate the performance of BSP in elections, but to map the growth and meaning of BSP through analysis of movement practices and narratives of participants since the formation of BAMCEF and later the DS4 (Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti [Dalit and other Exploited groups struggle committee]).

One of the major limitations of Dalit politics in the 1990s in Maharashtra, as suggested by Morkhandikar (1990), was its inability to move beyond Dalit identity. Similarly Palshikar (2007) more recently emphasised that the competition between Mahars and non-Mahars acts as a deterrent to Dalit politics. However, more than the Mahar-Mang-Chambar fragmentation it is the internal Mahar fragmentation that affects Dalit

politics in Maharashtra. Kanshiram's political strategy, since its incipient stage, had been to construct a broad political community on an ideological basis so as to unite OBCs and religious minorities (low caste converts) with Dalits at its core.

Kanshiram, though a non-Maharashtrian and non-Mahar, ventured into Ambedkarite activism in 1964 while working in a government job in Pune. Stories of Kanshiram being influenced by reading Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* and of his anger against the upper caste officers, who cancelled the leave of a Mahar colleague wanting to celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti, are common amongst the committed cadre I met. It is said that it was these important events that led to Kanshiram renouncing his job and family for the Ambedkarite *mission*. By committed cadre, I refer to those workers who have not moved out of the BSP despite its dismal performances in some elections. They referred to the BSP as a social movement and not a political party, thus designating political power as secondary to the BSP's mission. The word 'mission' is commonly used amongst the cadre, but their understanding of their mission was not always coherently articulated: most implied that the mission was achieving Buddhist India (*Bauddhamai Bharat*) or the India of Samrat Ashoka's dreams.[49] The mobilisation around this mission reached initially to cities and some small towns in Marathwada through the formation and strengthening of BAMCEF.

Dalit elite in Dalit politics: BAMCEF in the making of BSP

After working for RPI and getting disillusioned with its compromising alliances with Congress, Kanshiram formed the All India Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, OBC and Minority Employees Association in 1971. This organisation later became BAMCEF (Bahujan and Minority Community Employees Association) in 1978. BAMCEF gained a visible presence in Marathwada. It was conceived as a non-political, non-religious and non-agitation organisation that appealed to the conscience of the educated amongst the SC/ST, OBC and Minorities to join the Ambedkartie mission. BAMCEF appealed to the class amongst the Dalits that was comparatively well off, mostly based in urban areas and small towns working as government servants

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[49] See Jaoul (2007)for what he terms the Buddhist Avatar of BAMCEF in UP.

and partially alienated from their deprived untouchable identities. Kanshiram (Kanshiram 1981[2006]) in his small booklet titled "BAMCEF - An Introduction" asks this elite section of Dalits to get ready to face humiliation and losses that would come their way in pursuing the interests of the community.

In Marathwada, cadre camps (as they are referred locally) and weekly magazines, like Bahujan Nayak published from Nagpur, were important means of communicating Dalit ideology and culture in BAMCEF. Some elderly members of the BSP that I met still retained the older issues of publications like Bahujan Sanghatak (Hindi) and Bahujan Nayak (Marathi) from as early as 1980. Kanshiram started various magazines in Hindi and English and often wrote editorials for these publications. Manohar Atey (1997), who published the editorials of Kanshiram, described him as a practical philosopher. I met some older members of BAMCEF who had resigned from their government jobs to emulate Kanshiram's selflessness and was told about various others who had made similar sacrifices. Although its membership was mainly made up of government employees, BAMCEF was not conceived as an institution for the welfare of government employees. It instead aimed to mobilise resources, time and knowledge of SC/ST and OBC employees, for the liberation (*mukti*) of the exploited social groups that they belonged to (Ram 1982). BAMCEF had wings that emphasised self-help, like the BAMCEF Volunteer Force (BVF), Brotherhood Centre and Buddhist Research Centre (which was added in 1981). The Brotherhood Centre was supposed to be involved in community awareness activities and in supporting needy students amongst the Dalits. Elder members would speak about the spirit of volunteerism in BAMCEF members where even Class I officers cleaned up after meetings alongside Class IV employees and BVF members.

In the annual gatherings of BAMCEF, scholars (like Gail Omvedt and Raoasheb Kasabe) were called to address the members. Similarly in cadre camps at district or Taluka level, local scholars and members of BAMCEF conducted cadre training on Bahujan history. Following Phule, the Bahujans (SC/ST/OBC and minorities) were imagined as indigenous communities that were exploited by the invading Aryans. Seminars were also organised to discuss challenges for the success of the Ambedkarite

movement nationally (Mane, 2006). Pen and paper were provided to participants to take notes in such meetings, a practice that continues to date in the cadre camps of the party.

BAMCEF, however, was an organisation of government employees who could not engage in political action as that would mean risking their government jobs. They were instead mobilised to provide pay back to the deprived communities that they came from, through what movement narrative calls 'time, money and brain' (knowledge). This support continued for the later political struggles that Kanshiram planned. DS4 was formed in 1982 to pursue politics of protest and also to test grounds in electoral politics. After the formation of DS4, BAMCEF came to be a shadow organisation and its members now continued to mobilise resources for DS4 and later for BSP.

The strategy of 'Limited political action' and the formation of the DS4
Members of the DS4 remember it being conceived as a means of pursuing the strategy for 'limited political action'. After the formation of the DS4 on 6th December 1981, mass mobilisation became a strategy. DS4 and BAMCEF workers worked together with the DS4 workers at front and BAMCEF workers in the shadow supporting DS4. BAMCEF members too would travel to distant villages and towns where they felt they could make a difference and consolidate support for DS4.

In 1982, when the BAMCEF workers from Majalgaon read the news of D N Kambale[50] from Parbhani district organising a religious ceremony for a Brahmin priest to perform Munja (sacred thread ceremony) on Mang children, they visited Parbhani to convince him against this move as it was consolidating/affirming the idea of caste hierarchy. Though D.N. Kambale was not convinced, the BAMCEF workers managed to persuade his nephew D. S. Kambale to join DS4. D. S. Kambale had studied at Milind College in Aurangabad and had been associated with the Dalit Panthers earlier. I asked D.S. Kambale why one would leave a radical group like the

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[50] D N Kambale was famous locally as he was the first educated Mang from Nizam state who had written a letter to Ambedkar accusing him of being biased towards Mahars (Burra: 1986). He was also a Congress (INC) Member of Parliament from Nanded constituency from 1951 to 1962.

Panthers to join the DS4. He explained:

> Sure, the panthers were *jahal* (fiery) but they were not *vaicharik* (ideological). Just using verbal abuses (mainly against Hindu gods) and criticising does not help. They were aggressive but not constructive (*rachnatmak)*, and they did not have a theory or perspective. I was part of all that abusing (Hindu gods) and the villagers attacked us. We were beaten up and never felt bad about it. There was only anger in the Panthers. It was revenge driven anger. BAMCEF people were systematic, they had a plan for changing the whole system (Interview D S Kamble: 29/1/10).

As can be seen from the above quote while DS4 was an agitation wing, the workers also claimed intellectual depth in their politics due to engagement of educated employees of BAMCEF. One cadre from the Mang caste named Sudhakar Kshirsgar, whom I interviewed, ran a tailoring shop and was earlier associated with Dalit Panthers. Being a good orator he later graduated to conducting cadre trainings between 1986 and 1989. The approach of BAMCEF and DS4 was seen as different by those who shifted from the Dalit Panthers and Republican Parties to BAMCEF and DS4: they referred to this difference mostly as *vaicharik* or *boudhik* (intellectual). Such 'intellectual' content included use of history in understanding the varna system so as to challenge it.

> The cadre camps explained history from Buddha, Kabir, Phule, Narayana Guru, Periyar, Shahu, Ambedkar to RPI […] We were taught to make people who would destroy this *samaj vyavastha* (social system) and not to take up small issues like atrocities […] In BAMCEF we felt that the *savarnas*[51] did some 'action' [atrocities] and we gave 'reaction' [protests] and reaction resulted in our loss […] DS4 was set up to promote action not reaction against injustice (Interview Kshirsagar: May 2009).

Atrocities and violence against Dalits related to caste had seen growth or radical

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[51] Savarna means caste Hindus and does not include untouchables who are considered Avarna [one not part of Varna].

mobilisation amongst Dalits through Panthers. Such radicalism was seen as harmful 'reaction' in DS4 and BAMCEF. While movements like Panthers performed violent protests and saw violence as a means of communication, workers of BAMCEF considered violent protests of Dalits as mere reactions which would yield not long term results.

The introduction of the term *Chamcha* (stooge) in Dalit politics by Kanshiram marked the departure of DS4 (and later BSP) from its predecessors in Maharashtra. Kanshiram published a historical and analytical reading of Dalit politics called "Chamcha Age", which labeled all those Dalit (and backward) politicians serving the interests of dominant upper caste political parties as "*chamchas*" and their supporters as "*chamchas* of *chamchas*" and radically reiterated the need for political separation from Congress and other upper caste parties. The "*chamchas*" were seen to have sold out the Dalit community to serve their own purposes and Congress interests. The traditional understanding in Dalit politics of Ambedkar winning reserved seats from Gandhi through the Poona Pact in 1932, received a jolt as Kanshiram organised *Poona Pact Dhikkar* rallies (Down with Poona Pact) and published Chamcha Age in 1982 to mark 50 years of Poona pact. The historic Ambedkar-Gandhi clash was reconstructed to explain the socio-political exclusion of Dalits and the new era of "*chamchas*". While historical struggles since Buddha, Kabir, Phule, Shahu and Ambedkar were important, the Poona Pact marked the downfall of the Dalit and Shoshit (Dalit and exploited).

Poona Pact for Kanshiram affected the possibilities of real representation in the democratic procedures for the Dalits and other exploited groups; therefore, they needed to organise to regain political power. This fiery criticism of factors external to the Dalit movement (Gandhi/Congress) and internal to the movement (e.g. the shortcomings of the *chamchas*) attracted new entrants to BAMCEF, DS4 and later BSP. The new entrants to BSP, distinguished BSP from other Dalit organisations in its critique and antagonism of Congress (Gandhi). The critique of *chamchas* as internal others has now become part of the ritual political oratory of BSP cadres who use it regularly in their critique of RPI and Dalits affiliated to other parties.

Within Dalit movement circles the factions of the RPI and the Dalit Panthers saw BAMCEF and the DS4 as an elitist group that did not believe in protests or agitations. They criticised them for being led by a Chambar (Kanshiram as a Chamar from north India) and not Mahar, for having leaders that did not remove their footwear (as sign of respect) while garlanding Ambedkar and for being against *Namantar*. DS4 did not participate in the agitations for *Namantar* and held the position that securing political power was the only answer.

In 1983, the DS4 organised a nationwide mass mobilisation for equality (*samata*) and self respect (*swabhiman*) through a cycle 'march'. This witnessed a violent reaction from the Dalit Panthers in Marathwada who stoned a gathering in Ambejogai that had assembled to listen to Kanshiram. Kanshiram continued to address the crowd despite a stone hitting the microphone he was using, and the cadre rushed to shield Kanshiram with their bodies. The workers of DS4 were advised by Kanshiram not to resort to violence as a strategy against the Panthers or against non-Dalits.[52] Violence by *savarnas* against Dalits was conceived as a mere symptom of the larger oppressive varna-*vyavastha* (Varna system). The workers of DS4 (and BAMCEF) thus aimed to unite Dalits, OBCs and religious minorities (with an emphasis on low caste converts) against this social system that oppressed them.

These agitations in the early 1980s attracted more Dalits into its fold, some of whom were disgruntled by the politics of RPI and the factionalism that has riddled the Panthers too. Marathwada particularly had seen increased participation from amongst the Dalits, and the well to do within them besides participating would also provide resources for mobilisation. Besides retaining the middle classes and lower middle classes within its fold through BAMCEF, DS4 also reached out to the rural Dalits through its mobilisation strategies. For Kanshiram, it was an apt time to reach for an advanced strategy to achieve the mission of capturing political power and the BSP came into being in 1984.

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[52] Based on several informal conversations and some interviews with those who had participated in this rally.

Political power as the 'master key' and the formation of BSP

After the experiment of DS4 with the strategy of 'limited political action', the strategy shifted and became oriented towards gaining political power. As a result of this the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was formed on 14th April 1984. Some earlier workers that I interviewed had travelled to Delhi for the formation rally of the BSP. Despite being a political party, the BSP came to be viewed as a social movement by its cadres, a movement aiming to capture political power though democratic processes as they believed political power was the "master key" for social change. BSP also evolved into an authoritarian structure where Kanshiram was at the helm of affairs and controlled decision-making, and the cadre revered him and his commitment and accepted his authority. They followed all the orders from above as part of the party *shista* (discipline). It is this *shista* of the cadre that distinguishes BSP from other Dalit organisations locally: those who are not disciplined or quit mid-way to join other parties are termed as *gaddar* (hindi word for 'traitor').[53]

In Marathwada, all the Lok Sabha seats were contested by BSP in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections. An ex-member of BAMCEF and DS4 from Beed who had quit a government job to work for the mission on a fulltime basis was the Marathwada 'in-charge' of BSP. Elections fought in the formative years of BSP in Beed by various candidates who were ideologically committed and economically weak were termed as sacrificial elections, not for winning but for consolidating Dalit votes. In Beed, an OBC man (Vanjari) contested as the BSP candidate and polled 6482 (1.42 %) votes, whereas other Lok Sabha constituencies in Marathwada were contested by a Muslim (Hamid Khan), a Mang (D N Kambale, who had been convinced to stand by his nephew) and a Takari (Laxman Gaikwad[54]). All these candidates came from the imagined Bahujan political community. The BSP did not contest the Legislative Assembly polls of Maharashtra that followed in 1985 as Kanshiram decided that BSP would support RPI in Maharashtra. This decision did not go well with some of the senior leaders of BSP in Maharasthra. Kanshiram's interest in UP and in making Mayawati the first MP of BSP was a cause of envy amongst some local leaders.

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[53] It is usual for the BSP cadres to use Hindi words. Some cadre trainings too are organised in Hindi.
[54] Laxman Gaikwad was part of the radical Dalit literary circles and was author of well known *Uchalya*. He came from the Takari caste which was listed as a criminal tribe during colonial rule.

During the Bijnor by-elections of 1985, Kanshiram demanded 5 lakh rupees and three thousand workers from the people of Maharashtra, failing which he threatened to quit the movement. Some of the senior cadre of BAMCEF/BSP in Maharashtra raised allegations in the meantime of Kanshiram having an affair with Mayawati, Kanshiram on the other hand labeled these rebels as *gaddars* (traitors).

While the splintering of BAMCEF had started at national level since the formation of DS4, as some disagreed over the use of political (electoral) means, this became a possibility in Marathwada only in 1985. Sham Tangade, the head of BSP in Marathwada, left the BSP to join another group of BAMCEF (led by Tejinder Jhalli from Punjab) to pursue 'non-political' means. Various BAMCEF factions emerged over time. One faction of BAMCEF linked closely with BSP as a shadow organisation continued to mobilise resources and volunteers for the BSP.

The interweaving of party and non-party activity remained crucial in the politics of the BSP, even for those who objected to the merger between BAMCEF and the BSP. After working in various factions of BAMCEF, in 2000 Sham Tangade started a political party named the Prabuddha (Enlightened) Republican Party of India. He was very critical of BSP's politics which he maintained reinforced caste and did not lead to its annihilation. On electoral politics, he held the view that, 'the task of *manav mukti* (human liberation) can be pursued through electoral politics and Ambedkarites should take the lead in this' (Interview: 5/6/09).

BAMCEF was not a legally registered body until, in 1987, an opposing group legally registered BAMCEF, thus taking away the legal right to use the name BAMCEF from Kanshiram and BSP. There have been various factions of BAMCEF since then. Important among them in Maharashtra are the factions led by B. D. Borkar, Waman Meshram and Vijay Mankar; all engage in non-electoral politics like large scale conscientisation of Dalits and reinforcing Dalit antagonism to mainstream Hindu culture. BSP's BAMCEF exists as an informal body amongst followers of those who remained with Kanshiram. BAMCEF of the BSP in Beed attracted not just Dalits but also some OBCs (like Vanjari and Mali) and Muslims. Teacher/lecturer members of

BAMCEF also encouraged students to join the movement. Similarly the financial contributions to the Party have continued to flow. Workers in Beed profoundly remember contributing to a one lakh rupee *thaili* (bag) for the Bijnor elections of 1989 in Uttar Pradesh where Mayawati emerged victorious.

After the success of consolidating the Chamar vote in UP followed by the mobilisation of other castes around Chamars, a discussion in Maharashtra arose on which caste could be the core here. A rift emerged between the Mahars and non-Mahars in the party, with some Dalits suggesting that the leadership be given to OBCs in Maharashtra. "Kanshiram however was of the view that BSP was a movement and the OBCs were not yet ideologically as inclined as the Dalits" (Kshirsagar Interview: 29/1/10). Some OBCs who were part of BAMCEF acknowledged that Kanshiram contributed in making the OBCs aware of their rights. Interestingly in Beed OBCs were protesting against the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations. An important female Vanjari political leader, who is also an academic, explained, "they [OBCs] thought that Mahars and Mangs are going to get more reservations through Mandal and joined the Marathas in protest" (Morale Interview: 29/1/10).

Omvedt (1994) suggests that Kanshiram was the first Dalit to take the task of organising the OBCs. Various OBC leaders have been attracted to BSP, joined and left the party since its formation. The Mahar prominence within the BSP still continues. A committed cadre from the Mahar caste echoed Kanshiram's words when he told me, '*Mahar nahin toh Maharashtra nahin*' (No Maharashtra without Mahars). There are, however, other SCs and OBCs who form part of the committed cadre in Beed along with the Mahars. The elder workers have taken a back seat and there is a growth of younger workers who appreciate and associate with the politics of BSP with as much commitment as their seniors.

BSP and the new missionaries in Beed
The older missionaries have been replaced by younger cadres in Beed most of whom joined BSP in 2002. A major BSP political rally was organised in Kolhapur in 2002

to mark 100 years of the reservation policies initiated by Shahu Maharaj. This rally, now part of the cadres' collective memory, attracted more youth to the party who have continued to be part of BSP's cadre. Kanshiram's address to the cadres of Maharashtra, included a slogan in Marathi which they regularly recall: "*hou shakat aahe*" (it is possible), referring to the possibility of gaining political power in Maharashtra. The possibility of gaining political power through electoral politics, in spite of their small numbers, is something that continues to drive and motivate the cadres. Kanshiram is now added to the list of *Mahapursh* (great men) of the Bahujan Movement and his writings and speeches, recorded on CDs, are sold widely at movement events. His Jayanti is also celebrated by the cadre and BAMCEF members by organising discussion sessions. Some Dalits have put pictures of Kanshiram and Mayawati in their homes along with Ambedkar, Phule and Shahu. The BSP related faction of BAMCEF in Beed is still active and is led by a medical doctor who is a faculty member at a Medical College. The cadres of BSP mobilise resources from BAMCEF members, well wishers and contribute from their own pockets for party purposes. BSP thrives on volunteerism of the cadre, some of whom campaign for the whole day without food or attend meetings with packed lunches as they cannot afford to eat outside their homes.

Competitive factionalism in the non-party fields has led to the deepening of Ambedkarite ideology and politics, whereas competitive factions in party politics amongst the Dalits had taken a degenerative turn, leading to an almost disastrous end for Dalit politics. Kanshiram's highly institutionalised, leader dominated form of mobilisation in the BSP is considered by the cadre as an attempt to deal with the challenge of factionalism that pervades other Dalit political parties. Mayawati has now replaced Kanshiram as the absolute head of BSP, and the cadres respect her equally. Her 'dictatorship', as reported by the mainstream (*manuwadi*[55] for cadre) media, is seen as a strength of the party by its cadre.

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[55] Manu refers to the author of Manu Smriti; Ambedkar had burnt Manu Smriti in protest of the stigma and lower status it attached to Shudras and Atishudras. Cadre use Manu, Manu-wad (ism), Manuwadi (followers of Manu) interchangeably to emphasise the Brahminic bias of mainstream media, political parties, their leaders and sometime they talk of Manuwad amongst Dalits.

Patriarchal movement structure

BSP in Maharashtra does not have a visible presence of women workers in contrast to Uttar Pradesh (Ciotti 2009); they are particularly absent in leadership roles at the grassroots. There are no specific opportunities or structures to include women within the organisation. The leaders emphasise upon the cadre to expand the movement by recruiting new cadres who can give time, money and those who are educated. This has translated, in practice, into only men being identified as cadres and workers. The new '*bhai-charas*' (literally meaning brother-hood) are constructed around caste and religious lines and are totally dominated by men. While one sees a visible presence of women participants in rallies and meetings, women in Beed were totally missing in the oganisational structure of BSP.

In one of the BSP cadre meetings Jadhav, the vice-president of BAMCEF in Beed, explained to me the importance of BSP in social change. After listening to him for a while and taking notes, I asked him if BSP was a Bahujan men's movement. Apologetically he replied, "you have left me *nirottar* (answerless)", but added after a while, "you must appreciate that the leader of our party is a woman and we are proud of it." (Fieldnotes: 31/1/09). Local, well-read and ideologically sharp activists of the BSP also link gender discrimination and the exclusion of women from BSP's leadership to the ideology of caste that Manu constructed through *Manuwad* (Manu-ism). One such worker emphasised, "our slogan is *Nari ke samman main Mayawati maidan main*" (For the respect/honor of women, Mayawati is in the battle field). He also added an explanation that the historical Buddhist roots of egalitarian gender relations were corrupted due to *manuwad*:

> Buddhism gave equal respect to women [….] and it is not only Brahmans or Marathas who are *Manuwadi*. There are *manuwadis* within us too (Group Interview: 5/3/09).

The liberation of women is viewed as an essential part of achieving the Ambedkarite mission, but it is neither a priority within BSP nor is it ideologically transmitted to all cadres. Amol (21) is one of the young committed volunteers of BSP who besides

pursuing his law degree is also a *dhamma pracharak* (one who spreads the Buddha's teachings). He was candid in sharing his assumptions that women's bodies would necessarily corrupt themselves and also the movement. His views reflect the assumptions associated with female bodies that are prevalent in society at large:

> A: I am the eldest son in the family, my mother listens to me, and my wife, if I were married, will listen to me too. They will vote for BSP […] there is no need for women to become leaders […]
>
> S: Why has Mayawati become the leader then?
>
> A: […] Mayawati is an exception. Here there is a lot of importance for *charitrya,* [he translates in English] character. If a woman goes around in public (*char manus*), even if she is a good woman, they say she is not. And some women in the Dalit movement are not of good *charitrya* […] because of these four women others do not come out. It is my observation; out of ten women in the movement eight do not behave properly [meant bad *charitrya*] (Interview: 11/12/08)

Amol's assumptions about women's bodies, their social roles and the possibilities of corruptibility also explain the exclusion of women from leadership positions in the BSP in Beed, and their forced domestication in the localised contexts of Marathwada. Nevertheless, female supporters of BSP were critical of male party workers who they felt did not give them opportunity to engage actively in the party. These dominant gender attitudes that have been adopted within the party from local social attitudes, are, therefore, not uncontested.

BSP, the state and democratic politics

In this section I have mapped how the growth of BSP in non-party spaces contributed to the growth of BSP as a political party. BSP holds a specific political position in Maharashtra that has come to signify Dalit assertion and political separatism. This practice, however, operates in the challenging context of party politics where money and caste overwhelm principled politics. Thus there exists a tension between the

ideal and the substantive, in the actual practice of politics in the BSP. I will explore this tension and the strategies of BSP cadre in more detail in chapters seven and nine that focus on use of caste and cultural repertoires of BSP and on the mobilisation during parliamentary elections of 2009 respectively.

BSP workers become most active during the elections; the cadres are mostly discouraged from resorting to protests[56] and are advised to concentrate on conducting cadre camps instead for ideological dissemination and BSP's growth. The case of BSP presents an organised effort, backed by the spirit of its volunteers, to secure political power. They hope to bring social change from above through the sovereign state whose functioning can be controlled through securing political power democratically. Thus reforming society through the state, this also requires mobilisation from below for formation of an imagined Bahujan political community which is appreciative of Ambedkarite ideology. BSP's politics helps us gain an in-depth understanding of the blurring of the state- civil society boundaries and the claim of Dalits over the state despite being at the margins of civil society and the state.

MHA on the other hand is a movement which resorts to the politics of protest and its workers engage with the daily challenges that Dalits approach them with. MHA has a visible presence of women activists and also has a 'NGO' face to its politics. In the following section I will present these civil and political forms of MHA and their intersections.

Introducing Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan and its civil and political identities
Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan (which translates in English as 'Human Rights Movement/Campaign') is a grassroots Dalit movement organisation lead by Eknath Awad. MHA is active in Marathwada, more particularly Beed, and has a strong support base amongst the Mangs.

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[56] BSP workers do not always follow the orders especially ones related to protests. See Chapter seven for Sanju's activism.

MHA is not a registered body and in its actual functioning has two parallel organisational forms: one is of a registered NGO called the Rural Development Centre (RDC); and the other is of MHA as a grassroots Dalit social movement organisation. In the official correspondences of RDC with the INGOs who support it, MHA is referred to as Campaign for Human Rights (CHR hereon). CHR in RDC's official discourses conveys the mass support that RDC has, which strengthens RDC's funding support from INGOs. It is however the name Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan and its vernacular practices, that are prominent in Beed amongst Dalits, more particularly Mangs. It would be hard to find Dalits in Beed who know MHA as RDC-CHR.

In the following sections I will detail MHA's dual accountability; one is upward accountability to the international organisations and movements that RDC-CHR networks with, and the other is downward accountability in the form of MHA that is rooted in the complex vernacular Dalit politics. I will also present here the intersections of RDC and MHA.

RDC-CHR as the NGO face and 'upward' *accountability*

Awad was associated with Dalit activism particularly Dalit Panthers since school days. He pursued education despite coming from a very poor landless Mang family, and completed a Masters in Social Work in 1982. He had dropped out of his M.A in political science to join Social Work because of the good job prospects. After completing his degree in Social Work he joined as an employee at Vidhayak Sansad, an NGO working on tribal rights in Thane. Later in 1983 Awad worked with another NGO, the Churches Auxiliaries for Social Action (CASA), as a field officer in Maharashtra. While working with CASA, he registered Rural Development Centre (RDC) in 1985 under the Societies Registration Act and the Public Trust Act.

RDC's emergence can also be seen as part of the 'non-political' NGO boom that India has witnessed since 1980s (Kamat 2002). Registering of an association gives such organisations the legal sanction to secure resources from national and international organisations for engaging in non-political activities like welfare and development projects. Along with legal recognition come certain norms and

regulations over the types of activities the NGOs can perform. Kamat (2002: 52) observes, 'NGO interventions that are apolitical are allowed financial support from within or outside the country, whereas struggle-based organisations are denied such support.'

Registering an association, besides legal recognition, also gives absolute control over the registered societies/organisations to the group of individuals who register them. RDC like several other NGOs has a board of trustees but Awad remains the key force who heads RDC. Most funding support in India to NGOs, including support from the government funding organisations, requires *three years of registration* and *work experience* as a pre-requisite for extending funding to NGOs. RDC received its first funding support from CASA which enabled it to build up its credibility. The initial project implemented by RDC focused on 'income generation and development' (apolitical) activities like forming village-level development committees and cooperatives raising goats and building brick kilns. Whilst the monthly reports from April 1988 to July 1988 by Gaikwad, the only staff member on this project, were confined to details of village level meetings on water, health and livelihoods, he informed me that as part of his work he was also involved in mobilising Dalits against traditional discriminatory caste practices and for Jayanti celebrations (Interview: 9/6/09). Such projects of 'development and conscientisation' operated alongside the livelihoods work and were merged with creating awareness amongst Dalits through *kala pathaks* (artist groups) to mobilise Dalits for celebrating Ambedkar Jayanti.

Significantly, the bylaws of RDC that chart the official objectives do not mention the intention of working on the issue of caste or Dalits. The broad objectives stated in the organisation's documentation include health, education, livelihood and youth development. RDC was thus the *associational* cover for Awad's Dalit activism from the mid-80s till early 90s where he officially focused on development and *not* on caste issues or Dalits.

The discourse of human rights consolidated in the practices of INGOs in early 1990s.

This also included Dalit issues in the discourse of human rights in international activism (Bob 2007). Similarly the discursive practice of *Dalit* and *Dalit rights* has become part of RDC's procedural practice since the 1990s. This was also a result of recognition of Dalit issues in INGO discourses and increasing (financial) support extended by INGOs to work on Dalit issues. CHR was thus conceived as a people's movement for securing human rights for Dalits. It was formed on 10th December 1989 to mark international human rights day. CHR was thus an NGO-supported movement and some of the earliest activists working for CHR were provided with the financial support in the form of fellowships by INGOs (Holdeen India Program and Oxfam). Such support was routed through RDC and was coupled with legal training for the activists in legislation that abolished bonded labour, untouchability and caste discrimination/violence. Kamat's (2002) critique of a limited vision of NGOs that revolves around local feudal practices at the cost of capitalist social relations is relevant in the study of RDC-CHR as CHR was formed as a campaign with NGO support to raise similar issues facing Dalits. The stigmatization of Dalit bodies and labour were framed under RDC-CHR as one of bonded-labour.[57] The international conventions against bonded labour and the interests of INGOs to support activism challenging these practices were made relevant in the caste context of Marathwada through RDC-CHR.

Paid activists of RDC-CHR raised issues of caste atrocities and *veth begar* by using the Bonded Labour Abolition Act (1976). Dalit families who worked as agricultural labourers for a specific landlord on an annual basis for food and minimal cash were identified and motivated to leave such jobs. For instance the case of Narayan Mukund Awad and his family from Rajewadi was taken up by RDC workers in 1991. Narayan and his family had been working at the house of a Maratha landlord for an annual amount of rupees 250 (started with 50 rupees loan) and 50 Kg *jowar* (cereal) per month for 10 years. The family was freed and secured compensation for resettlement. The activists actively continued to identify various such cases of what it termed "caste-based bondage". The state officials were initially supportive, however,

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[57] As discussed in chapter three, the land tenure systems under Nizam in Marathwada gave immense power to *Jaagirdars* constructing a highly feudal economy and society that survived in the post-Nizam period leaving Dalits, particularly Mangs as landless labourers and *veth begars*.

after with inflating number of cases, the state machinery stopped recognising these cases as bonded-labour. RDC workers also participated in village level mobilisation motivating Dalits to cultivate grazing land. MHA's approach can be distinguished from that of the Panthers and other Dalit actors in Marathwada primarily by the superior knowledge and training that MHA activists possess on acts like Protection of Civil Rights and Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989.

RDC-CHR thus came to be the modern and civil face that networks with the international organisations and movements and they also fit well within the type of associations that the state promotes and recognises for development purposes. RDC-CHR in their upward accountability to the INGOs present MHA and its vernacular politics in a form that INGOs can legitimately engage with. As such these organisations reflect the procedural face and interpretation of MHA's vernacular politics. This does not mean that there is a contradiction between the human rights discursive practices of I/NGOs and the vernacular practices that Awad engaged in through RDC-CHR. The vernacular form of MHA is of a Dalit *Sanghatna* (organisation) which can be termed as driven by downward accountability to its supporters/members. This *sanghatna* largely comprises of Mangs.

Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan *as the vernacular face and "*downward*" accountability*

While CHR was started as I/NGO-supported movement, its practices remained vernacular and similar to other Dalit movements. I prefer to speak of MHA as this was the term used on ground and vernacular practices instead of CHR as used in RDC procedures. The earliest activists who worked on fellowships in RDC-CHR had previously been associated with Dalit Panthers; they thus consolidated vernacular practices of Dalit mobilisation in MHA besides learning some procedures of NGOs. RDC on the other hand remained a shadow organisation locally providing resources for the activists. MHA locally developed as a Dalit organisation with Mang prominence.

D.R Jadhav, another founding member of MHA from Mang caste had resigned from his government job to be part of MHA. Jadhav noted the conscious focus on Mangs in MHA: 'Though in principle we thought of going beyond caste in our work, it was also decided that the focus will be on Mangs who are the most backward within the Dalits' (Interview: 25/4/09). The main objective of MHA, as conceived by its senior Dalit workers, was to promote *Phule-Ambedkarism*.[58] Caste thus remained at the centre of the formation and mobilisation strategies of MHA.

The office of RDC in current times is a small compound which now hosts training halls, guest rooms, file rooms, and office computers. Awad has an office space here which is similar to a Dalit political party office with pictures of Ambedkar, Shahu, Phule, Annabhau, Savitribai Phule adorning the wall behind Awad's chair. This can be termed as one part of the daily vernacular practice of MHA where Dalits visit Awad with their various grievances. MHA also has village level branches in some villages of Beed, like other (non-NGO) Dalit socio-political organisations, with its boards and flags erected in village public squares.

In the formative years of MHA, this RDC office space was burnt down twice by the Marathas. MHA's mobilisation against untouchability brought it into conflict with the dominant castes locally (both the Marathas and Vanjaris). MHA for them came to be known as a Dalit group (like some other Dalit formations) that turns every case of conflict with Dalits (particularly Mangs) into a caste "*atrocity*" case, thereby registering "false" cases against dominant castes under the SC/ST (PoA) Act.[59] While the state institutions usually do not fund assertive Dalit mobilisation through NGOs, international funding to RDC has grown with various INGOs financing projects that merge development and rights including projects on child rights, gender

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[58] The Phule-Ambedkarite ideology and discourses are also referred to as Dalit-Bahujan discourses in academic circles. Rodrigues (2006) identifies the key the constituents of Dalit-Bahujan discourse as, 'self respect, opposition to Brahmanism, own historiography, positive perception to modernity and soft on colonialism, affirmation of political values and rights (includes political and cultural in addition to economic), rejection of the culture of masculinity and religion as morality with no belief in god or salvation'.
[59] See Chapter seven for caste violence , the importance of atrocity act in Dalit politics and the Maratha angst against protective legislations for Dalits.

equity, land rights, livelihoods and Dalit rights.[60]

Overemphasizing the role of the discursive emphasis of 'human rights' in RDC-CHR would underplay the previous Left and Dalit movement leanings of key Dalit leaders and would also turn a blind eye to the vernacular identities and performances of MHA. Though it was formed on International Human Rights Day (IHRD), celebration of IHRD is a mere formality in the current activism practices of MHA. More passionate mobilisation and conscientisation happens on Annabhau Sathe Jayanti, Ambedkar Jayanti, Savitribai Phule Jayanti and also on Awad's birthday which is celebrated as *sangharsh* (struggle) day by activists. Awad thus seized on INGO funding priorities to legitimize issues that he and other Dalit activists were already engaged in. Caste thus remained at the centre of the formation and mobilisation strategies of the vernacular form and practices of MHA.

The intersections- NGOs as support for the Movement and Dalitisation of NGO activism in MHA

As stated earlier, Awad was part of Dalit movement politics much before his exposure to the mushrooming NGO sector of the 80s. He was active in the Dalit Panthers during his schooling and later became the Majalgaon Taluka president of DS4 and he was the *up-adhyaksha* (vice-president) of BAMCEF while he was working with CASA. The activists of MHA under Awad's leadership engaged in challenging untouchability in villages especially through temple entry for Mangs, politicising caste relations and particularly mobilising Mangs. Movement songs were written for MHA by well known local Dalit movement *shahirs* (ballad singers) like Vamandada Kardak. These songs included slogans like those quoted below, which established MHA as an assertive Ambedkarite Dalit group:

> *Aamcha ladha nyaya sathi Manus Mhanun Jagnyasahti*
> Our struggle is for justice and for living like human beings
> *Phule Shahu Bhim Anna chya vicharachi Shaan Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan*

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[60] The sixth chapter presents in detail the vernacularisation of INGO rights practices in MHA's mobilisation around gaairan.

> The pride of Phule, Shahu, Ambedkar and Annabhau's thought is MHA
>
> *Manuskichi Bhik Nako- Hakk Hava Hakk Hava*
>
> We do not want our humanity [recognised/] as charity but as our right
>
> *Vishamte viruddh tufaan Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan*
>
> The storm against inequality is MHA

Awad has also encouraged registration of other organisations and trade unions which are independent of RDC but remain affiliated informally under the larger umbrella of MHA. These organisations are implementing small projects, key amongst them is Savitribai Phule *Mahila Mandal* (Womens Organisation, SPMM) which is emerging as a Dalit Womens' organisation in Beed.

MHA can be distinguished from non-Dalit NGOs in Marathwada, not only in its claims for self representation and recognition of Dalits in the NGO field, but also in its willingness to engage in conflicting processes of Dalit assertion, its networking with Buddhist NGOs and its use of Phule-Ambedkarite ideology and symbols. Dalits politicised by MHA in some villages erected boards with the MHA logo that came into being in 1995. This logo contained the earth held in two hands and the flag half red and half blue which symbolised caressing the world with Ambedkarite and Marxist ideas. Awad maintains that he is influenced by Ambedkarite and Left ideology and felt that the Left has failed in India because it did not come through Ambedkar but through the Brahmins. Awad also disagrees with the Left's criticism of NGOs. He insists that caste hierarchy is much more dangerous than globalisation and distinguishes the priorities of Left from his own:

> For instance if [standing crops on] gaairan [cultivated by Dalits] are destroyed by cattle [of upper castes] they [left] will not protest, they will say that that the world economic order should change. If a Dalit woman is raped. This is not their priority. If a Dalit is beaten up this is not their priority but globalisation should not come - this is their priority. They cannot think at a smaller level; most of their suggestions are impractical (Interview: 2/10/08).

MHA and all the externally funded projects of RDC are intertwined. RDC, however, remains mostly invisible in local political performance and activism. Some MHA activists are part of the paid staff of RDC projects but an activist working for RDC on child rights will not only be concerned with his/her project duties but would also participate in Dalit activism through MHA activities. Those who are not part of paid projects are motivated and influenced by the mobilisation of MHA and come mostly from the Mang caste. The activists motivate Mangs to set up village level branches by installing boards and forming committees and for organising Annabhau Sathe Jayanti. Such politicisation of Dalits particularly that which has involved claiming public spaces also led to violent reactions from dominant castes (see Chapter eight). Activists of MHA also act as brokers and provide Dalits access to the state, besides helping them in times of difficulty particularly violence from dominant castes.

Dalit women's involvement in MHA

MHA has much stronger contact with Dalit women compared to other non-NGO Dalit socio-political groups and a visible presence of women activists. This is related, to some extent, with the various projects implemented by RDC that require securing participation of women in development activities. MHA has seen an increase in women's participation as RDC project activities have increased

In the case of MHA, most projects implemented through its affiliated NGOs - RDC and SPMM - revolve largely around mobilisation of women who are organised in self-help groups (SHGs) at village level. Through this, women are encouraged to attend various meetings and rallies organised by MHA, making Dalit women a key constituent of MHA's mobilisation. The number of women activists increased over time both as a result of pressures from funders to recruit women and interest on the part of the leadership to enrol women. MHA thus has a far more visible and active leadership of women compared to other Dalit political formations. There are women workers who are part of paid projects and there are some exceptions who work like male Dalit activists brokering state accesses for Dalits and other deprived groups.

While the main constituents of MHA were Dalit women, women's leadership has

become increasingly visible since 2005. This was simultaneous with a 'dialogue' (and not imposition as insisted by funders) that was ongoing between SWISSAID and the leaders of MHA about SWISSAID's interest to deal with the issues of gender imbalance within MHA as well as within Dalit households. A project on gender sensitising was thus conceived so as to transform both the movement processes of MHA and Dalit patriarchy at household level:

> The situation of Dalit women within the whole Dalit community should be brought out. It should be recognised that even within the Dalit community the women are marginalised and exploited. If Dalits are fighting against discrimination [...] what about discrimination that Dalit women face? Within the movement we have women coming on the streets and protesting but the whole leadership lies with men. The whole patriarchal structure is sustained like this [...] what is the point? (Interview SWISSAID Country Director: 28/1/09).

Professionals provided training on gender mainstreaming to workers, both men and women. As part of transforming the leadership imbalance, new opportunities were opened up for women, key among them was the formation of a Women's Wing in MHA. Some the women activists of MHA are as active as the men especially in dealing with the state machinery, leading protests or giving speeches. Women who were active but at the margins came to play more important roles. Very few male workers have been influenced by the training and sensitisation processes and have atteplted embraced these trainings in their daily lives; others have mocked the idea of gender equality.

MHA however has contributed to increased participation and politicisation of Dalit women. The women's Self-Help Groups within MHA, that are generally formed for savings and credit purposes under state and (I)NGO practices, are also involved in organising Savitribai Phule, Ambedkar and Annabhau Sathe Jayanti. Female participants are urged through speeches by MHA activists to give up "backward" practices like *karan*[61]*, maria-aai* and male participants are particularly warned

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[61] A *karan* refers to a religious event of sacrificing animals (buffaloes or goats for gods) which friends

against the evils of alcoholism. Dalits are encouraged to invest in children's education and are encouraged to participate in certain ritual practices of Dalit movements; the critique of caste Hindu order and patriarchy and mobilising opinion in favour of religious conversions are merged into the projects of RDC. The activities of MHA are not restricted to caste and Dalit atrocities but also include issues like promoting education, child rights, grazing land development, land rights, employment rights [National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme] and health.

MHA in local politics and electoral competition

The political influence of MHA in Marathwada has grown over years with village level *shaka* being established in various places. MHA locally has a distinct identity amongst the Dalit groups in Beed and is seen as a Mang socio-political group with Ambedkarite leanings. It is primarily distinguished from other Mang groups like ABMS and BRP in its Ambedkarite position. The use of "Jai Bhim" as a way of greeting is part of daily political ritual in MHA's functioning, which is not the case among other Mang socio-political groups as they mostly associate Mahar identity with Ambedkar. Awad also converted to Buddhism in 2006 along with some of his followers at Nagpur to mark 50 years of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism.

Eknath Awad maintained active links with BSP till the year 2000. He was the Maharashtra vice president of BSP and contested parliamentary elections in 1999 polling 15,666 votes. Awad termed these elections as "a sacrifice for the movement and not fought with intent to win. ... The prime goal was to purge Dalit votes from Congress" (Interview/24/8/08). The Congress candidate had lost the seat only because of Awad contesting the elections as he managed to swing Dalit votes in favour of BSP. The BJP candidate who won the elections polled 300,307 votes and the Congress candidate who was runner up had polled 294,204.

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and relatives feast on. A potraj is called to make this sacrifice in the case of goddess mari-aai. A karan of mari-aai can also be done by the village patil if he offers the halya (male buffalo). Karan is generally done to ask for a *navas* (specific blessings) from gods or to return the blessings that goddess has extended. This will cost anything between five thousand to ten thousand rupees to the families that organise karan. The activists see this as hard earned savings or loans taken on high interests and suggest in their speeches on avoiding such expenses and instead advise people to invest in children's education.

When Awad participated in elections, BSP workers and activists were discouraged from entering the (apolitical) RDC campus in Telgoan and campaign vehicles were generally parked at a distance when workers came to the kitchen of RDC for lunch. Awad withdrew from BSP in the year 2000. One of the internal evaluation reports of RDC-CHR recommended that Awad should stay away from party politics. Awad elaborated, 'I realised if I become active in politics, we will lose some resources that we have got for people [through RDC],' (Interview: 2/10/08).

Awad, however, has not remained aloof from party politics and has pursued his political ambition despite being aware of the difficulties in achieving them. He led the process of forming an independent political party called *Bahujan Majoor Paksha* (Bahujan Labour Party – BMP hereon) in the year 2000 which was an effort to consolidate Mang votes. Awad did not take any official position in this party though he remained the main force behind it. There was an overwhelming response from the Mangs in this initiative. The village level *shakhas* of MHA also became BMP *shakhas* with an additional logo and slogan, *BMP ki kya Pahchan Hath Pe Dharthi Laal Nishaan* ("The identification of BMP is globe on hands in red"). This logo of BMP was painted on the reverse side of MHA boards put up in villages. The growing clout of BMP and Awad amongst the Mangs in Beed were not well received by the local leaders of NCP who encouraged BRP (another Mang formation, part of NCP) to mobilise the Mangs of Beed against Awad. While some workers of BMP were of the opinion that it should not enter into an alliance with any party for 10 years, Awad formed an alliance with the BJP in 2004 to counter Congress and the BRP. Awad switched to support NCP in the 2009 elections and during my short visit in January 2010 he was scathing in his criticism of politicians and termed them as terrorists and not policy makers. Awad's simultaneous criticism and engagement with party politics seems opportunist and intriguing, they however also represent the importance of party politics in Dalit movements and the marginal status of Dalits in mainstream political parties.

I will dwell in detail on the use of caste in MHA's politics in chapter eight and its involvement in electoral politics in chapter nine. As of now it suffices to say that

MHA has a dual faced dynamic structure: one is that of a vernacular Dalit movement with dominance of Mangs that operates within the local context of competing and collaborating Dalit movements; and the other is that of a NGO in the form of RDC-CHR.

Awad: the charismatic leader

At the RDC office Dalits, nomadic tribes and sometimes lower OBCs come to see Awad to seek help for problems ranging from caste atrocities, police atrocities and threats from upper castes to skirmishes, contractor-sugarcane labourer disputes, family disputes or unnecessary bribe demands from government officials. Awad is respected not just amongst the Mangs but also amongst Mahars who find him to be aggressive and radical in his practice of Ambedkarite ideology and raising Dalit issues.

Awad, however, holds a charismatic position particularly for his Mang supporters in Beed, as a leader of their own caste who has not sold out and is committed to the cause of Mangs and can solve their problems. Within MHA, workers continually re-emphasise his charisma. Awad owns a fleet of three cars (SUVs) which are a matter of pride for his Mang supporters. His aggressive speeches and calling for self-help and self-respect have motivated Mangs – both men and women. Locally he is referred to with the respectful term *jija* (sister's husband). Some activists have put up Awad's pictures in their home and Awad's birthday (January 15) is celebrated by activists as an occasion for protests. Some supporters even print his picture on their wedding invitations.

Awad participated in the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001 and in the UN plenary of Human Rights Council (UNHRC) at Geneva in 2009. Locally, these global visits were turned into events for political performance, by organising a *satkar* (honouring) of Awad for being invited to the UN meeting to represent Dalit issues in Geneva. Awad is also called to speak on Dalit movements by other non-party movements like the AIMBCS (All India Mulniwasi Bahujan Samaj Central Sangh) and colleges and universities in Maharashtra. There are local publications on

Awad detailing Awad's personal and political struggle and his Ambedkarite commitment. A book titled *Vadlatil Nikhara* (Hope in the Storm), published by MHA, was written about Awad by his Mahar friend B.S Gaikwad.

MHA thus contributes to the deepening of Dalit movements and politics in Marathwada. Its effectiveness has been in merging the global resources and local activism to challenge Dalit social, political and economic exclusion. It is not merely an elite advocacy NGO but is also rooted in the local complexities of Dalit politics.

Dalit politics in Maharashtra: a continuum of socio-political struggles

In a discussion on priesthood in Hinduism with some non-Dalits, I asked a Maratha in Kari village, if a Mang could become a priest? He replied that was *"impossible"* (Fieldnotes: 3/12/09). Dalit politics functions in a context of socio-cultural 'impossibilities' and political and economic 'possibilities'. It is within this context that Dalit movements and assertion have continued to grow. The state constitutes an important site of political engagement for Dalit politics as a structure of opportunity for socio-economic and political mobility and a target of claims for justice. The state also plays a role in denial of justice and mobility to Dalits. The non-party struggles that strive to stay away from party politics and engage in political education of Dalits also construct a political culture which makes the state significant thus blurring the boundaries between the state and civil society. Sites of Dalit assertion for recognition and redistribution in political, cultural and economic spheres are also sites of violent or strategic repression of Dalits which are charted in the following two chapters.

Chapter 5

NGOs in Dalit Politics

Two key issues that Dalit movements in Marathwada mobilise around are encroachment of common grazing land for cultivation purposes by Dalits and caste atrocities against Dalits. Dalit mobilisation for land rights or cultivation of government lands in the last decade has attracted international civil society actors who participate in such mobilisation through local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

There are two broad contending positions that debate the cause and outcomes of the current growth of NGOs in the civil society arenas across the world; one that views the mushrooming of NGOs as part of an evolving transnational/global civil society and the other that explains NGOs as tools of expanding neo-liberalism/neo-imperialism/neo-colonialism. This chapter contextualizes this debate by presenting the politics of formation of a funding-driven network of NGOs on Dalit land rights, its strategies and its vernacularisation through MHA. This chapter cautions against exaggerating the role of international civil society actors in local democratisation processes. It also argues that the anticipated fear of neo-liberal governmentality that NGOs consolidate in depoliticising public interests, is a misplaced one in the case of Dalits particularly in Marathwada.

India like other parts of the developing world has witnessed the mushrooming of private professional institutions known as NGOs in the fields of development and human rights since the 1980s. Democracy, development and human rights are new hegemonic ideas that currently legitimise national regimes (Donnelly 1999). Intersections of the local and the global institutions on issues of development and human rights are increasingly visible in the global south. UN agencies and a growing number of local and International NGOs (INGOs) are committing themselves to human rights-based approaches to promoting development (Nelson and Dorsey 2003).

The rise of NGOs and their increased socio-political and economic roles has been a matter of contention amongst scholars. This chapter engages in the debate on the utility and role of NGOs through the study of NGO intersections in Dalit movements, particularly *rights based advocacy*.

Legally recognised associations have been a resource in Dalit movements of western India since the colonial advent. However, formation and functioning of associations with external aid from national or international funding was a phenomenon largely missing in Dalit movements until the 1990s. In this chapter I conceptualise NGOs as 'new' associations in the context of globalising grassroots and Dalit politics that network with transnational civil society. I refer to the technologies of rights used by I/NGOs as 'new' technologies of rights to primarily distinguish them from the technologies of state, to chart the moral and technical high ground they claim (as compared to 'failed' technologies of state), and to explore the engagement of these technologies with the ones of state through Dalits movements at the grassroots.

Here, I begin by briefly summarising the two key competing perspectives that debate the rise and role of NGOs in the context of globalisation and make a case for the study of varied contexts of NGOs. I detail the land rights mobilisation of Dalits in Marathwada as a necessary site for institutional and extra-institutional struggle. In chapter four I have presented the vernacular politics of MHA despite its NGO form in RDC. MHA's vernacular practices also includes mobilisation of Dalis for cultivation of gaairan land. In the third section I present the process of formation of Jameen Adhikar Andolan (JAA), a network of local NGOs mobilised on the issue of Dalit land rights. I describe the key objectives and project components of JAA and will elaborate on the vernacularisation of the new technologies of rights in the local practices of MHA in the fourth section. In the conclusion I argue that new rights technologies of global actors have been vernacularised and politicised by MHA, which has contributed in bringing gaairan to the centre of local politics in Marathwada.

NGOs: the making of global associational revolution or neo-imperialism at large?

Liberal theories confirming democracy's dependence on associations and associational life are long standing. Current development efforts increasingly concentrate on the formation of NGOs in the belief that such institutions help foster and maintain stable democracies (Paxton 2002). There is a need, however, to distinguish NGOs as a *new* species of associations from those voluntary associations that Tocqueville (1945) makes central in establishing democracy. This will particularly help us delineate the voluntary character of mass based social movements from these new private and professional bodies called NGOs. In the study of human rights such a distinction will help us, 'explore the agency of people in the social construction of human rights and the counter hegemony that social movements seek to establish at the level of public common-sense'(Stammers 1999).

The current mushrooming of I/NGOs that advocate 'rights-based' development has been critiqued following the analyses of global political economy and micro field studies. The increased role of NGOs in development processes in the global south is also coupled with the wave of structural adjustment (policies) that swept the developing world, where curtailing fiscal deficits and state's social welfare role became a priority. Critics therefore argue that a 'new' form of civil society through NGOs is pushed forward by multilateral aid agencies like the World Bank to promote *anti-politics* machinery, causing the withdrawal of state and decline in public expenditure. Harriss (2001: 118 emphasis in original) maintains that, 'the concept of 'civil society' in such discourse excludes 'political society'; and the sorts of 'voluntary local associations' that are endorsed are not *political organisations* (such as political parties or trade unions)'. NGOs thus act as, 'Trojan horses for global neo-liberalism' (Harvey 2007: 117), or neo-imperialism (Karat 1984), and play a key role in 'privatising' public interests (Kamat 2004). Kamat (2002: 161), based on her ethnographic study of NGOs, critiques them as, 'corporatists that engender a corporatist identity among their members, that do not facilitate a reinterpretation of the material basis for a collective identity'. She critically explores the cooperative efforts of state and international capital in supporting the NGOs vis-à-vis the

expansion of global capitalist economy and process of indirect colonisation. Critics see NGOs as elite, non-representative, non-democratic private institutions that 'de-politicise' development/public welfare and warn against the NGO-isation of social movements. This criticism extends to the use of rights discourse by I/NGOs. While the proponents argue that the 'rights-based' approach aims to 're-politicise' development, those against it suggest that it is essentially dressing the same old exclusionary development in a new form (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi 2004). It is also argued that the universality presupposed in the 'rights talk' of NGOs has pitfalls in ignoring the, 'local particularities and daily process of political and economic life under pressures of commodification and neoliberalisation' (Harvey, 2007: 177-178).

The rise of NGOs globally is also viewed as an extension of neo-liberal governmentality. Foucault's conception of governmentality and associated technologies of dominance largely focus on the technologies of nation-state. An argument is made to challenge the, 'very distinction insisted on by the term nongovernmental organisation, emphasising instead the similarities of technologies of government across domains' (Ferguson and Gupta 2005: 123). The central effect of these new forms of transnational governmentality is seen as, 'not so much to make states weak (or strong), as to reconfigure states' abilities to spatialise their authority and superior generality and universality' (Ferguson & Gupta, 2005: 123).

A contrasting perspective to those (over) emphasising material dimensions and resurrection of colonialism is found in others who point to the existence of multiple subaltern counter publics and their global intersections. Calhoun (1999) argues that, 'globalisation has also led to rise in solidarities and activities that cross borders and transnational organisations' links may also work to empower sub-national regions or other groupings.' Appadurai (2000) suggests that the rise of an active transnational public sphere and networks amongst social movements makes globalisation not merely a phenomenon coming from above but create possibilities of 'grass-roots globalisation'. In the growth of transnational networks between NGOs/social movements, Appadurai (2001) also posits the possibility of 'deep democracy', a

democracy that transcends national borders and 'governmentality from below'.

In the case of rights-based approaches, Cornwall and Nyamu-Musebi (2004) remind us about the existence of plural rights-based approaches with different starting points and different implications for development practice. Offenheiser & Holcombe (2003: 299), observe, that the rights-based approach, 'transforms needs into rights, capabilities, and responsibilities and puts the states' responsibilities to its citizens under a lens'. With the rise of global civil society, they also see possibilities of a global social contract in issues of environment, livelihoods and security (Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003: 300)

The current era of neo-liberalism and globalisation besides capitalist expansionism has also rolled out certain possibilities of transnational governance and civil society, where I/NGOs have emerged as key institutions. Globalisation thus is not necessarily weakening the nation-state and non-economic dimensions of globalisation have varied implications for social movement politics and their functioning at grassroots. Caste and untouchability have been presented at UN and other international forums as issues of human rights violation actively in the last two and a half decades, Ilaiah refers to this process as globalisation of caste and untouchability (Ilaiah, 2006). Ramaiah (2009: 63) argues that, 'Dalits during globalisation have been able to give global visibility to their issues, taking the support of a number of local, national and global level civil society organisations, and rightly placing caste issues before the United Nations.' Studies of Dalit activism in the transnational public sphere have largely concentrated on the functioning of networks like National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) and International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) at United Nations forums and their impact in influencing policies of national governments and international bodies.

A study of the intersections of transnational public spheres (that increasingly advocate coalescing of rights and development) with vernacular micro-political practices of Dalit movements is still missing. Mercer (2002) rightly calls for a study of the complex role of NGOs in development through a more contextualised and less

value-laden approach. This chapter makes such an attempt through examining MHA's mobilisaton around land rights in Marathwada. MHA derives support from international civil society actors and its leaders participate in UN meetings, but MHA's practices are also rooted in the daily complex and conflictual practices of Dalit movements. I have simplified this dichotomy in the role of MHA as dual accountability in the Chapter four, one is the upward accountability for the international supporters and the second is its downward accountability to its supporters that is rooted in the muddled realities of Dalit politics.

Locating NGOs, INGOs in globalised grassroots and Dalit politics

Long before the rise of foreign funding for the NGO sector in India in the 1980s, the postcolonial state finances supported non-government institutions, which consolidated the dominance of landed gentry in rural Maharashtra. Marathwada for instance, like the rest of Maharashtra, has a history of state supported cooperative sector (credit and sugar) dominated by the Marathas (Dahiwale 1995; Rosenthal 1974; Lele 1990). The credit and sugar cooperatives besides control of land are key institutions that sustain economic and political inequality between the dominant castes, like Marathas, and Dalits. Both these sectors receive regular grants from the state government in the form of working capital, loan waivers and subsidies. Similarly, various educational institutions that are managed privately by the dominant castes too are aided by the government; thus thickening their socio-cultural, political and economic capital.

On the other hand the discursive practice of rights mobilisation in Dalit movements is not a recent invention. The language of rights claiming has historically been in circulation in Dalit movements in Maharashtra and has roots in colonial liberalism (Rao 2009). The liberal democratic state, its dispersed institutions and disciplinarian technologies are important sites of competitive mobilisation and protests for Dalit movements. The post-Ambedkar phase of Dalit movements in Maharashtra furthered the emphasis on implementation of rights granted to Dalits under the Constitution.

Thus Dalit movements in current times rationalise their mobilisation around the democratic liberal state by symbolically evoking Ambedkar's key role in drafting the Constitution and in securing rights for Dalits and other marginalised social groups. Dalit movements in the grassroots context of Marathwada at times violently engage with the exclusionary practices of the state and simultaneously make the liberal Constitution, the basis of their demand for rights. The symbolic evoking of the Constitution can be termed as a procedural emphasis in Dalit movements, Dalit activists in the local context however strategise within the vernacular substantive practices of democracy that are deep rooted in corruption and daily manipulative politics which largely work in favour of dominant castes. Dalit movements thus do not merely resort to institutional mechanisms.

The late 1980s saw a rise of NGO activity in Dalit politics in Marathwada. While NGOs as new associations, as per their byelaws aspire to raise voluntary contributions; very few NGOs actually survive financially on voluntary contributions. Hudock (1999) relates the emergence of Southern NGOs partly to the funding opportunities from northern NGOs which he suggests creates democracy by proxy. In India the mushrooming of NGOs can also be attributed to the increase in funding opportunities to such private and legally recognised bodies from both the government and non-government national/international funding institutions since the 1980s. The state in the 1980s increased spending for NGOs, to promote their role in development activities. The funding flows from INGOs on the other hand increasingly cover less of public service delivery and focus on promoting public action through merging development and rights in a democratic context. The funding interests of the state are different from those of liberal funding agencies, Kamat (2002: 22) maintains that, 'liberal funding agencies and more often liberal and left leaning individuals within private funding agencies are more often interested in directing funding towards political education.' She further comments that, 'such concern of funding agencies is often limited to oppression caused by feudal social relations, and does not refer to capitalist social relations'. RDC-CHR, the NGO face of MHA too have focussed on altering feudal relations so as to liberate Dalits from what they termed caste-based bondage [veth beggar]. However, MHA has also

concentrated on cultivation of government land by Dalits like other Dalit movements in Marathwada.

Dalit activism and the land question in Marathwada

The Dalit land question in Marathwada is one issue that has evoked institutional and extra-institutional Dalit mobilisation since the 1950s. Dalit mobilisation on the issue of *gaairan* land and other lands like forest, temple and burial in Marathwada can be traced to Ambedkar's period. Dadasaheb Gaikwad, a contemporary of Ambedkar led a *satyagraha* [form of peaceful protest generally attributed to Gandhi] of landless peasants for wasteland in Marathwada region in 1953, he was arrested and imprisoned for four months at Harsul Jail in Aurangabad for this protest (Kshīrasāgara 1994). Ambedkar himself had called for encroachment of government lands for cultivation by the landless in 1955, following which 2000 Dalits from Marathwada had encroached government lands (Pardeshi 2002: 32). Dadasaheb Gaikwad continued the land *satyagraha* through the Republican Party of India (RPI), a nation-wide protest ensued between 1959 to 1964 (most arrests were courted in Vidarbha and Marathwada). These protests attracted attention of the state government followed by the central government that made promises to provide land to the landless but did not fulfil them (Pardeshi, 2002: 30-54).

The mobilisation for 'illegal' cultivation of *gaairan* by Dalits and other landless groups has continued since then. The vernacular discourse of Dalit *Hakk* (rights), which includes extra-institutional measures like illegal cultivation of *gaairan* is dominant locally and has been effective in getting institutional recognition. Under pressure from Dalit and other progressive political formations for regularisation of encroached lands, the Maharashtra state government passed Government Resolutions (GR) in 1978 and then on 14th April 1991 (to mark Ambedkar's birth centenary year), ordering regularisation of encroachments till 1990. The GR of 1978 was revised in 1979 to specify "caste" criteria for regularising encroachments, which authorised regularisation of only those encroachments by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Nomadic Tribes, Denotified Tribes or Neo-buddhists (Bokil 1996). Mobilisation of encroachments thus got polarised along caste lines; besides

Dalits other castes like *pardhis* and *bhils* [both were identified as criminal tribes in colonial period] too participated in encroachments. Since the GR of 1991, the encroachment has aggravated in the hope of further regularisation of newly encroached lands, a process that continues till date.

The extent of *gaairan* all over Marathwada is 240,800 hectares belonging to 7,786 villages; following the 1991 ordinance of the government, 28,875 ha of *gaairan* were privatised in Marathwada, this was 12 per cent of the total (Bokil 1996). Guru (1997) challenges these official figures of land allocation and points to the dominant caste-state nexus that hindered the possession of land by Dalits. The actual implementation of the regularisation GR by the government was a very poorly done affair. The Government Orders of 2001 and 2005 recognise (under pressure from various socio-political movements) that the GR for regularising encroached land in 1991 was not implemented efficiently by Revenue Department thereby denying ownership to many rightful beneficiaries.

Various Dalit socio-political formations like factions of RPI, and new Dalit groups like Akhil Bhartiya Matang Mahasangh, Dalit Mahasangh and MHA are still involved in encouraging cultivation on *gaairan* lands by Dalits in Marathwada.[62] They also try to pressurise the government into regularising these encroachments. Below are notes from a mass political rally organised by RPI (A) on *gairaan*.

> A mass rally was organised by RPI (Athavale) called *Dalit Hakk Parishad* (Dalit Rights Convention). The main roads of Beed city were flooded with blue flags and banners of RPI (A). Huge hoardings with pictures of Ramdas Athavale, president of RPI (A) were put up on the main streets. RPI workers had mobilised Dalits, mostly encroachers of *gaairan* from villages of Beed district to attend the rally and around 20,000 people (mostly men) participated in the rally. The District leader of RPI in his speech made the following

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[62] These organisations are not united in their efforts of securing *gaairan* mobilisation. The *gaairan* cultivators however participate in the multiple organisations and rallies. Dalit socio-political organisations however unite in their protests against cases of caste atrocity which I discuss in the next chapter.

magani (demands) from the government: all the encroachments of *gaairan* till 2005 be regularised, loans given by all Scheduled Caste development corporations to Dalits be waived, since BPL (Below Poverty Line) survey has ended up excluding most poor Dalit families a new survey be carried out […] Ramdas Athavale, in his usual humorous and poetic style demanded that lands encroached till 2010 should be regularised in advance. (Fieldnotes: 4/10/08)

The above rally and talk of rights was not funded by I/NGO and presents the politicised nature of Dalit movements in Marathwada who raise issues of not mere recognition but redistribution as well. The Constitution of India is made the basis of such demands - another important ritual practice that Dalit movements resort to. However, the substantive engagement of Dalit movement activists with the state bodies that represent the constitution (and procedural democracy) locally is one full of conflict, distrust, racketeering but also hope.

As part of substantive politics for land rights, Dalits illegally encroached upon *gaairan* and forest lands even after 1991 and at times such encroachments led to conflict between Dalits and dominant castes, resulting in social boycott, humiliations, even rape and murder of Dalits. Land thus is an important cause of violence against Dalits in Marathwada besides other socio-political assertions of Dalits that may challenge the dominant caste hegemony (Guru 1994). Some Dalits who had cultivated land with the support of MHA too were participating in the above mentioned *Dalit Hakk Parishad* in Beed.

Although MHA has been supporting Dalits in cultivating *gaairan* and lobbying for regularisation of lands cultivated by Dalits, it differs from other Dalit mobilisations primarily in its source of financial resources for mobilization. While most Dalit activists of other movements largely derive funds from Dalits, government officers and rival or collaborating political parties and social groups, *some* workers of MHA also receive monthly salaries as they are employed in projects implemented by Rural Development Centre (RDC).

Enter INGO discourse of rights: the formation of Jameen Adhikar Andolan (JAA)

Senior activists of MHA were involved in promoting *gaairan* cultivation even before the formation of MHA as members of other Dalit formations. They continued the process after the formation of MHA, actively after the GR of 1991, without any specific project support. '*Gaairan'* in the discursive practice of Dalit movements is a synonym for a variety of public lands since land encroachment encompasses temple lands and burial grounds. In a letter addressed to the President of India in 1995, MHA made three demands regarding the redistribution of land: First, the Mahar *watan* lands [a portion of land that Mahars could cultivate in return for their caste duties] that have been usurped by landlords be returned to Mahars; second, the large tracts of temple land be transferred to the landless and; finally it demanded the distribution of all the *gaairan* to the landless without any preconditions. The letter further notes, 'India is the only country in the world where a lifeless god is legal owner of land, whereas this land is tilled by the landless and the profits makes some devotees rich'. Activism of MHA attracted funding organisations to participate in the process of land related activism (through RDC); key amongst them was Intermon Oxfam.

Intermon Oxfam (IO hereon), an international development support organisation started planning projects in India since 1994. IO's strategy plan for India recommended focusing on Dalits and Tribals regarding issues like sustainable livelihood, education and health. Initial support to RDC was a project on violation of human rights of Dalits. Recognising the history of movement-based mobilisation for *gaairan* in MHA and the fairly organised Dalit movement in Marathwada, the head of Intermon Oxfam (Thomas) suggested that MHA (Awad) should indulge in some 'constructive' work like land development of regularised *gaairan* encroachments instead of mere protests (interview with Thomas: 19/3/09). IO felt that people would not participate in the movement protests for long if nothing constructive was done. Furthermore, from the point of view of those cultivators who have been cultivating the *gaairan* land before 1990 but do not have legal right over the land, it is important that they cultivated the *gaairan* regularly. Non-cultivation meant that land was

reclaimed by the villagers or the forest department leading to frequent emergence of conflicts.

A project that could serve as a *model* for developing waste *gaairan* land was conceived on a pilot basis in 1999. Initially, it was planned to develop the grazing land in 15 villages for cultivation that included – land development (levelling), irrigation, training farmers (*gaairan* cultivators) in *sustainable* farming practices. This was followed by various local development-project implementing NGOs approaching IO to secure similar projects for developing sustainable farming practices on encroached lands. Most of these NGOs (Non-Dalit led) were part of another network of NGOs, which was mostly in competition with RDC-CHR over accessing funding.

IO however pressed on resolving the differences and forming a new 'network' of all NGOs with specific focus on land rights. The emphasis on rights can also be viewed as part of IO's gradual movement from its service delivery missions to a rights-based approach (Intermon-Oxfam, 2006). IO thus managed to bring competing NGOs together for various meetings to form a network of NGOs called *Jameen Adhikar Andolan* (Land Rights Movement, JAA here on). Fragmentation amongst Dalit leadership is noted as the reason for evolution and formation process of JAA in 2000. One of the documents of JAA states, 'Dalit leaders working in the land rights struggle have realised that they must work together and strengthen their struggle' (JAA 2005b: 9). The network however does not include other local Dalit socio-political formations like that of RPI and comprises only 'grant seeking' NGOs. As noted earlier professional institutions called NGOs do not constitute part of local practices in Dalit politics. The keenness of Dalit leaders in gaining political power is seen as a shortcoming of the Dalit movement and a case is made for new forms of leadership to face the challenges in the era of globalisation and liberalisation (JAA 2005a: 43-44).

JAA is conceived as a sustainable livelihood promotion programme by IO and participating NGOs. JAA hopes to achieve, 'a uniform land reform policy (of the

state) to ensure land entitlement to all landless people and increased Government investment on natural resources development to enhance the livelihood of the poor and marginalised. "All resource poor people in Maharashtra, especially Dalits will have enhanced capacities to make productive use of natural resources like land and water for sustaining their livelihoods" (JAA, 2005b: 10).

The key project components of JAA are research and documentation, mobilisation and advocacy for policy level changes, training and capital for sustainable farming practices and community-based microfinance. Professional consultancy firms based in Pune and Hyderabad are involved to assist in research, developing community based micro-finance institutions (CBMFI) and in developing sustainable farming practices on *gaairan*. These projects were split between NGOs part of RDC-CHR and the other network according to the financial resources involved. Eknath Awad was made the president and the head of the other competing network was made the secretary of JAA. RDC was to lead the mobilisation and advocacy component (without support of any consultants) due to its previous experience on land rights. Kamat (2004: 161) critiques the new category of "advocacy NGOs" for their lack of mass-base and their role in serving transnational capital. A similar critique of transnational Dalit networks is seen in Lerche (2008) who rightly doubts the effectiveness of advocacy-based shortcuts without active involvement of Dalit grassroots in achieving major social changes. The formation of JAA however is also an effect of MHA's long sustained activism around land, it was this activism that attracted IO to support the land rights advocacy and implantation of *advocacy* as a *new* technology is not necessarily a top down process. MHA is thus a movement rooted in the local complex practices of Dalit movements and RDC and other NGOs part of MHA act as associations that network with INGOs.

Vernacularsing JAA

The project on mobilisation and advocacy supported by IO to RDC under JAA is titled; 'Facilitating the process of securing land titles for occupants of grazing lands to enhance their livelihood in the Marathwada Region'. The mobilisation processes that activists indulge in as part of the *gaairan* issue are however not specifically mentioned in the project plans. The villages for mobilisation and development were

divided into three categories in practice, one where *gaairan* is cultivated and the cultivators have legal ownership, two where *gaairan* is cultivated but cultivators do not have legal ownership and the third category of villages where *gaairan* were available but Dalits had not yet cultivated it. The first and second category villages are provided inputs in sustainable farming practices and SHGs were formed to include *gaairan* holding and landless Dalits. In the second category of cultivators the focus is on collecting and organising evidence that would help cultivators secure land titles. In the third category of villages Dalits were mobilised by MHA activists to cultivate or re-cultivate (if vacated through force) upon *gaairan* lands.[63]

The formation of JAA brought along new project practices like filing affidavits regarding cultivated land, formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Livelihood Promotion Committees, capacity building and training for the landless and *gaairan* cultivators on their rights, sustainable farming and advocacy. These new practices were fused with the local mobilisation practices around *gaairan* by MHA, which has resulted in Dalit assertion and further politicisation of caste relations in Marathwada. I will present in brief some of these processes below.

Filing affidavits

As discussed earlier some of the lands cultivated before 1990 are still not regularised by the government machinery. The emphasis in advocacy under JAA is on collecting the "legal" documents that can prove the occupation of *gaairan* by cultivators as pre-dating 1990 and therefore legal. To secure land titles the salaried activists engage in collecting evidential documents like previous applications to the *Tahasildar*, police cases, court cases, registration of encroachments in government records and affidavits from *gaairan* cultivators (both male and female), farmers on lands neighbouring the *gaairan*, senior citizens, *gram panchayats* and shepherds, testifying that the encroachments predate 1990. Collecting and providing evidence is seen as an effort to help the state in delivering its promise of regularising land through the GR of 1991 thereby making policy implementation effective.

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[63] The last activity is not supported by IO.

Land rights of Dalits and other landless were broad based by IO and NGOs to accommodate sustainable livelihood, gender issues and micro-finance. The official discourse of JAA does not recognise that Dalits and other landless cultivate *gaairan* and forest lands after 1990 and that this continues to result in frequent eruption of violence against Dalits. The problem of *gaairan* is conceptualised instead in democratic and legal terms. The technologies of advocacy of IO/JAA to a certain extent depoliticise the extra-institutional nature of Dalit struggle for *gaairan*, where resorting to illegal means and violence too are vernacular practices. K is one such village where Dalits have cultivated the forest land after 1990 and the activists of MHA have not excluded this village from filing of evidence involved under JAA.

> Dalit encroachers of *gaairan* from K village in Wadawani Taluka were at the Tahasildar office as their affidavits of encroachments [referred to as 'file' by MHA workers which make it sound formal and important] were to be submitted to the Tahasildar. When Sadashiv asked the Tahasildar to cooperate with the poor encroachers, the Tahasildar in response asked the encroachers since when they were cultivating the land, to which one of them replied fifteen years [not realising that post-1990 encroachments are illegal]. Sadashiv on the other hand intervened showing the Tahasildar a letter from the District Collector requiring all the Tahasildars to 'verify' all the encroachments and legalise them if found to be legal [pre-1990]. After the submitting the *files,* Sadashiv suggested to the encroachers to pay the Talathi/Girdhawar[64] some money if they come for field visits to survey and record the encroachments. The encroachers gave Sadashiv fifty rupees for what they called cha-pani (tea and water). Sadashiv did not ask for this money but did not refuse to take it either (field notes: 29/9/08).

The focus of advocacy in MHA is to get the encroachments (both pre-1990 and post 1990) registered in the records of the revenue department. Activists of MHA as part of advocacy engage in filing detailed affidavits regarding cultivation of *gaairan* lands by Dalits, but not all Dalit movement actors engage in filing such affidavits.

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[64] Talathi is the village revenue officer and Girdhawar is revenue inspection of a circle comprising of some villages.

The following discussion within the workers of JAA at a review meeting explains the differences in the strategies of RPI and MHA.

> Kalyan: In some villages people who have encroached land are not interested in filing affidavits. They do not support our efforts.
>
> Jadhav: Such people are largely associated with RPI, they may be *karyakartas* (activists) of RPI. Try to convince them, tell them if they do not submit the files there is no proof of encroachment. (Fieldnotes: 20/12/08).

Filing of detailed affidavits by MHA is a new strategy that other groups like RPI have not been engaged in and activists of MHA try to convince the encroachers of the importance of submitting evidential documents to the government. Dalit encroachers in some cases aspire to secure land through a new GR that will extend the date of regularisation beyond 1990. MHA activists however based on the previous experience of the 1990 GR and its poor implementation persuade Dalits to file affidavits so that they have some proof of their *gaairan* possession. Dalit encroachers of land largely remain flexible in their affiliation and participate in rallies (*morchas)* of different Dalit groups that aim at pressuring the government to regularise the encroached land.

Dalit cultivators of *gaairan* who do not have legal documents are under constant pressure both from the state and from the dominant castes to vacate the land they cultivate. Destruction of crops or letting cattle loose to rampage crops, threatening or resorting to violence constitute some of the strategies the dominant castes resort to locally. Sustaining the cultivation or starting new cultivation on land thus requires mobilisation of Dalits. Dalits in the mobilisation discourses of MHA are motivated to cultivate land not merely for economic purposes but also to gain *swabhiman* (self respect).

Land as swabhiman: Self Help Groups and Livelihoods Promotion Committees as new sites for mobilisation

The formation of women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) has come to be an important

development strategy for poverty alleviation of various state development departments since the 1990s. An important project that is being implemented by the state government in Beed through NGOs is the Maharashtra Rural Credit Project funded by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Under JAA too, the emphasis is on forming women's SHGs to encourage women's leadership and economic independence. A total number of 940 SHGs have been formed as part of JAA comprising of 10,000 women and loans of Rs. 37,300,000 disbursed (Oxfam 2009).[65] Similarly, committees are formed under JAA at the village level of *gaairan* cultivators, which are known as Livelihood Promotion Committees (LPC). Both the SHGs and LPCs are engaged in the mobilisation to secure legal recognition for land cultivations.

The women's SHGs that are generally formed for savings and credit purposes under state and (I)NGO practices are also engaged by MHA in organising Savitribai Phule, Ambedkar and Annabhau Sathe Jayanti (birth anniversaries). In chapter four I have elaborated upon the visible presence and reach of MHA amongst Dalit women and the merger of vernacular Dalit movement practices in projects of RDC. Under JAA for instance, the training manual for the district level training of women members of SHGs and the Taluka level training manual of LPCs have songs, games and discussions on the *Varna* system and its role in degrading the status of Dalits and women. Activists for instance would jokingly warn SHG members that the one who fasts on *ekdashi* or visits *mangir baba* will not be given loans through SHGs (Fieldnotes: 14/4/09).

Meetings of SHG women like other rallies of MHA are also sites for motivating Dalits to cultivate *gaairan* lands that were not encroached earlier by Dalits or were vacated after attempts of "encroachment". Mobilisation for cultivating new *gaairan* is facilitated through fiery speeches of Awad and other MHA workers who provoke Dalits, particularly Mangs to "encroach" upon *gaairan* and live a life of self respect. Those who had listened to these speeches felt that these were like injecting saline in

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[65] Formation of SHGs and lending through SHGs is one component of the project. The other components include resources for mobilisation, research and montly salaries for activists, capacity building of activists and Dalits cultivators or gaairan.

their bodies or gave them goose bumps [See Chapter eight on politicisation of Mangs].

> Workers of MHA would term the Mangs of Bogalwadi village as *gulams* (slaves). When they tried to persuade Mangs here for encroaching the *gaairan* for *swabhiman* (self respect), only few youth showed interest. Most feared a Vanjari backlash and also felt that encroaching upon the rocky *gaairan* will not be economically viable. (Fieldnotes: 22/4/09)

While activists of MHA are aware of the challenges regarding the economic viability of *gaairan*, "encroachment" of *gaairan* is also encouraged as a process challenging the socio-political dominance of Marathas and Vanjaris and the control they exert over Dalits in general and Mangs in particular. Speeches or persuasion by activists do not necessarily evoke a good response in all villages. However some were immensely motivated by the speeches and ventured into cultivating *gaairan.*

Similarly, LPCs at Village level, Circle level, Taluka level and District level are formed comprising of *gaairan* occupants (men and women) as part of the advocacy component under JAA. These committees are meant to ensure that the *gaairan* occupiers have the required knowledge and training of various documents and processes necessary for securing legal entitlements and for them to take the lead in the JAA movement. Though funded by IO these meetings are similar to other Dalit socio-political gatherings in their ritual commemoration of Ambedkar Phule, Shahu, Savitribai and Annabhau Sathe.

> When Awad entered the meeting venue at LPC training meeting in Beed, one of the activists shouted slogans: "Eknath Awad *tum age bado* (Eknath Awad you lead us)" and some participants added "*hum tumare sath hai* (we are with you)" [field notes 20/8/08].

The activists urge the LPC members not to see themselves as "encroachers" since the Nizam government that had allocated the grazing lands to them. The LPC members

are simultaneously motivated by the activists to react violently if dominant castes turn repressive.

> If you destroy our crops by rearing your cattle, we will not only cut your cattle and feast on them but we will also break your hands… We will crush such *jatiwadi* (casteist) people under our feet. You should gain such strength this is the objective of this training camp (speech recorded: 20/8/08).

This meeting ended in the formation of the District LPC in Beed with a plan to commemorate Dadasaheb Gaikwad Jayanti in October with Jail Bharo (Fill up the Jails), slogans in praise of Ambedkar, Annabhau, and Phule and on land rights and injustices against Dalits such as,

> *Jameen aamchya hakkachi nahi konachya baapachi* (Land is our right and does not belong to anyone's father)
> *Dalit pe anyaya rahega dharti pe tufan rahega* (Whilst the Dalits face injustice there will be storms on the earth).

Such assertive mobilisation of Dalits around the issue of gaairan has contributed in them (particularly Mangs) challenging their lower social and economic status in the villages and the politicisation of caste relations.

Politicisation of caste relations

Cultivation by Dalits on *gaairan* lands leads to the "politicisation" of relations between Dalits and the dominant castes at grassroots. It is not just Dalits who encroach upon *gaairan*. In Tandalwadi village, a Maratha farmer who owns land neighbouring the *gaairan* land encroached around three acres long before the Mangs who have cultivated the land only since 2004. However, it is only the cultivation by Dalits that is challenged by Marathas. An earlier effort towards cultivating *gaairan* land by Dalits in this village in 1992 was unsuccessful as the Marathas threatened Dalits with dire consequences, some Dalits were even beaten up and had to flee the

village.

Not all the villages where Dalits encroach upon *gaairan*, however, result in conflicts with dominant castes. There has been an impact of the long history of Dalit movement struggles for *gaairan* and GRs that recognised the encroachments as legal. In some villages the dominant castes themselves "distribute" the *gaairan* to Dalits so as to sustain the patron-client relationships. As part of collecting documentary evidence workers of MHA try to convince the Gram Panchayats to provide a 'No Objection Certificate' for legal transfer of ownership to encroachers. An interesting case is of Pahadi Pargaon village. Dalits here encroached upon *gaairan* land in May 2009. The *gaairan* land in this village had been encroached earlier in 1970, facilitated by a CPI (M) worker. The earlier cultivators then were from various castes[66] who had surrendered the encroachments after being arrested. The land here was later brought under the control of the forest department following the release of the cultivators. One of the activists of MHA from this village mobilised 35 Dalit families (34 Mang and 1 Mahar) to cultivate the *gaairan* again. The dominant castes in Pahadi Pargaon are divided politically in this village between NCP and BJP who struggle to control the village *panchayat*. They supported the encroachments and helped the Dalit cultivators secure bail on their arrest. This had particularly to do with the united Dalit votes (a total of 300) that were crucial in deciding the village election results.

In Phule Pimpalgaon (Majalgaon Taluka) village the Mahars had encroached upon the *gaairan* much before 1991, which were legalised after the 1991 GR, whereas some Mangs encroached upon the *gaairan* in 2002. After the GR of 1991, Dalits had used records of police/court cases registered against them to prove their encroachments as the village revenue officer did not record encroachment/cultivation on *gaairan* by Dalits in most cases. The Mang encroachers here were disappointed that the Marathas had not opposed this process as no conflict also meant missing legal recognition/records that the land is occupied by the Mangs currently

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[66] I found this out from the surnames in the court order of Judicial Magistrate dated 28/8/70 that ordered ten days rigorous imprisonment and a fine of rupees 50 for each encroacher. I also interviewed the CPI (M) worker.

(Fieldnotes: 1/6/09).

MHA workers support the cultivation of *gaairan* land by Dalits also by symbolic gestures like putting up boards of the MHA *shakha* in the village and attending and giving speeches in support of *gaairan* encroachments on Annabhau Sathe Jayanti. They sustain the ritual practice of lobbying at local police stations to register cases of violence or opposition (like destroying standing crops or social boycott) by the dominant castes to *gaairan* cultivation under the SC/ST (PoA) Act (referred to locally as atrocity *kaayda* [law]). Like other Dalit movements, MHA emphasised 'caste' as the reason for opposition and exclusion of Dalits. This allegation that is systemically denied by dominant caste social and political formations, even the executive and judiciary which can be seen in non-registration of FIRs locally and the abysmal rate of convictions in cases registered under SC/ST (PoA) Act.[67]

Another important constituent of the project that RDC is implementing under JAA is advocacy with the state government for policy impact. In the following section I will present the advocacy efforts of MHA for securing land titles and also the nexus between dominant caste and state institutions that delay and deny the possibility of land regularisation for Dalits.

Between procedural advocacy and substantive caste politics: State against Dalit land rights?

Advocacy that NGO's practice is distinguished from popular campaigning as the latter involves large numbers of people and the former does not. In the case of MHA's advocacy, popular campaigning has been its core strength, which has attracted the attention of the state authorities on the issue of *gaairan* land. The state response however is a mixture of support, repression and inaction. While violent displacements are just one part of the political dynamics, the procedural engagement with the state involves long drawn and delayed processes that generally do not work in favour of *gaairan* occupants.

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[67] See next chapter on caste violence

Support

Organising mass rallies and protests to show the strength of *gaairan* encroachers is an important strategy that sits well with the advocacy initiatives that IO supports. As part of advocacy under JAA, MHA has been actively lobbying the state government to regularise encroached *gaairan* by Dalits. In 2004, Sanvidhan rallies (those supporting the Constitution) were organised across districts in Marathwada, where MHA claimed that the government had insulted the "Constitution of Dr. Ambedkar" by not regularising encroached *gaairan* and forest lands (Awad's interview on Zee Marathi; 14/4/04). Advocacy efforts and display of numerical strength has helped in consolidating Eknath Awad's image as a mass leader particularly from the point of view of party politics. Sharad Pawar and his daughter Supriya Sule (leaders of the NCP) attended a few of the mass rallies of *gaairan* occupants where Awad was projected as a Bahujan leader and social worker. These rallies do not mention the support received from IO. The stage too is decorated with the symbols of Phule, Shahu, Annabhau, Savitribai Phule and Ambedkar. The traditional practice of beginning speeches by paying tribute to Bahujan leaders and ending them with Jai Bhim and Jai Bharat [India] is followed.

As part of advocacy under JAA, MHA had filed 22, 482 cases [affidavits/evidences collected through RDC] of encroachments with the government that could be legalised (claiming that these encroachments were before 1990) by November 2008. A meeting with Sharad Pawar and Revenue Minister Narayan Rane took place in Mumbai in November 2008 to discuss the possible action on the files submitted by JAA. Sharad Pawar had taken interest (impressed by the show of numbers in the rallies) in organising this meeting of Awad and others with Narayan Rane as well as the Divisional Revenue Commissioners. Here Awad presented the case of landless Dalits who were given fallow lands for cultivation by the Nizam Government in 1946 and requested the Minister to be considerate as this was the case of the poor and landless. The discussion was however brought to the 1991 GR of the modern state.

Narayan Rane asked Awad how many cultivators of the cases submitted were

occupants before 1990 [...] Awad replied that most were before 1990 […] Rane responding to Pawar's persuasion proposed a *mohim* (campaign) in this meeting to deal with these cases on a priority basis. Discussion on lands other than *gaairan* cultivated by Dalits was not encouraged in this meeting. […] Rane also maintained that earlier efforts of giving land to Dalits had resulted in Dalits selling their land for alcohol (Fieldnotes: 16/11/08).

Awad was visibly elated on this day, however moves to regularise these 22, 482 cases have been much slower than expected. Initially it was due to a larger crisis that faced the state in the form of attacks by gunmen on South Mumbai in November 2008. While the promise was of dealing with all the cases as part of a *mohim* (campaign), in the follow-up meeting held with the state revenue minister in Aurangabad on 24th Feb 2009, the minister assured that only 10 per cent of the cases will be taken up before the parliamentary elections of May 2009 and that evidence of encroachments (pre-1990) will be sought. It was also made clear by the officers that affidavits filed after 1990 by MHA will not be considered as evidence for encroachment/cultivation before 1990.

Inaction

One of the non-Dalit workers at RDC mocked these meetings held with the ministers to secure *gaairan* ownership. He asked me sarcastically once referring to the above meeting, "*gaairan nave karun ghenya sathi nahin gela* (did you not attend the meeting yesterday for securing *gaairan* ownership), as if one meeting was good enough to secure *gaairan* ownership" (Fieldnotes: 22/2/09).

The state technologies work in various forms not just against the possibilities of regularisation but also against continued cultivations on the *gaairans*. While meetings of MHA leaders with ministers raised hopes of legal entitlements, revenue commissioners were simultaneously threatening eviction. The Divisional Commissioner of Aurangabad issued orders to vacate the encroachments on *gaairan* within a time bound manner by 18th October. Senior activists of MHA in Beed organised immediately to submit a letter to the District Collector warning of mass

protests if the encroachments of poor landless Dalits and Adivasis were removed. The letter also demanded that the illegal encroachments by owners of sugar factories, private educational institutions and by the government be first vacated before the encroachments of Dalits.

An important outcome of lobbying by MHA during my fieldwork was an order from District Collectors office dated 9/1/2009 asking the Tahasildars to survey the cultivations on encroachments and to record them in government land records. These orders do not automatically translate into action at the Taluka and village level and protest marches had to be organised in Tehsils to pressurise the Tahasildars into acting. The Tahasildars of some Talukas in Beed responded with orders to the lower staff to survey and register the encroachments from the list submitted by MHA/JAA. Despite the orders issued by the Tahasildar locally to enumerate all cultivations on the *gaairans* and to record them irrespective of dates, the Talathis did not actively pursue this task. Though the Talathis had received written instructions for recording the encroachments in revenue records, they were also said to have been 'pressurised by officers and local politicians verbally to avoid official recording of encroachments.' (Informal discussion with MHA activist: 1/2/10). The Maharashtra Land Revenue Code 1966 requires the revenue officials to enter the encroachment in land records immediately on witnessing them and the encroacher on government land is liable for eviction and non agricultural assessment (NAA)/land revenue and fine at prescribed rates. The state authorities however deal with the old and new *gaairan* encroachments by not entering them in government records and by not evicting them, thus maintaining a passive silence.

Repression

After the GR of 1990 the Gram Panchayats controlled by dominant castes had actively allocated the *gaairan* lands for social forestry to avoid cultivation of these lands by Dalits. Forests come under the purview of Central Government thus making it tougher for Dalits to survive their resistance against displacement from *gaairan*. Guru (1995) points out the changes in the nature of violent displacements of Dalits from *gaairan* encroachments 1980s onwards and the crisis of Maratha hegemony. He

notes that the 1980s to 1990s represents direct violent displacement of the Dalits by the non-state forms of repression with direct Maratha participation, after 1991, the state took over the task of terrorizing Dalits over the *gaairan* issue through Gram Panchayats. The distinction however is largely blurred and Maratha control of state works in their favour to displace Dalits from their efforts to cultivate *gaairan* lands. In Dhanora village for instance the Tahasildar had read out the *saat bara* (land possession records) in the Gram Sabha meeting and declared the cultivation of *gaairan* by Dalits was illegal and asked the Gram Panchayat to vacate the *gaairan*, thus giving Marathas (panchayat) the authority to vacate the land cultivated by Dalits.

The state machinery is particularly repressive when it comes to forest lands causing situation of conflict locally, at times dominant castes align with the state in such situations. The land in Kotarban village is identified as one of forest department. Dalit cultivators from Kotarban village had to face earth excavation machines on their *gaairan* which were meant for planting trees under social forestry. The encroachers were hesitant to resist the process, owing to the dominance of Vanjaris in the village. The woman officer at the social forestry department was a Vanjari and had the support of the local Vanjaris from the village (Fieldnotes: 26/5/09). Peaceful protests do not always work in favour of Dalit encroachers and aggressive resistance or performance of symbolic violence too is part of MHA's strategies. In Osmanabad district, when forest officials forcefully entered encroached *gaairan* land with the police, revenue department officials, gram panchayat members and JCB (excavation) machinery for planting trees, Awad suggested to the workers to create a "law and order" situation and asked the encroachers to stop the plantation or to uproot the planted trees (Fieldnotes: 9/6/09).

Activism of MHA may have failed to secure the legal recognition by the state for the land cultivated by Dalits. However, like other Dalit political formations it has ensured protection for Dalits who cultivate *gaairan*; it has specifically encouraged Mangs to venture into cultivation of public lands and has also helped Dalits to file legal documents with the state about their cultivation of *gaairan* lands. While RDC-

CHR may represent apolitical associations if viewed through a revolutionary lens, MHA still retains the political and cultural specificities that are necessary for Dalit movements to function at the grassroots.

NGOs as new associations in Dalit politics

It is argued that, 'top-down planning, top-down funding, and upwards accountability negate participation, NGOs may thus replicate patron-client relationships' (Fisher 1997: 456). The case of MHA does not totally reverse this thesis as Dalit activists may seem like patrons for Dalits cultivators of *gaairan*, they however also act as mediators of state access and justice for Dalits. The mobilisation strategies of MHA and the advocacy or movement visions of IO are not always in agreement. In some villages, forest land encroachments have been supported by MHA. This may seem contrary to the objective of sustainability in JAA but the process of vernacularising global practices also results in undermining some to suit the local context. Full grown trees under social forestry too have been pulled down by encroachers to make land available for cultivation purposes. One of the disappointments of IO has been the leader centered nature of MHA/JAA and there is an emphasis from IO since 2009 on making JAA a 'people's movement' by delegating leadership and planning roles to *gaairan* encroachers. IO officials informally shared their apprehensions about the plan eventually working out but hoped that JAA will survive even if the project (JAA) is over because of MHA's activism roots (Interview: 19/3/09).

The case of MHA's mobilisation and activism around *gaairan*, its intersections with INGOs and vernacularsing of global project practices of NGOs makes an interesting case of the role NGOs can play in the complex socio-political realities of caste society if they fuse with local ideologies and protest movements. A narrow definition of civil society with emphasis only on associational activity like that of NGOs may not only miss the vibrancy of civil society in the form of extra-institutional movements but also fails to capture the diverse strategies that the competing actors in civil society may adopt. NGOs can thus play both positive and negative roles in social change processes and in the case of Dalit politics, they are new associations that create spaces for international collaborations and can aid in local protest

practices of Dalit movements.

NGO-ising civil society and beyond

The case of MHA's mobilisation around land rights blurs the distinction between civil society and political society. In the Indian context it is difficult to maintain a clear distinction between state and community and also to distinguish the "state" from "political society" (Hansen 2001: 233).

The anticipated fear that neoliberal governmentality and associated disciplining technologies that INGOs or NGOs consolidate, leading to "depoliticisation" of public interests seems, however misplaced in the case of Dalits, particularly in Marathwada. Many of the Dalit movements here still remain outside the bounds of NGOs, their associations and voluntary public spirit does not depend on INGO grants. Dalit movements in Marathwada represent a cacophony of voices that cooperate (and compete) while resorting to varied strategies to address recognition and redistribution concerns of Dalits. These mobilisations are full of contradictions where the procedural emphasis is on getting the "Constitution to work" and the substantive politics involves use of symbolic violence and other strategies that are considered effective from the marginal location of Dalits.

There is also a need to be cautious of over exaggerating the democratisation processes while analysing the role of international civil society players. Appadurai (2001: 24) conceptualises 'deep democracy' as crossing national boundaries and makes two broad distinctions between grassroots political movements of "armed solutions" and "partnership-partnership" (between traditionally opposed groups such as states, corporations and workers). Such a distinction may fail to develop a nuanced understanding of structural violence and exclusions that Dalits face in localised contexts and Dalit agency that encompasses peaceful or violent politics of resistance, and continued importance of state in these processes.

To conclude, in current globalised times and spaces, the political rationality of transnational governmentality (INGOs in this case) and that of the Indian state on

Dalit issues are not in absolute cohesion. I/NGOs, besides advocating better technologies of reaching out to Dalits, are not particularly influenced by the micro-technologies of dominant caste-classes that the state is trapped in, thereby giving Dalits more chances of manoeuvring. Such manoeuvring and vernacularising of new rights technologies of global actors by MHA has contributed in bringing *gaairan* to the centre of local politics in Marathwada. *Gaairan* and its cultivation, like *jayanti* celebrations, temple entry protests and caste atrocity mobilisation by Dalit movements are crucial sites of socio-political performances that politicise caste and initiate processes that challenge the dominant micro-technologies of power. MHA's vernacularisation of NGO repertoires thus reiterates Mercer's argument that, 'new professional institutions like NGOs can play both positive and negative roles and their contributions may be different spatially and temporally' (2002: 18).

The partial success of Dalit politics in cultivating the state lands explains the malleability of state processes and Dalit challenge to the state authority. Dalit politics around *gaairan* can be distinguished from Dalit politics for securing dignity and equal status in the rural public spaces which are embedded in caste hierarchies. While public spaces form key sites of democratisation and deliberation in civil society, Dalit assertion and civic engagement in public spaces evokes violence. Democratisation of public spaces is a process full of conflict, violence and contradiction, as I elaborate upon in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Caste dynamism, Dalit assertion and violence in the democratisation of public spaces

Caste and its hierarchic functions are fast changing for Dalits in rural Marathwada. Besides the changes that caste is undergoing due to economic factors, Dalits participate in changing caste relations into civic relations by negotiating and renegotiating their social status in public spaces. In renegotiating and claiming dignified existence in public spaces, Dalits invite violence from the opposing dominant castes, particularly Marathas. In this chapter I address questions related to the centrality of caste in public spaces and detail the complexities of Dalit assertion and democratisation processes in the grassroots of Marathwada. Some of the key questions that I seek to explore here are: Why and how do Dalits make citizenship claims to public spaces in Marathwada? Why does Dalit assertion in public space result in violent responses from Marathas against Dalits? How do Dalit movements respond to the exclusions and violence they face in public spaces? What does Dalit assertion in public spaces mean for Dalits and non-Dalits?

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first section I briefly present the meanings of the changing economy and labour practices for Dalits in rural Marathwada. This section describes in particular the intersections of material and cultural practices that sustain the 'untouchable' status of Dalits and the disjuncture that the increasing monetisation of rural society has introduced to the socio-economic and ritual practices in Marathwada. However, material changes for Dalits have not necessarily meant undoing the exclusions that they face. The second section thus explores the critical role of public spaces in sustaining or challenging the political and ritual exclusion of Dalits. It presents varied forms of Dalit assertion in public spaces that evokes a violent response from Marathas. The third section presents cases of violence that Dalits faced during my fieldwork and highlights the intersection of socio-religious realms with political realms, particularly the ways in which Maratha honour and/status sustain the degraded social status of Dalits in public spaces. Section four presents Dalit movement efforts to securing justice through state

institutions. Dalit movements do not merely mobilise against Marathas but engage the state institutions, at times through the use of strategic violence against the state apparatus.

In the conclusion I argue that challenging traditional authority in public spaces also involves altering the private socio-ritual beliefs of the Marathas. Violence against Dalits is thus also a marker of dominant caste adjustment to a new understanding of public spaces where social status may not necessarily translate into political privileges. It is these complex processes of democratisation of public spaces that help Dalits gain status of equals in rural public spaces.

Changing Dalit roles: Old labour practices as *slavery*

The earlier labour practices that stigmatised Dalit bodies socially and politically are increasingly termed as slavery (following Ambedkar's maxim – 'tell a slave that he is a slave and he will revolt') by Dalit activists and Dalits influenced by Dalit movements. Labour practices linked with *gavaki* and *yeskarki* besides causing social stigmatisation of Dalits also sustain their economic dependence. Dalit activists and labourers emphasise *liberation* in not being dependent on Marathas for their livelihood sources. As discussed in the chapter two the changing labour practices and increased monetisation of economy has led to mobility of labour in Marathwada. Migration as sugarcane cutting workers to the sugar belts of northern Karnataka and western Maharashtra has facilitated economic mobility and independence amongst several Dalit families. It is not rare to come across Dalit families who had bought land, built houses or invested in their children's education based on their earnings as sugarcane cutting workers. Dalits also try to make the most out of other non-farm employment opportunities in neighbouring towns.

One Dalit activist in his early thirties described to me how the practise of *gavaki* constructed, humiliated and stigmatised the existence of Dalits in public spaces. He used to go door to door through the village in the evening for *bhakri* (a flattened bread made out of jowar, bajra or maize flour), as part of *gavaki* till he was fifteen, "I used to feel that we are supposed to live like this" (Fieldnotes 7/6/09). It is increasingly difficult to find families now who strictly survive on traditional

practices like *gavaki*. Other caste-based practices are also being challenged. The traditional *halagi*[68] playing, for instance, is now turned into commercial music playing groups called *banjo* parties who perform during marriages.

Sukhdeo (33) from Phulepimpalgaon village runs one such commercial music group. He had contracts worth Rupees 2 lakhs in 2009 of which he had saved 90 thousand for himself. With each contract he makes around 5000-7500 rupees for events like marriages, *jayanti* and *warat* (processions). He has twenty workers in his group of whom eight are *bouddha* (or Mahar converts) and the rest are Mangs. He insisted that the pollution of touch associated with *halagi* playing is no longer relevant to his profession. For instance, he described the changed treatment for them as *banjo* players in upper castes marriages,

> We sit in their *pangat*, it is not like earlier we do not sit separately, some of us eat in turns with the guests, no one knows who we are and no one asks. (Field notes: 1/6/07)

Pangat refers to the seating arrangement (in rows) meant for dining during marriages and other socio-religious gatherings. Earlier the *pangat* of Dalits on such occasions was not part of the main *pangat* where castes above Dalits sat. Dalits were traditionally also made to carry their own plates in such functions. Metal plates are no longer used, instead *patroli* (plates made out of dried leaves) are used for dining that do not require washing. Though this is changing, it is still the upper castes who necessarily cook meals in such marriages and a Dalit cook is out of question. Changes though slow are evident and the new form of playing music as an occupation for Mangs and Mahars is not just economically attractive but is also seen as socially just.

Earlier labour practices in Marathwada were non-monetary transactions - labour mostly being exchanged for grains. Besides denying Dalits a respectable social status, this practice also sustained extreme poverty and indebtedness amongst them. Dalit activists of various groups have made the most out of the Emergency period of

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[68] Halagi is a type of drum that Mangs are traditionally supposed to play on occasions like marriages and religious processions.

government under Indira Gandhi in 1975-1977 (referred to as *aanibani* locally) by spreading the word that the laws had changed drastically and all the loans (mostly grains) that were given to Dalits by the s*avarnas* were waived. They also asked the Marathas to return cattle and other belongings of Dalits that had taken possession of as security for loans given to them.[69]

Dagdu from the Mang caste who is in his late 60s recalled the lack of '*vijjat*' (respect) in the earlier treatment of Mangs and recounted to me the humiliations that were part of their daily survival.

> Dagdu: When they [Marathas] used to go to pray to *aai* [meant Mari-aai] they used to say, *chal re Manga*[70]. […] We used to lead them playing the *halagi,* both while going to *aai* and coming back.
>
> S: And they used to pay you for this.
>
> Dagdu: No money, they used to give *bhakar* , one *bhakar* (flattened bread)
>
> S: And did working on the land too fetch you *bhakar*?
>
> Dagdu: No, they used to give us *jowari* (grain). We used to work [involving threshing grain] for months on the *khala*[71] . There were no machines then.
>
> Samala (Dattu's wife): We had to go behind the bullocks, round and round for months during *khala* […] till the *jowar* was ready (for packaging).
>
> Dagdu: Then they used to give us five *payali* (a measure of 4-5 kg) *jowar*. We

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[69] The propaganda campaign during emergency that reached villages included a talk of new programs for the poor like land reform, debt moratoria, credit for the small farmer and homes for the homeless(Schlesinger 1977). The Dalit Panthers endorsed the Indian Emergency (Morkhandikar 1990) . Dalit activists tried to make most out of authoritarian rule in favour of Dalits by causing panic of new laws in the villages. Sham Tangade shared, "We started working on these issues [debt moratoria, land for building Dalit houses]. This news spread and Dalits started visiting us seeking help particularly to deal with their debts." (Sham Tangade: Interview 5/6/09)

[70] *Chal* means 'lets go' and *re* connotes authority and rudeness. While *Mang* is a general description of caste, the form *Mang-a* is derogatorily used by upper castes to symbolise their power over the Mang and also the inferior status of the Mang.

[71] *Khala* is the space on farms where the threshing of crops is done. Earlier bullocks were used to crush the grains. Mangs generally were not given the best grains but the damaged ones.

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also had to give them a *gofan*[72] annually and a broom every two months. Whenever we gave them the brooms we returned with *bhakhar*. We also had to give them *awat* and *dawa* [other form of ropes].

S: How many years back was this the case?

Dagdu: Say around 20 -25 years ago.

S: And now you get money for this. Is this any better?

Dagdu: This is good.

S: Why?

Dagdu: This is good there is *paisa-pani*, *vijjat* (*paisa* means money, *pani* means water and *vijjat* means respect or honour). Earlier we did not know what *vijjat* was. We did not know where it was how it was? (laughs). [We] just lived, for [a loan of] two *chipta*[73] *jowari*. I once sat in front of the *patil's* house till 11.00 pm. They were having dinner and I sat outside their door waiting. He would ask his wife to see if I was still waiting or had left. She would come out see me and go inside again. And finally when he was done with everything he came out only to speak badly to me. He said, "Has your father kept *thevi* (savings) with me that you are here to ask. You are sitting here till mid-night for two *chipta jowari*.' Even then I kept quiet. When he went inside and gave two *chipta jowari* I returned home gave it to my wife which she then crushed them on the stone and cooked them. Finally we fed our children. This was our state.

S: How did it change and why?

Dagdu: Much changed since *aani bani*.

S: What happened?

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[72] *Gofan* is a special rope used by farmers to keep sparrows away from *jowar* and *bajra* crops. Mangs as part of their stigmatised caste occupations were also required to make ropes.
[73] *Chipta* refers to a small cylindrical shaped tin jar used for measuring. Two *chiptas* make one *sher* , which is around one kg. Dalits were also served water and tea in the *chipta* earlier.

Dagdu: People were saying laws have changed, do not treat them like that [...] Don't ask back loans, its *aani bani*, they [Dalit activists] used to go to the *patil* and tell him that the government has waived all the loans. (Interview: 8/3/09)

The older generations of Dalits emphasised that the rising importance of money for labour had made living better for the present generations. They also associated earlier occupations with the discriminatory treatment that they faced daily. *Bhakri* as a medium of exchange for labour is now viewed as causing both the social and economic exploitation of Dalits.

Swarga in her sixties from Phule Pimpalgaon cursed the earlier economy that revolved around *bhakri* and shared, "*Paisa nazari navata* (there was no money to see) [...] *Lok fakt bhakri saathi jagayche* (people used to live just for *bhakri*)'. Her daughter who is married in the neighbouring village added, "Now people take *uchal* (advance) from *karkhana* (sugarcane industries) and there is no need for you to go to their (Maratha) *bandh* (Fieldnotes: 2/6/09)'. The literal translation of *bandh* would be bunds in farms but it is used here to connote the lands and territories of Marathas. Entering these territories on a regular basis as dependents can make Dalits docile and susceptible to, and quiescent about, humiliation, exclusion and violence. Dalits thus prefer to migrate as sugarcane labourers, lured by both money and dignity. Dalits who work as sugarcane cutting workers take advance (*uchal*) from the *mukadams* (contractors) before leaving for sugarcane cutting. This was around 30,000 rupees per couple for six months in 2008-2009 (this was raised to 38,000 in 2009-2010). A sugarcane cutting worker-turned-*mukadam* informed me that the rate for cutting one tonne of sugarcane this year was 89.49 rupees. Each *koyta*[74] (couple) could cut up to three tonnes and earn around 200 rupees per day, which did not include some extra money they could make from the owner of the sugarcane fields.

Swarga's son Bapu had recently got his daughter, who had studie to 10th grade, married to a groom from Dhalegaon (Georai Taluka) who works in a company in Nashik. He had spent 94,000 rupees for this marriage. His daughter had also

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[74] *Koyta* literally means the blade that is used cut sugarcane. However one *koyta* in the sugarcane cutting business terminology refers to two workers (mostly husband and wife) who together make one *koyta*.

accessed education till 10th grade. Bapu works as a centering worker in the nearby Majalgaon town whenever he gets work he earns up to 200 rupees a day. Bapu's house is a two room semi-pucca construction with a fenced compound.

I asked Bapu if his house was built under *Gharkul,* a state government housing scheme meant for Scheduled Castes and other poor in Maharashtra. His current house that stood in the place of a small hut he had had earlier, built with money he had earned through sugarcane cutting. He and his wife Ramlila worked as sugarcane cutters for 6 years before building this house. Ramlila added, "My elder son was just 20 days old when I went for sugarcane cutting. We used to put him in a saree [a cradle made by hanging a saree cloth] and worked the whole day.' (Fieldnotes: 2/6/09). Despite hardships, Dalits prefer to migrate to faraway places as sugarcane workers than to work in villages on the lands of the dominant castes.

The economic changes though substantial are precarious. There is also no direct relationship between economic mobility of Dalits and Dalit assertion in public spaces. Not all Dalits who had experienced such partial[75] economic independence (i.e. those who were not dependent on dominant castes) were turning their opposition to hierarchic practices of caste into practice. Dalits, despite being aware of the discrimination they face, may be neither united nor willing to question their exclusion. A Dalit informant from a village in Beed Taluka who was a sugarcane migrant worker discontent with the Marathas' dominance in his village said, 'our village is very *bara bodyacha* [76], they do not let us touch their water pots and pour water from above [a distance] for us to drink. They do not even pay our wages properly; they pay it once in 15 days rather than weekly.' He also shared his disappointment that the 35-40 acre grazing land was still not "encroached" in his village by landless Dalits.

Despite achieving some economic mobility, Dalits may still be under the socio-political and economic dominance of upper castes. Dalits continue to face caste

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[75] It is important not to exaggerate Dalit mobility or assertion. See Jeffery et. al's (2001) critique of Pai (2000).

[76] A verbal abuse, *Baara bodya* literally translates into twelve vaginas, a slang generally used to comment on a woman's sexual promiscuity or loose character.

exclusion in various forms and these vary according to the struggle that Dalits have initiated in their local context against such discrimination. Assertive actions of Dalits that challenge the authority of Marathas evoke violent reactions making Dalit assertion a risky proposition for Dalits dependent on dominant castes.

Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) distinguish traditional forms of violence against Dalits in the past from the present forms, which they suggest are related to modern forms of Dalit resistance. Dalit assertion, resistance and the violence they face in the in villages of Marathwada, I argue are related to democratisation of public spaces. In public spaces like the village road, temple, panchayat building or village squares Dalits are not allowed an equal space or status. Violence against Dalits has cultural and politico-economic reasons and collective violence against Dalits can be viewed as a reaction against Dalit claims to citizenship rights in public spaces. Violence however has a productive role and Dalit and Dalit movements in responding to the violence actively engage with the state institutions and procedures. Dalit politics thus marginalises traditional forms of authority that dominate public life and spaces in villages.

In the following section I will elaborate on the nature of changing Dalit assertion and their claims of dignified entry into public spaces. It is mostly the Marathas who object to the assertive actions of Dalits and resort to violence as their traditional authority in the village is questioned.

Dalits, public spaces and political violence

The intersection of private and public spaces in the making of a public sphere may not be specific to any culture or society. The making of bourgeois public sphere in the European context marked such an intersection where literary writings influenced private realms and the rise of humanness in the family, which in turn created public spaces and a public sphere that was critical of public authority of the state and where rational arguments came to be considered sole arbiters (Habermas 1991). Public spaces increasingly came to be associated with the bracketing of social status and 'a political consciousness developed in the public sphere of civil society which [was] in opposition to absoloute sovereignty [...] public opinion came to assert itself as the

only legitimate source of law' (Habermas 1991: 54). While forging an Indian comparison with the bourgeois publicness of the west has shortcomings, the idea of public space as one meant for all irrespective of status and as central in forming public opinion is a critical one to engage with in the case of Dalits.

If equality for all marks the ideal of public spaces, 'then few areas in India constitute public space in any meaningful sense since space has usually been hierarchically patterned.' (Gorringe 2005: 178). Rao (2009) has detailed the intersections of Hindu right to 'private' property (temple) and the customary practices of caste sociality that segregated untouchables under colonial rule. Dalit politics in the colonial rule thus placed, 'the temple within governmental control and imputed to it a "publicness" dissolving the distinction between civil and religious space.' (Rao, 2009: 90).

The postcolonial procedural practice instilled in the liberal Indian constitution recognises public spaces as 'public' - one that citizens can access equally. However, the actual practice besides being anti-procedural is also very complex and riddled with violence. The influence of socio-religious beliefs that construct the untouchable status of Dalits in public spaces and the liberal idea of citizenship both configure the complex terrain for Dalit politics of resistance. Dalit politics and empowerment in public spaces thus needs to be studied not through merely focussing on consensus that emerges in the public sphere but also through conflicts and violence in public spaces at the grassroots. Violence as Spencer (2007: 133) argues is, 'not simply the reproduction of local structures of antagonism, but also an opportunity for a remaking of local social order.'

The location of Dalits in the rural public (socio-political and cultural) spaces comes under pressure for change through Dalit assertion and responsive violence. Assertion against their marginal location in public spaces is mostly facilitated through Dalit exposure to Dalit movements and/or activists. Most conflicts between Dalits and dominant castes are still associated with the 'mode of Dalit entry' into the village (which is the non-Dalit part). For the Marathas and other castes above Dalits, *Maharuda* and *Manguda* (the localities where Dalits reside) are necessarily outside the bonds of village boundaries and publics, making the social and political exclusion

of Dalits a spatial necessity. For instance in Tamil Nadu, Dalit *cheris* (colonies) are jungle-like spaces for the village (Gorringe 2005). Like the dominant castes, Dalits too in their casual conversations do not consider their part of the village as 'the village'. Most references to discrimination are against the villagers (*gaavat-le* or *gaav-kari*) who mistreat them. The traditional understanding of village (*gaav*) as one belonging to non-Dalits particularly Marathas is still a spatial practice in rural Marathwada.

Dalits however increasingly enter the village in politically assertive forms with symbols of protest. Violence against assertive public displays and performance of Ambedkar symbols increased in Marathwada with the *Namantar* struggle. The consolidation of commemorative political symbology in Dalit politics was seen as Dalit militancy by non-Dalits resulting in political violence to counter Dalit militancy. Violence thus has come to be a mode of public communication and material practice that staged political antagonism (Rao 2009). Such violence involves reinvention of ritual-archaic forms of humiliation against Dalits, mostly performed in public (Rao; 2009).

Jayanti of *mahapurushs* (literally translated as great men, often used synonymously for Dr. Ambedkar and Annabhau Sathe)[77] are important occasions for Dalit assertion and protesting against their excluded and untouchable status in the village. *Jayanti* celebrations in the villages pass with pomp through the main village streets where Dalits were not allowed to walk with their footwear few years back or were excluded in some other form. Entry of those people perceived as untouchables and untouchable symbols of protest in the village with loud political performance goes against the traditional understanding of Dalits as docile bodies in upper caste imagery. Below I describe the Annabhau Sathe Jayanti in Rajewadi that illustrates the masculine performance of Dalit youth in a village that did not allow Dalits in the Hanuman (monkey-god) temple a few years ago.

There was loud music and sounds of whistling, Annabhau Sathe Jayanti was in

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[77] Dalit social movements merge the symbols of Ambedkar and Annabhau for socio-political mobilisation. I will deal with this in the next chapter on Mang mobilisation.

procession (*mirvanuk*). A large frame of Annabhau Sathe was kept in front of the jeep. Young men around the jeep were shouting slogans "Annabhau Sathe jindabad" (victory to Annabhau), "*Bharatratna Dr.Ambedkarancha vijay asso*" (victory to Ambedkar). The youth continued dancing to loud music throwing Gulal [red powder]. Some heads were totally smeared in this powder. (Field notes: 20/8/08).

Annabhau Sathe *Jayanti* is not celebrated in all the villages but is an event that is spreading amongst the Mangs. It is through voluntary contributions that Mangs in Rajewadi village organise Annabhau Sathe Jayanti. This Jayanti has become a festival for Mangs and most of those who migrate to places like Pune for work return for a short period to attend it. Rajewadi though a remote village where no state bus plies, has a history of Dalit mobilisation.

MHA had mobilised the Mangs here in 1994 on the issue of temple entry and against bonded labour. The celebration of Ambedkar Jayanti too was riddled with conflict and the Mahars, Mangs and Chambars had organised together for this celebration. In a recorded informal conversation Mangs discussed how the Marathas viewed the changes in the socio-economic and political functioning of Dalits at the village level.

> Shivaji: See things are changing, our women used to work at their place; we used to be totally dependent on them. Now things are changing, our boys dress better than them. In the panchayat some posts get reserved for Dalits, which they do not like. They feel that the village belongs to them.

> Vishnu: No one is doing caste-based work now. Earlier we used to wear their old clothes

> Bandu: They do not like this. They cannot see this.

> Shivaji: Let the Marathas do it now. Now the Mahars and Mangs are doing well. Some have land and some have jobs. Let them come and drop *sarpan* (fire wood)[78]. Why are they not doing it? Because they cannot do this *halkat* (lowly)

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[78] Earlier Dalits as part of caste duties used to cut and deliver *sarpan* in at the doors of patil families.`

work. Now our people are educated we won't do it. So they feel that we are *maajalet* (one with excess body fat/ turning deviant) and that is why conflicts have increased.

Bandu: Because we do not do caste-based work they think we are *majalet*.

Shivaji: Earlier they used to say, Mang, Mahar please stay in your limits. Now if they comment on caste our people cannot take it. They cannot tolerate it and become angry if you say anything on caste. (Group Interview: 9/3/09)

Dalits in Rajewadi have not restricted their violation of caste boundaries to mere celebration of Jayantis. They have further challenged the physical "village" and "Dalitwada" distinction as well. A Mahar in this village bought a house from a Mali in the midst of Maratha households despite Maratha resistance. Shivaji, another Mang who was a *saal-gadi* and turned to sugarcane cutting has now bought a piece of land in the "village" from a Maratha for 11,000 rupees and was planning to start a *chakki* (flour mill) here. He had already installed the grinding machine but the construction of a shed was stalled mid-way as the Marathas were opposing this. Shivaji had halted the construction of the flourmill to avoid the possibility of violence. While the Mangs here may have claimed some dignified space in the village the struggle for more is ongoing. Dalits are thus crossing the set limits of caste boundaries in various ways. Marathas view such claiming of public spaces in the village or the violation of caste boundaries by Dalits as deviance, termed locally as *maaj*, and this can prompt violent retribution. Dalit claims on the other hand also stretch the boundaries of dominant caste perception about Dalit existence in public spaces.

Violating caste boundaries and the public-private dimensions of caste atrocities against Dalits

In this section I will detail some cases of violence against Dalits and Dalit mobilisation that occurred during my fieldwork. The first was in Shindi village on 19th January 2009 followed by more cases in the villages of Khadki Ghat, and Ladewadgaon on 26th January. In Shindi village the Marathas beat up two Dalit girls

aged 18 and 19 when they were returning from their field. On a later date I asked one of the victims what had happened on that day. She recounted to me that the Maratha youth used to regularly eve tease, which the sisters had chosen to ignore in the past.

"On that day when we were returning from the fields, one of them commented, "*Salaam tumchya sabhyatela, Mahar layach sabhya jhale* (salutations to your decency, Mahars have become too decent) " and pushed me from behind and I fell down. I shouted back pointing my finger at him, "Can't you see?" He reacted by slapping me and said, "You Mahar how can you point a finger at me like that?" His mother and other boys also joined him in beating me." (Informal discussion: 19/5/09).

Since they owned some land and their elder brother worked in Pune, these two girls were pursuing education (first year BA) and were not labouring on Maratha lands, but the act of pointing a finger in anger and questioning the Maratha went against the respect that Dalits traditionally show for patils. Such respect would include making way for Marathas on the *paai-vat* (beaten track) and not crossing them. These girls were beaten and dragged through the village streets till their homes. The girl who had pointed finger was the most badly beaten. Besides the Maratha men, two Maratha women were also involved in thrashing the girls. Sanjeevani, a Mahar woman, a key witness in this case, described to me her fear and helplessness:

"No one came [to rescue the girls]. Everyone was watching from a distance. I went close and said, "Let it be. Leave her." But I too was afraid.... They were hurling huge stones at her and they would have thrown some at me too... They first hit her with sticks and once she fell down they were throwing stones at her. I felt a lot but could not do anything, I and my elder daughter came home and cried holding each other" (Interview: 19/5/09).

The use and performance of violence against Dalit girls in the public, for talking back against the Marathas, reveals the power that Marathas wield in this village over public spaces. The subordination and the sexual control of women and low caste men are also key to sustaining caste hierarchies (Chakravarty 2003: 67-77). The specific experiences of violence that Dalit women face are also related to the politicisation of

Dalits and Dalit politics of resistance. Rao (2009: 240) argues that, 'sexual violence *is* indeed caste violence' and that upper-caste violence 'resurrects archaic forms of sexual violence and punishment in direct proportion to the politicization of Dalits'.

The violence against these two girls was not the first incident that had happened against Dalit women in Shindi; another Dalit woman (Sanjeevani's mother-in-law) was murdered in a land-caste dispute in 1991. This case is still doing the rounds of courts and is currently in the Supreme Court. The threat of violence from Marathas to Dalits, particularly Mahars in Shindi, dates back to the *Namantar* movement. Some amongst the Mahars from Shindi were campaigning in favour of *Namantar* and the Marathas responded by threatening to burn down the Dalit-wada forcing some Dalits to move out of Shindi for good.

There were several other instances of violence against the Dalits in Shindi, which were not reported to the police. It was mostly the Mahars who were targeted but there were cases of violence against other Scheduled Castes as well, the most recent one against a Chambar woman in public view in early January 2009. The Chambar woman shared this with the women activists of MHA but had not dared to file a legal complaint.

In Shindi there were also various cases of violence against young Dalit men. Two youth were beaten up by the Marathas in the past on the suspicion of them having affairs with Maratha girls. In 1998, one of them was tied to an electric pole and thrashed whilst his brother was hung upside down in a well and dunked. In 2001, another was unrobed, his head was shaven, and he was taken through the village to the police station where a case was registered against him under Section 395 (Dacoity). This youth was kept in the police station for three days where he had begged to register a case against those who had beaten and humiliated him. However a simple Non Cognisable (NC) offence was registered against the Marathas.

Dalits, particularly men, cross the social and traditional boundaries of caste by indulging in what are considered as "vulgar" acts of love or sex with Maratha women. The pure personal spaces of the Marathas or for that matter any other twice-born caste are attached to the purity of "their" women and Dalit men loving or

assaulting upper-caste women is the gravest possible social violation.[79] One of the youth who was beaten up earlier by the Marathas elaborated, "Let me tell you. If this case [of violence against Dalit girls] would have been *ulta* (vice-versa) then the Marathas would not have even kept our bones for *panchnama* (post mortem)." (Interview: 23/1/09).

The gendered basis of Maratha male authority in the village adds to the blurred boundary between private and public at the village level as the "private" honour of the dominant castes is intertwined with the supreme status they hold in socio-cultural and political public spaces. Thus, the main village where the temple, panchayat building or water sources are located; though public are also rendered private in one way due to the ritual and political superiority that dominant castes hold in the village. Assertive Dalit entry into these spaces is seen as a deviant encroachment upon both the personal and public space of the Marathas. Nagaraj (1993) attributes contemporary violence against Dalits to the breaking down of the village justice system that gave the dominant castes an upper hand over the lives of Dalits. It was this control over the Dalits that made the "village" and the "Maratha household" supreme in status with the Maratha male as the head. Marathas thus club their honour and kingly (*rajeshahi*) claims making their sovereign claim over the village absolute. Dalit intrusion into public spaces in assertive forms put Maratha honour under stress in full public view. Nagaraj (1993: 34), thus, argues that 'the major problem with Indian rural society is that it cannot handle deviation now without resorting to violence and whatever little restraints it has, collapses when it comes to the question of handling untouchables.'

Maratha Rajeshahi against Dalit invasion of public spaces

> These Mundes [...] Vanjaris they are *tucch* (lowly). Some ten fifteen years back we didn't even touch them or allow them to get close, now they are everywhere [...] Did you see how they were recently beaten up by Marathas in

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[79] During fieldwork another incident of violence that happened was against a twenty-year-old Mang youth in a village in Aurangabad District. He was tied to an electric pole in front of Shivaji's statue and thrashed till he died. The Mang boy was said to be having a love affair with a Maratha girl (Repoter 2009).

Wadawani […] All the bikes with Bhagwan Baba [religious symbol of Vanjaris] on them were broken. (Fieldnotes: 23/8/08)

A Maratha[80] in his mid-30s shared the above in a casual conversation when a Munde (implies Vanjari) was called onto the stage of Annabhau Sathe Jayanti in Chinchwati Village. The Mundes are lower than the Marathas in caste status and the Maratha was sharing Maratha superiority in response to the sight of a Munde on the stage – a public space. The increased visibility of Vanjaris and the violation of caste distance from the Maratha's perspective had to be tamed with violence against Vanjaris and their bikes that carried the symbol of Bhagwan Baba. The increasing presence of Vanjaris in public spaces, however, may not be as objectionable as Dalits presence in public spaces for Marathas and the idea of caste hierarchy is most strictly practiced when it comes to Dalits.

There has been an increase in political violence against Dalits in Marathwada, between the years 1998 to 2004. Aurandabad division [Marathwada] recorded the highest number of atrocities against Dalits (Waghmare: undated). The participation of Marathas against Dalits in such violence is unusually high. This data unravels the conflict between semi-feudal caste practices of Marathwada and the politics and assertive commemorative performances of Dalits. The Rural Development Centre collected data for 3529 cases registered under the SC/ST (POA) Act between the years 1990 to 2009 in Marathwada. Amongst the cases, where caste of the accused was mentioned, Marathas were involved in 54 percent of cases.[81]

One, however, has to be cautious of an approach that evaluates specific groups of 'people' who dominate and does not situate this in a broader understanding of the 'society' (Hearn 2008). Hence, the relation between Marathas and Dalits and the dominance that affects this relationship cannot be restricted just to the relationship

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[80]He was not aware of my caste and purpose and I had joined him in mocking the speakers at the Jayanti.

[81] Muslims (12.58) were at the second place followed by Vanjaris (7.1) and the rest were various other smaller castes like Dhangar, Teli, Mali, Koli, and Brahmin. Most cases of atrocities were committed against Mahars (49.65 per cent) followed by Mangs (23.29) and Chambhars (4.93). In Beed Data was available for cases registered between the years 2000 to 2008 which has similar trends. Out of the cases where caste of the accused was mentioned the Marathas accounted for 53.24 per cent followed by Vanjari at 21 per cent and Muslims at 11.68 per cent (caste of the accused was not available in 5.71 per cent cases)

between Marathas and Dalits. It is difficult to treat Marathas as one whole as they are neither homogeneous nor do all Marathas participate in the violence against Dalits. It is, however, the powerful Marathas who influence the perspectives and positionality of the weak amongst them. Conflicts like *Namantar*, Khairlanji or Shindi are thus turned into sites for performing Maratha radicalism and resurrecting ideas/practices such as the *rajeshahi* of Shivaji (Maratha rule), which unite the *Kunbis* and Marathas into 'Marathas' against '*majlele'* Dalits.

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The making of Maratha identity in the post-Mandal period gained a new political turn as Maratha leaders lobbied for inclusion of a new caste called Kunbi-Maratha so as to include the Kunbis in the OBC list. Deshpande (2004a) suggests that the Marathas formed this category to serve the dual purpose of granting Marathas easy access to the backward quota if they wish whilst simultaneously protecting their status and glory as a ruling caste. Maratha elites thus innovatively mould the democratic processes to usurp development benefits and reconstruct *rajeshahi* (kingly status). Various Maratha social formations in Maharashtra, including Maratha Sevak Sangh which is the only Maratha formation known for its anti-Brahman(ic) stance, had come together in August 2008 to make two demands - one was scrapping of the SC/ST(POA) Act (referred to locally as atrocity *kaayda* [law]) and the other was reservation for Marathas based on 'economic' (not social) criteria.

Maratha assertion is mostly fuelled by Dalit assertion in the political fields of Marathwada where Maratha emotions are mobilised against valorisation of Ambedkar at the cost of Shivaji. It is interesting to note that Shivaji Jayanti for instance was not a norm in the villages and was not celebrated or performed in public earlier. One of the Dalits from Phulepimpalgaon said jokingly, "Earlier there was no Shivaji Jayanti in this village, they (Marathas) have started it recently" and added, "they are learning from us, they are now asking for reservations too, we made them *hushar* (wise)" (Informal discussion: 1/6/09). Maratha mobilisation differs, however, in that it is not against hierarchies of caste but about consolidation of Maratha caste and its Hindu leanings. For instance the symbol of *Raje* (king) that is found on most

of the Maratha owned vehicles (motor-bikes, jeeps, tractors) has religious connotations. There is a particular way of writing *Raje* on the vehicles. The color has to be necessarily saffron and a two-edged flag pops out of the syllable *je*. The popular war cry that Marathas give when they assemble to attack Dalits is *Jai Shivaji Jai Bhawani.*[82] Any criticism of Hinduism (which is common in Dalit movements) is radically opposed either through direct violence or through their thick political networks.

> Amol Galdhar, a leader of the NCP's Youth Wing was at the District Collector's office, dressed in white kurta pyjama, flashing thick gold chain, pendant and rings, and a mark of *kumkuk* (vermilion) on his forehead. He was there to give a letter of protest against the planned meeting of *Andha Shraddha Nirmulan Samiti* (a leftist organisation that organises awareness campaigns against blind faith practices) in Beed. He was of the opinion that faith (*shraddha*) is a personal matter and no one should interfere.
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> Amol walked inside the office with the Collector whereas Dalit activsts waited outside till the peon called them inside after five minutes. Inside the office, Amol had pulled up a chair, was sitting close to the officer and was resting his elbows on the officer's table, whereas Dalit activists sat in the chairs kept in front of the officer at a distance of at least five feet from the table. (Field notes: 21/9/08).

Only one Maratha politician visited Shindi village under the pressure of Dalit mobilisation. Leaders of Maratha non-party political formations reacted to Dalit mobilisation on the other hand by mobilising opinion and people against Dalits and the protective legislations they are entitled to.

Akhil Bhartiya Chava Maratha Yuva Sanghatan (All India Lion Cubs Maratha Youth Organisation) is a militant Maratha youth organisation which is referred to as Chava (Lion Cubs) locally. Chava mobilises actively whenever there is a case of

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[82] Jai Bhavani (victory to goddess bhavani) Jai Shivaji (victory to Shivaji) is a slogan generally used by militant Maratha social and political formations including Shiv Sena. It is actively used in public gatherings and while attacking Dalits and Muslims in Marathwada.

caste atrocity and Dalit mobilisation. They also circulate literature and musical CDs that highlight how Dalits are 'misusing' the law and marginalising the "brave race of Marathas". The boards put up by Chava in villages and towns have pictures of Sambaji (Shivajis'son also referred to as Chava) forcing open the jaws of a lion with his bare hands. A text that is invariably written above this picture states 'such is the caste of Marathas who open the jaws of a lion with bare hands to count its teeth.'

In a protest march in Beed on 30/1/09, Chava demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) enquiry into the Shindi and other cases of caste violence as they felt that the cases were just minor quarrels that were being given a 'caste' colour by Dalits. On 26/2/09 Shalinitai Patil[83] from western Maharashtra, founder of another militant Maratha social formation called *Kranti Sena* (Revolution Army), and Jawale Patil (Chava President) held a press conference and warned the police and the government against favouring Dalits in the Shindi case They reiterated that the government should not take steps that pamper Dalits who file wrong cases for money and also reminded that it is not only Dalits who vote in the elections.

One of the important disagreements that Maratha organisations had with the Dalit activists was over the nature of crime in Shindi. They insisted that there was no *dhind*[84] (caste based humiliation) involved in the violence against the girls. Whereas Dalit activists maintained that beating the girls through the village streets was intended to humiliate the girls in public.

The Maratha socio-political organisations despite their political might were worried that the Dalit protest might lead to jailing of the accused Marathas. When it comes to accessing the state, however, the example of Amol Galdhar (above) illustrates how

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[83] Shalini-tai (tai means elder sister and is added to connote respect) is a Maratha leader from western Maharastra and wife of ex-Chief Minister of Maharashtra Vasant Dada Patil. She is known in Maharashtra for her anti-Dalit, anti-Ambedkar and pro-Shivaji stance. She was MLA of NCP earlier but was removed from NCP because of her anti-reservation and anti-Ambedkar speeches. Both Chava and Kranti Sena innovatively combine religion (Hindu), region (Maharashtra) and caste (Maratha) in their political performances.

[84] Dhind/dhindi refers to processions carried out in public that pass through village streets. These are generally religious ones but dhind can also be carried out locally to humiliate or punish social wrongs of villagers, particularly Dalits. This involves varied acts of humiliating like blackening of face, making Dalits eat human faeces, shaving heads and taking them around on a donkey. Section 3(1)3 of SC/ST (PoA) Act makes such humiliation in public of Dalits punishable.

Maratha leaders are privileged compared to Dalit activists. The differential access for Dalits to the state and its mechanisms of justice affects the possibilities of securing justice. It is not surprising that out of the 2980 cases of caste violence registered in Marathwada between 1995 to 2005 only 57 resulted in conviction (Waghmare undated).

Similarly the status and dominance of Marathas expands over the political sphere of Shindi. The local panchayat in Shindi is one dominated by Marathas who also constitute a numerical majority here. Marathas have around 250 households, the Dalits have around 100 households and the OBCs (Parit [washerman], Malis [gardener], Sutar [carpenter] and Kumbhar [potter]) around 50. Two Maratha Patils who are local leaders of BJP and NCP "settle" most cases of violence or other disputes in the village through their traditional (patil) and political (panchayat) authority. The Government of Maharashtra has a special campaign called the Mahatma Gandhi *Tantamukt Gaav Mohim* (Conflict Free Village Campaign) that encourages the "settling" of conflicts at the village level and assures extra development grants or prizes to villages, which are 'conflict free'. The objective of this campaign is to ensure that conflicts do not arise at all in the village and village level committees across castes are formed for this purpose (GoM undated). The attempt from above is thus toward a consensus process of solving conflicts through deliberations. Such deliberation or 'settling' of caste conflicts at the village level invariably means that the perpetrators of violence against Dalits go free. Since the case was not settled at the village level in Shindi, both the powerful Marathas in Shindi despite having contrasting political affiliations lobbied in various ways with the police and the administration to save the Marathas involved in violence against the Dalit girls.

The dominance of Marathas in Shindi village had scared Dalits supporting the affected Dalit girls' family. A Mahar youth had moved out of Shindi as he had a role in getting the police case registered. Dalits from Shindi were apprehensive about getting any *nyay* (justice) due to the economic and political might of Marathas. One of the apprehensive Dalit youth said, "We can never win this battle and therefore should not fight it."(Informal Discussion: 24/1/09). The fears of the Dalits of Shindi

turned out to be true, as eight of the eleven accused in the case were not arrested for long. Dalits, by contrast, had to face social boycott in the village: the electricity connection to the Dalit locality was turned off, Dalits were denied *kirana* (grocery) in the village shops and were not allowed to use the tempos/rickshaws owned by Marathas for commuting. Over the following months, gave security to Dalits for sometime, however the hut of a Mahar was set on fire by some Marathas on 5th February 2009.

On 20/2/09, the accused Marathas also managed to secure interim bail from the High Court bench in Aurangabad for all those who had escaped the police arrest. Their bail application was rejected at a lower court in Ambajogai earlier. They celebrated this 'victory' by distributing sweets and bursting crackers in the village. Section 438 of Indian Code of Criminal Procedure that allows anticipatory bail is not applicable if a case is registered under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. However an amendment to the Section that came about in Maharashtra in 1992 allows the High Court's intervention. By bursting crackers and distributing sweets the Marathas proved to the Mahars in Shindi that the atrocity law was not greater than their political might.

The Marathas benefit from their networks and their economic and political status in continuing their traditional social authority in newer institutions of democracy like panchayats.[85] Dalits on the other hand may succumb to the patronising practices of Marathas. It is worth noting here that the *gaairaan* land in Shindi has not been 'encroached' by Dalits assertively but 'distributed' by the two prominent Patils as if it were their own private land. Assertive 'encroachment' by Dalits would have meant a challenge to the local Maratha control of the village polity. The dominant Marathas, therefore, favoured Dalit families who were subservient by 'giving' them good quality and larger tracts of land.[86] On the other hand Dalits who participated in *gaairaan* rallies and meetings organised by RPI and MHA for regularising the

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[85] See Jeffrey (2000) for a detailed study of how the intermediate *Jat* castes perpetuate their economic and social advantage through political networks in UP.
[86] Two g*aairan* cultivators (one Mang and another Chambhar) who were given lands attended the press conference organised by Chava in Kaij to vouch for the non-existence of caste politics (*jatiya rajkaran*) and the peace that exists in the village.

encroached *gaairaan* lands were questioned by the Marathas: 'Why do you go for protest despite us giving you the *gaairaan*?' (Interview: 23/1/09). Dalits from Shindi, who joined Dalit movements and rallies aimed at pressurising the state to regularise *gaairan* cultivations, were asked not to do so. Their participation in such protests and rallies that sought approval of the modern state to cultivate *gaairan* legally was also seen as a protest against the local authority of Marathas in Shindi.

The socio-political existence of Dalits, if assertive, becomes a challenge to the forms of kingly status that the Marathas try to resurrect through local institutions of democracy. Violence against Dalits is thus a function of their assertive socio-political and cultural behaviour. Some Dalits from Shindi particularly told me that since a Mahar youth joined the BSP and erected a board of the BSP in the village there was a lot of angst against him and other Dalits who joined him as it was seen as a move against the two Patils.

Historically, Mahars in Marathwada have been targets of the Marathas because of their conversion to Buddhism, *Namantar* and their protest against traditional occupation and roles. However, the current violence against Dalits is localised and may be evoked by varied acts of self-respect or assertion that Dalits from any caste may initiate. Dalits upset the caste relations and politics by questioning both the socio-cultural and politico-economic practices embedded in the traditional patron-client relationships that Marathas try to sustain in new forms.

Caste atrocity, the state and Dalit movement mobilisation

Dalit movements mostly rely on state mechanisms despite various challenges and a high probability of them failing to secure justice. The informal or traditional modes of justice delivery at the village level are mostly avoided, as it is the Dalit challenge to traditional authority that causes violence against them. Dalits challenge the dominance and violence against them by seeking justice outside the village through legal measures particularly the SC/ST (PoA) Act. On the other hand, Maratha socio-political organisations in Maharashtra, particularly Marathwada regularly mobilise protests for the scrapping of this act. The Dalit activists, despite being aware of the shortcomings of legal measures, consider the atrocity *kaayda* as a vital protection.

Perhaps aware of this, these efforts to secure justice are met with challenges at the local police and other administrative offices as officials hesitate to register such cases as 'atrocity' cases under political pressure.

Sanju, a BSP worker from a neighbouring village had taken the girls of Shindi to the police station and to the local hospital. He informed me that the Police Inspector at the police station was not willing to register the case until Sanju used his political contacts and made one of the senior BSP leaders in Beed speak to the Additional Superintendent of Police who is a Chambar and supports BSP. It was this intervention that helped registering the FIR at the police station under the SC/ST (POA) act. The unwilling inspector had delayed registering the case till 1.00 am on 20th February whereas the time on the FIR was noted as 10.00 pm of the previous day. Sanju was also offered a sum of Rupees 50,000 to settle the matter and not register the case under SC/ST (POA) Act.[87] He had also consulted some Dalit lawyers regarding the sections of the SC/ST (POA) Act under which the case could be registered. This was influenced by the previous experiences of Dalit activists where the police register the case under a wrong section making the possibility of punishing the accused impossible.[88] Instead of accepting the lure of money from Marathas, Sanju used his contacts with some sympathetic journalists who carried this news the next day, making the issue politically significant for Dalits, Marathas, and the state machinery. On a later day he informed me that Shindi was an 'opportunity' to deal with the Marathas that he had been waiting for so long. "I have filed atrocity cases in all the surrounding villages of Shindi including my own. It was only Shindi that I was not able to get and finally I got it" (Fieldnotes: 6/5/09). Despite their political and economic dominance, the accused Marathas attempted to avoid legal measures in settling the dispute and lured the activist through money.

Sanju however came close to facing arrest and police violence later as tension flared up between Dalit youth and Chava activists around the villages neighbouring Shindi. A case under Section 395 (Dacoity) was registered against him. However, he escaped

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[87] This offer was made by a worker of one of the RPI factions on behest of the Marathas (Informal conversation with the BSP worker: 20/1/09).
[88] Rao (2009) has detailed the use and abuse of legal categories like that of SC/ST (PoA) Act in denying justice for Dalits.

arrest and fled to Mumbai as a Dalit lady police constable informed him about the Local Crime Branch searching for him and suggested that he left Beed altogether. Dalit activists thus make use of their political networks from their marginal location. These worked marginally in their favour and use of networks was therefore coupled with protests which were not always peaceful.

Dalit movements mobilised for protests against the Shindi incident and the callous state response. Such mobilisation and protests were dispersed and occurred at different times but were homogeneous in purpose. Factions of RPI held demonstrations on 20th January. BSP organised a *rasta roko* (road blockade) at Massajog village on 23rd and on Republic Day (26th January). It was only BSP's mobilisation that had non-Dalits protesting for Dalits. The group that blocked the guardian minister's car was led by a Muslim leader and speeches were made by a Brahman and a Muslim during the *rasta roko*.

Dalit protests are not always peaceful and can turn violent against the state institutions. The doctor at Kaij government hospital had not hospitalised one of the gravely injured girls from Shindi on 19th January. Instead he had sent the girl home with some first aid for her wounds. Dalit activists saw this move as clearly influenced by political pressure.[89] On the next day the girl had fallen unconscious and needed immediate medical intervention. Dalit activists visiting the village took her to the Taluka public hospital and also demanded an explanation from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for their negligence the day before.

> The CMO replied, 'the doctor on duty may have not felt the need to hospitalise the girl.' Workers of RPI had by now started crowding the CMO's office. One of the workers of MHA said to the CMO, 'Not hospitalising the girl also means that the crime is not grave, nor are the injuries. It also is a way of saving the culprits.' Someone from amongst those standing behind said, 'This is *jatiwad* [casteism] and he [the CMO] is trying to protect his caste fellows.' A junior doctor in the mean time was sent to examine the girl. The doctor informed the

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[89] Dalit activists were of the opinion that the personal assistant of a local NCP MLA (who is from Chambar caste and elected on the SC reserved seat) had influenced the hospital authorities on the behest of Amar Patil. This MLA was also the public health minister till December 2008.

activists that the girl's blood pressure was low. He gave her some injections and asked the nurses to prepare intravenous (IV) drips. Some of the angry activists later started pelting stones, breaking the windows of the hospital building and ambulances. (Field notes: 20/1/08)

Similarly on 26th January, ten Dalit women activist of MHA planned to humiliate the Guardian Minister from Maratha caste of Beed by hurling glass bangles [a sign of femininity] at him in protest as no Minister had visited Shindi or condemned the incident.[90] The police were cautious and had deployed a woman police inspector along with two women constables. They asked the women activists to get rid of their bags that they were carrying. Some women activists had hidden the bangles meant for attacking the minister in their blouses. Dalit women's bodies in this surprise attack rendered the police officials and even the Minister momentarily vulnerable. The women activists were arrested later.

> Alka refused to get into the police jeep complaining that there was no space for her to sit. A male constable walked towards her (in an authoritative way) amidst all the commotion. Alka did not succumb, "touch me and you will see what happens", she said to the constable who moved back.

> One of constables vented his anger, "had they been men, we would have broken their legs" (Fieldnotes: 26/1/09)

Sen (2007) suggests that the violent activism of women may also be part of their agency in making their violent public role indispensable and challenging the mechanical inclusion of women in male dominated movements. Dalit women's (violent) activism though slightly different from Dalit men's activism largely revolves around public spaces. Dalit women activists in this case had made the state and state officials (especially men) temporarily vulnerable through the 'cunning' use of their 'female' bodies (considered docile sexual objects prone to violation). It is

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[90] A Dalit Police Inspector in Beed had provided an opportunity to women MHA workers for meeting the visiting Guardian Minister. This official was not aware of the intentions of MHA activists. In an informal conversation with the activists of MHA few days earlier they had accepted that the police are *jatiwadi* and few Dalits and OBCs who are sensitive to the Dalit cause work under a lot of pressure (Field notes: 24/1/09). He was recently relocated to Beed police station but was transferred out of Beed immediately after the incident of attack on the Minister took place.

however difficult to find Dalit women or activists engaging in violence against rival communities or individuals.

There were more instances of violence against Dalits on Republic Day (26th January) in other villages of Beed. In Ladewadgaon of Kaij Taluka a Mang Sarpanch [chairperson of village panchayat] was stopped from hoisting the national flag and was slapped by some Marathas. In Khadaki Ghat village of Beed Taluka another Mang landless Sarpanch's hut was set on fire. The dispute here in the *Gram Sabha* was over the allocation of two houses under the Rajiv Gandhi *Gruha Vikas Yojana* (housing development scheme). It was decided that one of the houses will be allocated to a Mang which the ex-Sarpanch from Maratha caste opposed. Some Marathas heckled and pushed the Mang Sarpanch and abused him on caste lines in the Gram Sabha. The houses of the Sarpanch and his mother were set on fire while the Gram Sabha was in progress. Both sides had filed FIRs against each other at the police station. However it was the Sarpanch who was arrested based on the FIR filed by Marathas. This was done despite the Mang Sarpanch registering his FIR 20 minutes earlier than the Marathas. The Mang Sarpanch was arrested as a 'precautionary' measure to prevent further violence. Several sections of the Indian Penal Code were registered against him - section 143 (unlawful assembly), 147 (rioting), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 34 (criminal action by several persons in furtherance of the common intention).

After the sudden rise in cases of violence against Dalits, the police and District administration's inaction and the filing of false cases under Section 395 against Dalit activists, various social and political Dalit organisations came together in Beed town for a meeting to discuss and plan a strategy in the lobby of a government rest house. Around eighty Dalit male activists and the leader of MHA's women's wing participated in the meeting. Dalit workers participating in this meeting represented diverse, ideologically competing as well as contrasting political and social groups like Congress (I), Bahujan Samaj Party, Republican Party of India (A), Bhartiya Janata Party, Shiv Sena, Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), Democratic Party of India (DPI), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), CPI (M) and Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan, Republican

Panthers, Dr. Ambedkar Advocates Association, and BAMCEF. Those participating were from various castes like Mahar, Mang, Valmiki (Bhangi) and Chambar. Besides Dalits there was one member from Dhangar (OBC) caste who was part of NCP and had come along with his Dalit friend. A senior leader who is associated with NCP and is also a leader of DPI (Democratic Party of India, a marginal Mang political formation) was made the *Adhyaksha* (Chair) of this meeting.

Most participants discussed their helplessness and the involvement of both the NCP and BJP in influencing the administration and police so as to help the accused. Some advocated violence for violence, which seemed to be an idea most appreciated through applause but was not pursued. Some quoted Ambedkar and the need for Dalits to move out of villages. Dalit workers of major political formations like NCP and BJP-Shiv Sena acknowledged that their position in those parties is a marginal one and they are helpless. One of the Shiv Sena workers said,

> The *prashasan* (administration) is not on our side and all the parties are involved in this. Be it Shiv Sena, Rashtrawadi (NCP), BJP all are *jatiwadi*. I work for Shiv Sena, they cannot do anything in this regard. They say do *nished* (condemn the incident), how will *nished* help, you are humiliated, beaten, killed, how will *nished* help? [Speech recorded: 27/1/09]

Deliberation on strategy in such a diverse composition of participants was not easy. An argument broke between the workers of BSP and Congress as the Congress affiliate was protesting the idea of criticising political parties. This was however brought under control by the Chair who summed up the discussion calling for a united protest on 29th January in front of District Collector's office. He commented on how political parties like NCP and BJP used Dalits and also emphasised that it was not Marathas against whom Dalits had to fight

> None of these parties belong to your forefathers (laughter here). All our people there are doing *rakhandari* (watchmen) […] Please remember that the *rajyakartas* (political rulers) here are not afraid of *samajik andolans* (social movements) [...] All the political leaders know that all those (Dalits) who are leading *samajik andolans* are their own people [affiliated to parties]. They will

call you in minutes and say, 'Ai AC [referring to himself] be quiet' (loud laughter and claps here).

No caste is bad; it is a matter of *pravruti* (inclination/leaning towards Brahmanism). We have to fight against *pravrutti* and not against any caste. If we think of attacking a caste then what about Shahu Maharaj who honoured Babasaheb. He too was Maratha, so we cannot say that all Maratha's are *jatiwadi* and nor can we say that all amongst us are Ambedkarites (laughter here). [Speech Recorded: 27/1/09]

This meeting was followed by a protest rally on 29th January. All the Dalit socio-political groups united under a network that was called *Samajik Nyay Sangharsh Kruti Samiti* (Social Justice Action Committee). Around 1000 people participated in the protest in front of the District Collector's office. Some leaders gave speeches and a signed memorandum was submitted to the DC's office. All the local newspapers covered this news of local Dalit groups coming together and Dalit unity. MHA along with other Dalit NGOs in Mumbai lobbied with the National Scheduled Caste Commission and its members visited the concerned villages in the following days.

Dalit protests, both violent and peaceful, coupled with their use of social and political networks had led to the state machinery responding. One of the Patils who was threatening the witnesses in Shindi was externed [forced to leave] out of Shindi by police, some police officials were suspended for their carelessness in giving protection to Dalits in Shindi, and the doctor on duty at Kaij hospital was suspended for some time. Both the Dalit girls of Shindi were treated in Ambajogai Government Medical Hospital for more than a week. Compensation was provided to some of the affected Dalit families of Shindi and Khadaki Ghat by the District Collector under the provisions of the SC/ST (POA) Act.

The situation remained tense in Shindi till the end of my fieldwork in June 2009. After securing bail the Maratha families continued to pressurise the Dalit girls and their parents for an out of court settlement which the girls firmly rejected. The Ambedkar Jayanti in Shindi was celebrated despite the Marathas threatening violence if the procession entered the village. For Sanjeevani, the woman who

witnessed the girls beating, the Jayanti in Shindi was a success not just because the procession passed through the village but because, 'Dalit youth from the neighbouring village came and danced in the Jayanti and this made the Jayanti good.' (Fieldnotes: 19/5/09). The political performance of Dalit youth coupled with the commemorative celebration of Ambedkar in village public streets was also Sanjeevani's mode of protest against daily humiliations and exclusions that Dalits face.

On the other hand the Sarpanch from Ladewadgaon who was slapped for trying to hoist the Indian national flag on Republic Day did not register a police complaint despite being approached by Dalit activists and the matter was 'settled' at the village level through an informal mechanism. The slap and the humiliation caused in 'public' was forgotten.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has dwelt on the centrality of public spaces in democratisation processes, Dalit claims to equal citizenship in public spaces, the resulting violence against Dalits and the complex nature of engagement with the state in Dalit politics. Public spaces in rural Marathwada are embedded in caste hierarchies and are intertwined with the status privileges that dominant Marathas enjoy. These privileges blur the personal and public boundaries in public spaces in particular. For dominant castes the personal is guided by caste superiority, purity and honour and is performed and expanded in public spaces through the dispersed institutions of the liberal state. Not surprisingly the state engages in suppressing the conflict and on suggesting measures that could settle the conflict through communication at the village itself. Therefore understanding the state as strategic relation or strategy, is instructive for practices of resistance (Bierbricher 2007).

Dalit assertion in public spaces represents a critique of the caste sociality that reproduces the hierarchies of caste and the untouchable status of Dalits in insidious forms. Dalit critique, critical political performance and the resulting crisis/violence affects both Maratha authority and Dalit exclusion. Looking for civil society and its workings in rational communicative action or forging consensus makes little sense in

the grassroots of Marathwada. Civil society guarantees only the existence of the public and not 'public consensus' and a strong civil society guarantees the existence of conflict (Flyvberg 1998).

Dalit activists prefer public spaces and state interventions to the traditional modes of justice mechanisms which sustain the prevalence of caste prejudices. Most violence pertaining to Dalits in rural Marathwada is associated with public spaces and Dalit claims to dignity or assertion in public spaces. Assertive actions of Dalits may not necessarily be associated with identity or ideology and may pertain to individual mobility; however the backlash against individual/group assertion or mobility of Dalits is mostly related to caste or turned into a caste issue by dominant Marathas. Dalits and Dalit movement actors are not always victims of such dominance and they too make use of caste and the state from their marginal locations. They thus attempt to create dignified space for themselves in 'public' and also actively participate in the process of democratisation revising socio-ritual beliefs and practices that dominate public spaces – a process which is full of conflict, violence and contradictions.

Collective identities and anti-caste (?) movements in a caste society

Violence against Dalits is also a function of collective identities of protest they forge which may not fit well within the localised caste practices and beliefs. Dalit movements deploy diverse and competing 'collective identities' around which they mobilise for change. The relationship between Dalits and caste is a contested one, while some scholars reveal the 'consensus' where untouchables share the ideas of their ritual inferiority and reproduce (replicate) caste hierarchies (Moffatt 1979), others highlight the 'conflict' and Dalit challenge to caste (Deliege 1992; Gorringe 2005). The movements that I focussed on under my study fit into the conflict thesis where untouchable castes challenge their ritual inferiority and other exclusions through forging varied movement based collective identities and actions. Study of social movements as a process of collective identity formation among relatively autonomous individuals (Melucci 1989) can helps develop a processual understanding of collective identity formation in Dalit movements. The next two

chapters present the strategies of anti-caste collective identity formation in BSP and MHA respectively and their use of caste (*jati*) and cultural repertoires.

<div align="center">Chapter 7</div>

<div align="center">**The making of "Bahujan"**</div>

<div align="center">**Caste and cultural repertoires in anti-caste politics of BSP**</div>

> In our country there are people who believe in various castes and religions. But within these, the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes under the Varna system – the casteist (*jatiwadi*) social system – did not have equal rights to progress in every walk of life like other castes or to lead a life with *man-samman* (dignity). Meaning these classes (uses word *varga* [class]) did not have equal rights of education, jobs, farming or business, voting or even contesting elections. But there were various saints and great men amongst Dalits and OBCs who opposed this unequal social system, the *varna* system (Mayawati Speech: 15/3/10)[91]

Mayawati opened her speech with the above lines in a massive rally at Lucknow to commemorate 25 years of BSP's formation, where the number of participants was estimated by the mainstream media to be around one to two million people. The 'Bahujan' centric orientation of BSP was reaffirmed in this rally. The anti-*varna* rhetoric of Mayawati and her affirmation of Bahujan symbols, leaders and ideology and simultaneous rejection of Gandhi and Congress were a matter of debate during the next few weeks in the English-language mass media. They debated two issues following from this event. One was the huge garland of notes that Mayawati was presented on this occasion. The other was whether the BSP was reverting to a 'Dalit' political agenda, and was abandoning the much-celebrated Dalit-Brahman combine. Mayawati's referring to the *varna* system caused a kind of panic in the middle class, and they responded with public deliberations over the 'vulgar' display of wealth and her parochial Dalit (not Bahujan) agenda.

The 'Bahujan' character of BSP has been a matter of debate in academic circles and its formation a challenge for BSP cadres. Jaffrelot (2003: 497 - 498) contests Pai's (2002) claim that BSP in 1990s developed a Dalit-oriented policy. He presents BSP

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[91] Accesses from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Em7PvREoTiw

as a Bahujan party in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, and observes, 'Kanshi Ram continuously tried to transform the party into the crucible of the *Bahujan samaj*, by aggregating the Dalits, OBCs and, to a lesser extent, the Tribals and Muslims'. Similarly Chandra (2000) explores the multi-ethnic character of BSP in Hoshiarpur. She suggests that BSP is a multi-ethnic party that makes 'overt 'appeals (compared to Congress' 'covert' appeals) to ethnic identity. BSP's comparative ability to provide political representation led to its rise over Congress. Recent research on BSP in north India suggests BSP to be not a party of Dalits or Bahujans but a "catch-all party" (Jaffrelot 2006).While the non-Dalit vote-base of BSP can be termed volatile, the Dalit vote has largely remained intact; in the 2009 general elections more than half of BSP's electorate were Dalits (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2009). In Maharashtra too, most of BSP's support comes from Dalits (Palshikar 2007b).

What are the BSP's grassroots strategies of mobilising Dalit and non- Dalit votes and support? How are caste differences within Dalits dealt with? Most of the studies have tended to focus on the mobilisation process of BSP in North India; non-north States are missing due to the marginal position of BSP in these states. In this chapter, therefore, I will fill this lacuna. No Dalit party in Maharashtra is a formidable third force that could attract Dalits merely by patronage; BSP however remains a key player amongst the Dalit parties, and constitutes an important element in Dalit counter politics. Instead of an instrumental approach followed by Pai (2002) who focuses on the macro *mobilisational* strategies (electoral and coalitional) of BSP, and Chandra (2004), who explores ethnic favouritism in the Indian patronage democracy, I pursue here a qualitative approach to explore the formation of the 'Bahujan' collective identity at the grassroots in Marathwada. Similar studies point to the BSP's use of symbolic and cultural means in expanding its base amongst the Dalits in north India (Jaoul 2006; Narayan 2006; Loynd 2009) By reference to social movement studies the focus here is on the construction of 'we-feeling' or community (Melucci 1989; Gorringe 2005).

Chandra's (2004) instrumentalist approach partially ignores the strategic deployment of cultural-ideological material in BSP's mobilisation. Similarly, Pai (2002: 24)

observes that the BSP does not pursue an 'Ambedkarist' agenda of challenging caste. Such an agenda would ideally require purging Dalits politically and culturally from the Hindu community (Rao 2009: 158). A key question of relevance here is, does BSP indulge in anti-caste politics or does it merely represent the political ambitions of Dalit elites, as suggested by Pai (2002)?

Kanshiram had argued and mobilised for the formation of a broader political community that he called Bahujan (I discussed this in chapter four) with Dalits and an Ambedkarite ideology at its core. He avoided the concept "Dalit", preferring to use the term "Bahujan" from the very beginning, utilising Phule's analogy of *shudra-atishudra* vs. Aryans (Brahmans). On the other hand the BSP has clearly moved beyond its Mulniwasi (Bahujans as indigenous people) and anti-Aryan (Brahmans and other castes) rhetoric and the scale of overt attacks on upper castes has come down. A closer look at the portion of Mayawati's speech that I began with unravels the complex dynamism in BSP's (anti?) caste politics. *Varna* is constructed as an 'absolute' hierarchical system by Mayawati, whereas castes are recognised as discrete categories with varied beliefs and ideology, caste categories that are part of the 'constitutional' scheme, i.e., SC, ST and OBC are imagined as humiliated and deprived 'Bahujans' and their 'various' saints and traditions are said to have challenged the *varna* system. While the mainstream media represented the anti-*varna* rhetoric (and public display of wealth) of Mayawati was synonymous with a Dalit political agenda, they ignored her continuous reference to the Constitution and to cultural traditions of protest carried out by Bahujan saints and *mahapurushs*. It is this merging of tradition and modern that I explore at length in this chapter.

Dalit and OBC cadres of BSP from Beed attended this large-scale commemoration rally addressed by Mayawati. They had paid from their limited resources to be part of this commemoration. An instrumentalist approach cannot explain this voluntary spirit of BSP. Like Kanshiram and Mayawati, the BSP cadres in their local praxis emphasise the collective identity of 'Bahujan' who represent 85 per cent of population and not 'Dalit'. But they also mobilise around caste identities like those of Mang, Boudha (Mahar) and Charmakar as they attempt to forge this imagined

Bahujan collective. It is this tension and fusion of particular (*jati*) and collective (Bahujan) in the formation of anti-caste Bahujan collective that I present in this chapter. I detail here the mobilisation strategies of BSP in Marathwada, considering carefully the use of caste as cultural and ideological material in the construction of 'Bahujan' collective identity where Dalits are at the core of these mobilisation processes. I argue that BSP's caste repertoires strategically deal with both the 'difference' and 'hierarchical' elements of caste and construct a counter-politics where cultural-ideological roots of every caste are identified in anti-caste histories thus contributing to the deepening of Ambedkarite politics. Thus the dynamism of BSP's socio-cultural mobilisation and its version of anti-caste politics are also linked to the dynamism of caste hierarchy itself.

This chapter begins by briefly presenting the centrality of Ambedkar and Ambedkarism in electoral and Dalit politics of Maharashtra, where the factions of RPI have come to be synonymous with Ambedkarism. Though they engage in assertive Dalit politics they are also seen as parties specifically associated with Mahar radicalism. It is in this context that BSP tries to move beyond Mahars to include other Dalits and non-Dalits in its fold. In the following sections I describe the BSP's attempts in Beed to mobilise three social categories -- Chambars, OBCs and Muslims – and present the accommodative and strategic mobilisation of BSP cadres to challenge the identity of BSP as the party of 'untouchables'. BSP's Ambedkarism is thus broad-based so as to include dissenting Dalits and non-Dalits to form a Bahujan collective from below that has anti-caste cultural groundings.

Voting for RPI as religion and Ambedkar as God in Maharashtra Dalit politics
The major challenge for consolidation of non-Dalit support for BSP in Maharashtra is the relatively low population of Dalits (11 percent as compared to 21 percent in UP) and the presence of various competing Dalit Party (RPI) factions that have a longer history and who claim a direct lineage from Ambedkar. The non-Mahar Dalits have largely remained outside the purview of RPI influence. Varied factions of RPI called themselves the true heirs of Ambedkar and were identified mostly with Mahars. Voting for RPI in electoral politics in post-Ambedkar phase thus came to be

intertwined with Ambedkarism and Ambedkarite politics, which constructed local Dalit politics well before the emergence of the BSP in Maharashtra.

Some elder supporters of RPI I spoke to felt that not voting for RPI was like betraying Ambedkar. Assertive Mahars affiliated with the various RPI factions ended up voting for the alliance partners of RPI - mostly Congress. Some others had lost hope in electoral politics because, as they saw it, the RPI had fallen into an 'alliance trap'. For example, Dhammananda is a staunch Ambedkarite in her mid-fifties who did not vote in elections anymore. *'You have to become lachar* (helpless) *if you vote for them; we will have to bow in front of them'*. She considered the old and united RPI as 'our' party and added, *'I will support RPI till I die, as it is Babasaheb's party'* (Fieldnotes: 13/4/09). RPI not being united and not having an independent identity in contesting elections meant for Dhammananda that no other party could represent Ambedkar and his ideology. Due to lack of Dalit unity and the missing unified 'Ambedkar's RPI' Dhammananda preferred to stay away from voting.

While Dhammananda has given up voting, others have taken one of the factions of RPI as the path that Ambedkarite Dalits should follow. While some Mahars merge Ambedkar and Buddha with other Hindu Gods for worshipping (Ganguly 2004), other Mahars strictly worship Ambedkar and Buddha, preferring to reject Hindu Gods and rituals in totality. They have merged Ambedkar, Buddha and the Constitution to construct a new kind of *bhakti* where the old gods are replaced with modern gods and symbols. There is thus an internal critique and competition for being 'true' Ambedkarites within Dalit politics.

Kailash, a BSP worker, commented critically on commitment that turns RPI into a kind of religion. 'Yes, some of our people are like that, they would even worship Babasaheb's dog as a god.' (Fieldnotes: 9/4/09). BSP workers follow Kanshiram in criticising RPI's tendency to work only among the Dalits, and even more especially amongst the Buddhist Mahars. Following Kanshiram, they term RPI's Ambedkarists as *chamchas* who are also labelled as *gulams*. Shantabai Salave in her early sixties is currently a BSP supporter and has travelled from voting for CPI when it was strong,

through Congress (RPI alliance) and is presently a BSP supporter. Before voting for BSP she voted where the *samaj* [Mahars] voted under the influence of their leaders [called *pudharis* locally]. She had moved to BSP after attending some cadre camps organised in the village. The supporters of BSP consider its politics to be better than the RPI groups particularly because of its independence from non-Ambedkarite parties.

> S: Why not support RPI?
>
> SS: They go to Congress-BJP.
>
> S: What is wrong if one goes to Congress-BJP?
>
> SS: No, No [...] It has to be 'all Ambedkar'. Our people contest in Congress and we think that they are ours (*aapale*). But they are sold out for money […] I tell these boys whatever mark [votes] you get is fine. Why go after money? RPI too is ours but they follow their [Congress] wishes. It is like we are cleaning at their place. This is how I feel (laughs). (Interview: 5/3/09)

The Ambedkarism of BSP thus is not radically distinct from groups like RPI as Ambedkar is at the centre of all their political processes and imaginations. The cadre of BSP proudly reminds Dalits that the symbol of 'elephant' Ambedkar had chosen for RPI was 'lost' by the factions of RPI as they could not garner enough votes and the BSP 'got it back'. The cadres, however, move beyond the critique of RPI to target major political parties and their ideology as inspired by Manu-wad.

Both in the political rallies and in cadre camps the workers and leaders of BSP rework history to remind their listeners that universal adult franchise in India was a gift from Ambedkar so that even poor, un-propertied and uneducated people shall decide who the 'rulers' can be. 'Selling' one's vote for money, liquor or meat distributed by dominant parties is therefore considered as step against, or betrayal (*dokha*) of Ambedkar. All non-BSP parties are seen as non/anti-Ambedkarite, who naturally lack the quest for implementing (Ambedkar's) Constitution of India. The Constitution of Ambedkar is thus turned into a manifesto of BSP.

Jogdand [District Secretary of BSP in Beed and a Mang] recalled a speech in 1993 of Kanshiram where he spoke on how to implement Ambedkarism [...] For Ambedkarism to be implemented the Constitution has to be implemented properly. If the Constitution is implemented India will become a great country in world, but how does one implement the Constitution? That is what BSP is doing. BSP is the only political party in the world that comes to power without any manifesto (Fieldnotes 21/1/09).

As discussed in chapter four, symbols of Ambedkar, Kanshiram and Mayawati have surfaced in some Dalit households. Along with such symbols is also introduced the Constitution as an Ambedkarite mission – yet to be achieved. Mobilisation of such Ambedkarite emotions and hopes has seen voters of BSP spending money from their limited means, either directly contributing to the party or paying for their own travel to participate in rallies and meetings. Such evoking of the voluntary spirit in party politics is not merely a function of reworking 'true' Ambedkarite ideology in BSP's mobilisation and strategic use of caste pride. Communal anti-caste histories and their intersections with class issues also contribute in consolidating support for BSP.

Making of the 'Bahujan' collective identity: merging humiliation and deprivation

Chandra (2000) observes that humiliation and not deprivation is conceived as 'the' problem in BSP and the cure is seen in political representation and not material benefits. The cadres of BSP in Marathwada similarly emphasised humiliation and a quest for self-respect as important reasons for their passionate voluntary engagement in BSP. They incorporate class issues and aspirations in their repertoires, however, in order to situate the material deprivation of Bahujans, particularly Dalits, within the cultural repertoires of contention that construct 'Manu' and Manuwad as the 'Other'. One of the elder members of BSP explained the intersections of poverty with Manuwad.

It is a *chakravyuha* [cyclical trap], you are supposed to be resource-less according to the Manu Smriti and the effects we still see [....] Things have

changed now, there is no direct *jatiwad* [casteism] but there is indirect *jatiwad*. In places where they cannot stop us we have moved ahead but our pace of progress is very slow (Interview: 3/2/10).

The participants and supporters of BSP do not merely rally around BSP because they respond to the issues of humiliation and self-respect. They hope to better their lives through such support. Machindra Paike is a marginal farmer from Chinchala village who also works as a labourer on other people's farms. He explained:

> If the BSP came to power in all of India everyone will progress personally [*vyaktigat*] and all the schemes and plans will be implemented as per Babasaheb's Constitution. None of these are implemented properly so far. If this happens all people will progress [*vikas*] including the poor. (Interview: 23/9/08).

The BSP in Maharashtra is dominated by Mahar Buddhists but the Buddhist/Mahar and other Cadres of BSP make efforts to mobilise support outside Mahar Buddhists to form a Bahujan collective. Phule-Ambedkarism and anti-Manu emotions are mobilised amongst non-Mahars and the use of caste repertoires is central in the strategies of BSP. Each caste is constructed here as a victim of Manuwad and specific caste histories are mobilised through symbols that fit the anti-caste discourses. The workers of BSP also claim to pursue Ambedkarite politics which includes 'annihilation of caste' – a text written by Ambedkar that is supposed to have influenced Kanshiram. Though BSP in Maharashtra is dominated by Mahar-Buddhists, a formation of Buddhist collective identity through en masse conversion is not at the centre of BSP's political performances or mobilisation strategies and the cadres mobilise in *bhakti* mode, constructing discrete ideologies of protest which are close to Buddhist principles.[92]

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[92] The RPI's critique of Mayawati and Kanshiram is that of them not converting to Buddhism. Kanshiram had vowed to convert to Buddhism in October 2006 with lakhs of followers but he passed away in March 2006. His final rites were carried out by Mayawati using Buddhist rituals.

The focus is on mobilisation of varied caste/s (and religions) into a collective identity of 'Bahujan' with Dalits at the core. The '85 – 15 formula' of Kanshiram, as cadres generally refer it to, constructs *Bahujan* and the non-*Bahujans*. All the castes and religions (represented as low caste converts to other religions) other than the 15 percent of ruling castes (Brahmans, Baniya and Thakur) are referred to as Bahujans. The term Bahujan is given culturo-historical grounding by invoking its usage by Buddha and Phule. On the other hand, Bahujans are also constructed as deprived castes and such deprivation is linked to their dispossession of 'political' power in recent (colonial and postcolonial times). Securing political power could thus result in implementing Ambedkar's Constitution of India and solving deprivations, thus bringing in a society that is based not on the *jatiwad* of Manu (also referred to as Manuwad) but on the *samata-wadi*[93] ideology of Baba, Shahu, Phule and other great men who challenged caste, but whose history and contributions were neglected by Gandhi and the Gandhian Congress.

Self respect and self rule are merged in the public discourses of BSP; self respect is associated with recognition claims for the specific castes and anti-caste leaders and self-rule (through BSP) is presented as a necessity for securing self respect – something that has been denied due to the dominance of the Congress in the colonial and postcolonial years. 'Bahujan' is thus a collective identity constructed by using caste and fragmented caste histories. Bahujan socio-cultural history is not presented as one of deprivation; the stories of anti-caste protests in *bhakti* are selectively used to suit the varied contexts and castes. Thus the usage of symbolic history varied from pre-colonial anti-caste symbols like Buddha, Ashoka, Kabir, and Ravidas to the colonial icons like that of Phule, Shahu and Ambedkar. The efforts of the cadre are thus on the formation of an ideological alliance amongst the Bahujan (who have been divided and humiliated by Manu and main-stream political parties) through the use of diverse histories and symbolism.

BSP's coming to power with a full majority in Uttar Pradesh in its 2007 assembly elections with support from Brahmans created a visible stir in the politics of

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[93] Samata means equality. The emphasis here is on social equality.

Maharashtra.[94] BSP's success was understood to be based on the formation of brotherhood (Bhaichara) committees there. Dalit cadres in Maharashtra worked towards forming similar Bhaichara committees to collectivise castes and communities through mobilising caste pride and use of (anti-) caste histories. As in UP there was an attempt to involve the Brahmans as well, which met with some success. For instance, Bhonjal, a new Brahman entrant, also emphasised ideological and caste reasons for joining BSP:

> You see it was five Brahmans who became the first disciples of Buddha. Buddha was a Kshatriya Raja and not a Mahar. Ananda, a Brahman, was Buddha's favourite disciple; there were no SCs here. You should also remember that Brahmans helped Phule in securing education and also in spreading education (Fieldnotes: 23/1/09).

I will return to Bhonjal's case in chapter nine on electoral politics where I present an instrumental analysis of the non-ideological factors – the use of caste muscle, money power and micro brokering and patronage politics – that attracted some Dalits and non-Dalits to BSP. Here I focus more on how the ideological commitments were variedly mobilised by the workers of BSP.

While the mainstream public sphere reacts regularly to BSP's political performances BSP workers and leaders do not engage with the mainstream public sphere. BSP has developed and nurtured its own counter-public sphere, however, and that provides an effective means for the transmission of the party's political messages (Loynd 2008). Cadre trainings, political rallies, musical performances and alternative literature (books and CDs) are key sources and sites that constitute the alternative public sphere of the BSP. The literature sold is critical of the mainstream media, which is generally termed as Manuwadi by the cadre of BSP. Any public event of medium or large scale organised by BSP is accompanied by the sale of Dalit literature close to the venue. These books include Marathi and Hindi versions of Ambedkar's writings and other writings of scholars and journalists on Kanshiram, Mayawati and

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[94] I will deal this in detail in the chapter on the parliamentary elections of 2009

Ambedkar, small booklets critiquing Gandhi's life and politics, or detailing the life of Periyar or Phule. There are also booklets on the myth of 'Muslim pampering', detailing Muslim deprivation highlighted through the Sachar Committee.[95] In this chapter I focus on the politicised cultural frames that BSP constructs to mobilise varied castes against Manuwad. I will begin by presenting the case of Charmakars, followed by OBCs and Muslims.

Chambars/Charmakars in Dalit movements

'Chambar' is increasingly seen as a derogatory term locally, especially amongst the new activists amongst the Charmakars aligned to varied socio-political formations. Charma means skin and Charmakar translates into one who skilfully works with or on skin. The work with skin is not considered as polluting, as was the case with the Mahars, who under Ambedkar's influence chose to move away from stigmatised occupations. Those Charmakars pursuing leatherwork or jobs as cobblers also referred to their work as *rohidasacha kaam* (work of Rohidas). Amongst the Charmakars, Ravidas[96] (also referred to locally as Rohidas) is a universal socio-religious symbol and can be assimilated both within the Brahmanic Hindu traditions and anti-caste *bhakti* traditions.

While the Dalits in UP particularly have used the symbol of Ravidas as one of protest against caste Hindu traditions, thus making a movement from Bhakti to Buddha (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2007), Ravidas still remains a Hindu symbol for the Charmakars in Maharashtra. Both in the past and present, the Charmakar leaders have largely opposed the alternative of conversion to Buddhism. While the Mahars attribute their social mobility to Ambedkarite ideology and Dalit movements, Most Charmakars have been socially and educationally mobile without converting to Buddhism. The educated elite amongst Charmakars rejects both the Mahar obsession with conversions to Buddhism and the identity of Dalit (or Hindu Dalit), and is more

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[95] A Committee formed by Central Government to study the socio-economic status of Muslims in India. The Committee brought out the miserable Muslims presence in Government services. Hindutva political parties criticised the formation, findings and recommendations of this committee.
[96] Ravidas was a Bhakti saint of fifteenth-sixteenth century from Chamar caste. He followed the Sanskritisation mode of *bhakti* in contesting caste and continued to practice his caste profession, never hid his caste, did not advocate religious conversions nor following the upper castes (Ram 2008).

inclined towards identifying themselves as Hindus. Dr. Bhosale, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Mumbai from the Charmakar caste has researched Charmakar organisations extensively and argues that the Charmakars had no good reason to be in favour of conversions, and that the Mahars remain lowly in their eyes (Bhosale 2003). Dr. Bhosale is regularly invited to speak in ROSA (Rohidas Officers Social Association) and other meetings; he shared some of his experiences.

> They [ROSA] hardly discuss any social issues; rather they meet for match-making for their children. You tell me [he asked], how would an [educated/urban] Charmakar woman identify with what happened to the woman in Khairlanji? I was called to speak on a Rohidas Jayanti by Ramesh Medekar who is part of BJP. I told him that I would present Rohidas who is closer to Buddha. He allowed me to speak. But my idea of Buddha's path as an alternative was not liked at all. (Fieldnotes: 17/9/08).

Buddha and Ambedkar are the symbols associated with Mahars in local political culture and politics of culture. While for some Dalits these symbols resemble assertion against their untouchable status, they have also become synonymous with untouchable identity. Like the Mangs, Charmakars may oppose Ambedkarite ideology not only because Ambedkar was a Mahar and they reject Mahar dominance in Ambedkarite movements but also due to their proximity and comfort in Hindu beliefs and practices, particularly their higher social status as compared to Mahars. Charmakars are not happy to be associated with the symbols of Dalit protest like Ambedkar or Jai Bhim, because they also render the possibility of their being identified with 'invisible' untouchable identity.

It is such invisibility of oppression and oppressed identity and Brahmanic appropriation of Dalit existence and bodies that BSP workers seek to challenge. Dalit suffering is thus linked in the discursive practice of BSP to Dalit bodies and minds, which they argue, are colonised by Brahmanic practices. Rao (2009: 268, emphasis in the original) has dealt with this aspect in detail and has argued that a twinned structure of denial and disclosure (of caste) gestures to the continued relevance of a

corporeal politics. The somatic symptoms of colonisation (in this case Dalit denial of their lower status vis-à-vis case inequality) are signs of the colonisation of psychic space (Oliver 2004: 28). BSP leaders emphasised the need for making these invisible identities of caste and status visible for forming the Bahujan identity.

> Yes, annihilation of caste is the agenda of Ambedkarite movements. But where is caste? Caste is hidden. It is in heart and brain. We have to make it visible. Why is it hidden? Because there is inferiority complex. Convert inferiority into caste ego then they will not hide caste. This is psychological treatment and it began in this country with Ravidas. He ends every composition with *kahe ravidas chamar* [so says Ravidas Chamar]. Ravidas has never hidden his caste. This was scientific treatment, a person who considers himself inferior, turns caste into pride for him (Interview with Suresh Mane[97]: 10/2/09).

Ravidas thus is a symbol of contention for competing political ideologies and groups as he can be interpreted as close to Hinduism (caste-Hindu traditions)[98] or as close to Ambedkar/Buddha vis-à-vis the Bahujan collective identity. Over the years, the BSP cadres have attracted Charmakars into the party through caste repertoires strategically mobilising opinion in favour of Ravidas (as one closer to Ambedkar and anti-caste thought). I will now move on to discuss the strategies of BSP involved in mobilisation of Charmakars who have been traditionally out of Ambedkarite movements.

Charmakars in BSP

Most BSP supporters in Maharashtra consider the musical performances by Rahul Anvikar as more effective than the speeches of the cadre trainers or leaders. Rahul Anvikar is a 'star' performer and his arrival on the stage attracts applause from those who have heard him before. Rahul mixes music with movement talk that forges a link between the Bahujan ideologues from Buddha to Ambedkar with BSP

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[97] Suresh Mane is a senior leader of BSP from Maharashtra. He is the national general secretary of BSP and is also Professor of Law at Mumbai University.
[98] See Khare (1985: 40-50) for differences between the caste Hindu and untouchable versions of the Ravidas legend.

(Kanshiram and Mayawati) and with a critique of major political formations like that of Congress and BJP. He also overtly engages with the caste of participants in his performance. As part of the Janhit Chetana [people's awareness] Rallies that were organised in all districts, Rahul Anvikar[99] performed in Beed on September 22 2008 in front of around eight to ten thousand participants. His song on how the heart of Congress was beating because of the growth of BSP saw some of the participants (including a woman) getting up and dancing in their places.

Rahul particularly engaged overtly with the Mangs and Chambars here. He asked the participants, are there any Mangs here? Some of the Mang participants raised their hands. He asked the Mangs to be bold and not shy, 'I too am a Mang, do not be shy'. This evoked laughter from the audience and also resulted in more Mangs raising their hands. He followed this up by emphasising that he was a Mang of Baba, Shahu and Phule and also added that Matang meant 'elephant' in Pali (as also in Sanskrit) resembling not just the symbol of BSP but also the power and strength of Mangs. He then sang a song on Annabhau and his role in the making the life of Bahujans golden. He later moved to the Charmakars and asked, are there any Chambars here? Fewer hands compared to Mangs went up, but he added again, 'Do not be shy I too am a Chambar', causing laughter in the audience. Rahul however treated Chambars differently, 'the Chambars of Maharashtra have to be gathered in one place and bombed to death. How come you do not have *akkal* [brains]. The daughter of a Chamar [referring to Mayawati] is going to be the PM of India'. As laughter prevailed Rahul went on to sing a song in praise of Ravidas and his anti-caste philosophy.

A direct link of caste and power was thus forged between the Chamars of UP and the Chambars of Maharashtra and the need for the Chambars of Maharashtra to join this movement which would make 'a daughter of a Chamar' the PM of India. A general quote from Ravidas that is cited by the BSP cadre is,

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[99] There are not just public performances, either, since some cadres/supporters organise performance for *samaj prabhodan* (awareness lecture) by Rahul Anvikar on personal familial occasions.

aisa chahu raaj main, jahan sabhan ko mile ann [I want the kind of rule where everyone gets food]

chot bado sab samm base, Ravidas rah prasann [where the big and the small live equally, Ravidas will then be happy]

The BSP cadres argue that the kind of rule that Ravidas aspired for can be provided only by BSP. This quote from Ravidas, however, seemed most handy while convincing the Charmakars in favour of BSP. Also, the blue colour (of BSP) is generally associated with Mahar Ambedkarites. On 31st January 2009, a District-level Charmakar Samaj Meeting was organised in Beed as part of the BSP's mobilisation of Charmakars. BSP's Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha Mr. Veer Singh was to address this meeting. Dr. C, a lecturer at a college in Nagpur University from Charmakar caste and some non-Dalits, joined him. Around a thousand Charmakars both men and women from across Beed attended this gathering. Charmakar (not Chamar) pride was again evoked by the organisers who introduced the *khasdar* (local term for MP) as a Charmakar. The M.P spoke in Hindi and mixed Charmakar pride with BSP's quest for taking revenge for the humiliation that Congress had put Babasaheb through. While there was not as good a response for the suggested avenging of Ambedkar's humiliation, Charmakar pride did evoke good applause from the participants.

> While in Maharashtra the Charmakars may be less numerically but in the whole country amongst the Scheduled Castes the Charmakars constitute 90 per cent [....] In UP out of the total SCs the Charmakars are 95 per cent [some applause here....] and every one considers Mayawati as their leader [....] Congress and BJP divide the voting of Scheduled Caste so that SC should not become PM [....] The Charmakars across the country are supporting Mayawati [...] Why should you support BSP? Because Mayawati is Charmakar, I am Charmakar and you are Charmakar too [applause here]. If we have to make Behenji Pradhan Mantri then we will have to all vote for BSP. (Speech recorded: 31/1/09)

The Charmakar rejection of Dalit parties including BSP in Maharashtra is also linked to the excessive representation of Charmakar leaders in both BJP-SS and Congress. I will deal with these instrumental processes in chapter nine on elections.

Below I present two cases that elaborate further the complex process of rendering caste visible and form Bahujan ideology and identity. K (44) is an assistant lecturer in one of the junior colleges in Beed run by a powerful Teli from NCP. K has travelled from NCP to BJP and had joined BSP covertly (he called it *aatun*) during my fieldwork. K had switched from NCP to BJP as he was refused a ticket from NCP for contesting zilla parishad elections. K and his wife were present for the Charmakar Meeting of BSP but he did not come on the stage, unlike others who lined up to shake hands with Khasdar. He also showed me the receipt of the Rupees 500 that he had contributed on the occasion of contributions collected on Mayawati's Birthday. It is not just K's support for BSP that is covert but so also is his Ambedkarite leaning.

> The living room at K's flat in Beed had two beds. One of these beds had a small shelf attached. K [after knowing thoroughly about my research] removed some literature from that closed shelf which contained some books in Marathi on Ambedkarite movement and on Charmakars. These were however closed in the shelf; no one could see them unless one opened the shelf. The living room had no pictures that one would find generally in the houses of a Mahar or Mang activists like Ambedkar Buddha or even Ravidas. It had one small idol in silver of goddess Lakshmi. (Fieldnotes: 24-2-09).

As opposed to K, Banage, another Charmakar in Majalgaon, was more vocal in displaying his Ambedkarite identity and leanings. Chanderlal Banage (33) is seventh class pass and owns a small roadside cobbler stall in Majalgaon. During my fieldwork his shack was a site for regular discussions among the workers of BSP. One of the most noticeable aspects of Banage was his interest in reading and accumulating reading material related to BSP. He had kept these cuttings of newspapers and other magazines in his stall and he would share them during

conversations. Besides Dalits he would engage with OBCs, Muslim and some Marathas. He and other committed cadres of BSP would regularly try to convince more members to join BSP. Banage was previously a supporter of CPI (M) and BBM before joining as a fulltime BSP worker.

Banage informed me about a particular incident of discrimination that had influenced his political choices and proximity to Dalit movements as compared to other Charmakars who keep a distance from RPI formations. Banage was the *sachiv* [secretary] of a Muslim Bhaichara and also the Taluka President of Akhil Bhartiya Guru Ravidas Samata Parishad, a social organisation that mobilises Charmakars towards Ravidas and BSP. Banage actively purges Ravidas from Hindu leanings, he even considered the term Rohidas that is prevalent locally to be a Manuwadi plot. Banage was pursued to attend the cadre trainings by local BAMCEF workers who had also impressed upon him that Kanshiram and Mayawati were from Charmakar caste. Banage has been attending the cadre trainings since 1997. However, it is only since 2007 that he became a fulltime cadre involved in mobilising resources and people in favour of BSP. Following the '85-15 formula', Banage maintains that BSP strives to make this vertical manuwadi system (of caste hierarchy) horizontal. Banage held that a lack of 'awareness' amongst the Charmakars was responsible for their miserable presence in BSP.

> This system [*manuwad*] has been fitted in our heads. You worship gods, various gods, and then you worship the godmen [Maharaj], and then you give them *daan dakshina* [religious gift], and feel that problems can be solved by godmen they know. People have become dependent on god and godmen. Everyone goes through good and bad times but they [Charmakars] think that god will solve all the problems [.....] My brother used to say that this party has this *samaj* [Mahar] and we should not contribute money. I told them, you pay money for temple, god, why not for party and social work? Construction of temple does not change the status of *samaj*. I studied BSP and understood that BSP is not just about Mahars [...] The Brahmans are joining BSP, everyone else

is joining, why shouldn't we? This is our home, we have freedom here. (Interview: 23/12/08)

Banage understood that the *dheya* [objective or mission] of the BSP is to end caste, to create a society without caste, but he under-emphasised any need to convert to Buddhism.

> [Converting to] Buddhism is not important. It is just a label. What is important is change of *vichar* [ideology]. We all are human beings and we should have *Manavtawadi* [humanist] ideology. There is *Manuwad* and *Manavtawad* [...] we are for *Manavtawad*. This party is for *Manavtawad*. That is important [...] It does not make sense to label it as something. (Interview: 23/12/08)

Over time Banage has removed pictures of gods and goddesses from his home. He also felt that Kanshiram was a selfless Buddhist monk in all practical senses. He did not emphasise Buddhist collective identity in the formation of Bahujan identity, however, but retained the Ambedkarite critique of Manuwad. This is also because an obsession with forming only one Buddhist identity may push out those who can be mobilised in favour of BSP through other means like caste repertoires. Charmakars are thus mobilised by evoking the *bhakti* leanings of Ravidas against caste and through mobilising caste pride and forging linkages with the Ambedkarite mission of ending Manuwad as conceived by BSP. In this process the identity of Charmakars is consolidated, rendered visible and linked to the Bahujan identity.

A senior leader of BSP estimated that there are around 200 symbols – modern and medieval – that could be evoked for organising the scattered caste into a collective Bahujan identity with an anti-caste ideology. Such politicisation and consolidation of caste is translated into 'we for ourselves' in party politics. The imagined Bahujan identity with Ambedkarite ideology is thus merged with fragmented Bhakti and other symbols like Santaji (Bhakti saint from Teli Caste), Chandragupta Maurya (constructed as a King from shepherd caste), Prasenjit (Mang king) and various

others, so as to merge ambitions of political power with anti-caste ideology. I will now detail the strategies for OBC mobilisation that the cadres engage in.

OBCs, BSP and Ambedkarism

> Congress tells Yadavs, do not follow Babasaheb, you are from the *khandan* [genealogy/lineage] of God Krishna. Babasaheb will make you Chamar, Harijan. So why will Yadavs follow Ambedkar if they are from Krishna's *khandan* (laughter here). Why will the one who has a lineage of God Krishna follow Babasaheb and call oneself backward? (BAMCEF Cadre training speech: 28/6/09)

There are 216 castes identified as OBCs in Maharashtra.[100] Dongre, a senior worker of BSP and a lawyer by profession, held the view that Ambedkar had envisioned a coalition of OBCs and Dalits through Article 340.

> Babasaheb made provision of reservation for the OBCs. Babasaheb had the vision of understanding that the *Dhobis* and *Telis* will have no work to do in future, even they are *gulam*, and it was through Article 340 that Babasaheb tried to unite SC, ST and OBC (Fieldnotes: 25/12/08).

Like the Charmakars, several OBC castes too consider Ambedkar (even Phule and Shahu) as untouchable symbols of assertion. The opposition of Congress and BJP to reservations for OBC during the debates over implementation of Mandal Commission is regularly evoked and historicised by the BSP Cadre to remind the OBCs of Congress-BJP betrayal (or Manuwad) and the role of BSP in implementing the Mandal Commission. Some from castes identified as OBCs, within and outside BSP, hold similar views and are critical of major political formations. This does not, however, translate into unity in party politics between the constitutional groupings like those of OBCs. Some visible passionate 'non-political' mobilisation of the OBC category during my fieldwork was against the demand of reservation of Marathas as the OBCs feared that Marathas will be included in the OBC category. Two major

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[100] Accessed from National Commission for Backward Classes website - http://www.ncbc.nic.in/backward-classes/maharashtra.html

OBC leaders in Maharashtra, Gopinath Munde and Chagan Bhujbal, had both opposed this move from their respective positions in Congress and BJP. In Beed the Vanjaris constitute a dominant OBC caste and some Vanjaris have been associated with BSP in the past. On knowing that I was researching on BSP, Dadasaheb Munde (from Vanjari caste) who is employed in the education department spared no time to tell me that he was actively engaged in BSP in his college days.

He gave another interesting paraphrase on caste, '*kele ke jad mein pat mein pat aur hindu dharma*[101] *ke jat mein jat mein jat*' [Like the layers within layers of banana tree are the layers of caste within caste in Hindu religion.] Munde told me that he got to know Charvak [an ancient Indian philosophy closer to Buddhist principles] and Periyar after joining BSP. We were at the *dhaba* [bar] where he was having both fish and whisky unlike his senior Vanjari colleague who was not eating fish as it was *shravan* month. When I queried Dadasaheb why he was not avoiding meat as most Hindus prefer to do in *shravan* [a holy month for observing Hindus], he replied, ''I hope no one will feel bad here. I have had mutton with *mal*[102] on me [...] I don't believe in such things [....] India will become communist if all communists became Buddhist'. (Fieldnotes: 22/8/08).

Dadasaheb's analysis of caste was still influenced by the cadre trainings of BSP. Like Ambedkarite Dalits he saw caste as one disease that affects the public spirit of all Hindus. He therefore suggested that the communists should become Buddhists (i.e. give away caste) to make India communist. It is interesting to note however that Dadasaheb is no longer a supporter of BSP but supports the BJP. The recognition, representation and domination of Vanjaris (Gopinath Munde) in BJP are key factors that attract Vanjaris towards BJP. Thus BJP too uses the Bahujan rhetoric locally to mobilise votes in its favour. The Bahujan-ism of BJP or Congress is however not considered as 'Ambedkarite' by the cadre of BSP.

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[101] Dharma was generally used as a synonym for religion amongst the activists. Hindu Dharma meant Hindu Religion.
[102] A necklace made of *tulasi* beads worn by Hindu followers of god Vitthal from Pandharpur which requires being strict vegetarian and non-alcoholic.

Some OBC members of BSP emphasised Phule-Ambedkarite ideology in BSP and stayed in BSP much longer than several Dalits. Dr[103] Bhobade (aged 70) has been with BSP since 1991. Bhobade is from Mali caste and he emphasised that the elite within the Mali community betrayed the ideology of Phule. Bhobade is also the district head of Satyashodhak Samaj which Bhobade felt was a defunct organisation.

Bhobade does not have any following within the Malis mostly due to his anti-Hindu tirade; he is particularly against idol worship and against any ritual practice (marriage or death) that involves calling a Brahman as a priest. Bhobade owns 22 acres of land and is amongst those few well-to-do BSP cadres who continue to spend from their pockets for party meeting and gatherings. Despite the disappointing performance of BSP in the Maharastra elections of 2009, Bhobade travelled to Lucknow in March 2010. He and some others cadres of the party participated in the national rally of BSP held on 15 March to celebrate 25 years of the formation of BSP.

Bhobade has a past in CPI but has switched from left politics to BSP. For him challenging the cultural elements of *manuwad* were more important than mere talk on class issues.

> I grew up in the left environment since schooling. They are not against *manuwad* and *vishamtamay samaj vyavashta* [unequal social system]. The communists speak a radical language but do not bring it in practice. That is why I moved to Satyashodhak Samaj and then to BSP and now I am a Buddhist. [….] Every communist organises his or her marriage through *manuwad* by inviting the Brahmans and does all the god business. [...] The objective of this party is implementing *phule-ambedkarwadi vichar* [ideology]. Those who are not here because of the ideology leave the party. In *samatawadi vichar* [ideology of equality], there is no *bhat-brahman* – no *puja archana* [praying rituals] in this party. We have to make *samajik samata* [social equality]. We do not accept the unequal system. (Interview: 11/12/08)

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[103] Like Ghopale, Bhobade does not have a medical degree. He is however referred to as 'Dr' locally as he had done a short course in Unani medicine.

Bhobade's shift from class to caste ideology is intriguing and helps us understand the decline of CPI (later CPI-M). Beed had a strong presence of CPI including elected MPs and MLAs till the late-1970s, which reduced significantly with the growth of the Congress followed by the BJP and Shiv Sena. The failure of CPI to bring in changes in the lives of the poor due to the dominance of Congress in the centre and the state led to the CPI losing its support base to the caste-based patronage politics of Congress and later BJP-SHS. CPI's decline, however, can also be attributed to its inability to integrate caste-based inequalities and cultural practices surrounding caste into its class-based ideology. Bhobade, who was amongst the committed workers of CPI, was attracted to BSP after BAMCEF workers provided him with readings on Phule, insisting that he should read Phule as he is from Mali caste. Bhobade later moved on to read Ambedkar and was so influenced that he recently decided to convert to Buddhism.

While ideological bindings do not always work in favour of strengthening BSP, the cadres also try to broad-base BSP's support by involving the poor amongst OBCs in contesting elections and thus attracting them towards BSP and Ambedkarism. In Massajog village the Marathas constitute 60 per cent, the Mahars 20 per cent, Mangs and Chambars around 5 per cent each and other OBC castes constitute 10 per cent. There are three elected representatives from BSP in the Gram Panchayat of which Satish Jadhav is one. Jadhav, in his late 30s, is 9th grade pass and comes from Koli (fishing) caste. Massajog village has only one Koli household which is that of Jadhav.

Massajog is close to the highway and hosts tea and snack stalls as long distance buses and transport vehicles stop here for short breaks. Jadhav is landless and used to work as a helper in other hotels. He has gradually moved to own a small stall on wheels on the highway where he sells newspaper and snacks in the morning. After being convinced by Raju Sonawane (BSP Taluka Adhyaksha of Kej from Massajog village), Jadhav had contested the last Zilla Parishad (ZP) elections on a BSP ticket as it was reserved for OBC; he emerged the runner-up and polled 1465 votes. Jadhav

was threatened by the Marathas (from NCP) to withdraw his candidature twice as they had hosted another OBC. However the local BSP workers rushed immediate support (termed as security by BSP workers). After losing the ZP elections Jadhav contested for the Gram Panchayat elections of Massajog on the seat reserved for OBC which he won with Dalit support.

Jadhav now also looks after a Beer shop owned by a Maratha (who is not too comfortable dealing with drunkards). Jadhav's earnings have not increased much as his income hovers around Rupees 3000 per month, but contesting elections has secured him a respectable [*aadar*] position in the village, something which was not the case earlier. Earlier people used to call him Satya (instead of Satish), Kolgandya (a derogatory term for Koli caste-members). It changed to Satish, later to Jadhav and now most call him Jadhav Saheb. Like any BSP cadre, Jadhav too considers BSP as 'his own' party and he calls those affiliated to Congress or BJP slaves of Congress and BJP. He too felt that winning elections for BSP was not easy but emphasised that increasing vote percentage was important. Jadhav was not troubled by the fact that this was a party dominated by Dalits or Ambedkarite ideology.

> Ravindra [a Mahar supporter of BSP] entered the Beer shop and greeted Jadhav with Ram Ram.[104] Jadhav responded by greeting him with Jai Bhim, and questioned him, What is Ram Ram? Ravindra responded curtly, 'What I Jai Bhim? *Ram Ram madhe mai ghalata mag kashala Jai Bhim ghalata* [you lay your mother in Ram Ram, then why say Jai Bhim?] You have all your marriages in Hindu rituals and then talk of Jai Bhim.' Jadhav smiled and said that things will change slowly [*halu halu*]. [Fieldnotes: 22/5/09].

The Dalit workers of BSP indulge in discussing the 'ills' of Hindu religion, which Jadhav too has grown sympathetic to. Jadhav is not amongst those who spend a little time reading literature. But he seemed convinced with the persuasions of BSP cadres who emphasise the similarities in the issues facing Dalits and OBCs, the need for a Bahujan collective to secure political power for bringing change. Jadhav and his wife

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[104] This may be because of my presence here, as Ravindra knew that I was researching on Dalit politics.

are known for their contribution in mobilising support for BSP in Massajog. I asked Jadhav why he would continue to support BSP when it had not gained a single seat in the General Elections of 2009 in Maharashtra.

> J: Today or tomorrow you will see success, wait and see in Vidhan Sabha elections. I have learnt a lot from this party. Our people vote just for liquor and they rule.
>
> S: Who are our people?
>
> J: Mang, Muslim, Harijan, Dhangar, Koli.
>
> S: And who are they?
>
> J: The Marathas. We all have to unite, then we will be able to rule [Fieldnotes: 22/5/09]

For Jadhav, securing of political power in the local Gram Panchayat has translated into an improved social status where people – including his relatives – respect him now. This has also brought him closer to the Buddhist Ambedkarites of BSP and their Ambedkarism. The Bahujan identity as understood by Jadhav is one comprising of those communities who do not have power and it included the Muslims who are generally constructed as anti-nationalist in Hindutva discourses. I will now deal with how the BSP cadres mobilise Muslims.

Muslims in the Bahujan identity

The mainstream public sphere in the months of November and December 2008 in Maharashtra was jammed with nationalist pride and emotions following the attack by 'Pakistani terrorists' and the martyrdom of Indian soldiers in South Mumbai. There was also news speculation on the possibility of war between India and Pakistan following the attack on Taj Hotel in Mumbai in November. Banage, who was then the Muslim Bhaichara Sachiv, was concerned over these developments. He asked me if there will be a war between India and Pakistan. I said I doubted such a possibility. However, Banage had more to add. He asked me, 'Do China and Pakistan commit all the atrocities that have happened against Dalits and Muslims in India? Answering himself in the negative he added that there is no need for war with China or Pakistan

(Fieldnotes: 23/12/08).

Banage was referring to the 'violence within' against Dalits and Muslims. Banage would highlight the plight of Muslims from Partition to Gujarat. The cadre and the leaders hardly emphasise the threat of the China and Pakistan in their speeches. In Hindutva discourses, as well as in some other mainstream party discourses, Muslim loyalty is always in doubt when it comes to nationalism and commitment to the nation. The history of Muslim rule is invoked as a dark past. In the rallies of BSP there were special efforts to form the Bahujan identity so as to include Muslims.

Shaikh Mohammed, one of the senior leaders of the BSP in Marathwada, began his speech at the Janhit Chetana rally with paying ritual tribute to Phule, Shahu, Ambedkar and Kanshiram. He also added the names of others like Ahilyabai Holkar, Birsa Munda, Santai with Maulana Fais-ul-Haq, Maulana Johar and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.

> My Salam, Jai Bhim and Namaskar to these great people [...] Oh people of Bahujan samaj, oh Muslims […] Bharat is our *watan* [nation], we are the inhabitants of this country, the Dravidians, the adivasis. It was the Aryans who gave birth to the Manuwadi system in this country […] The Bahujan samaj is slave, earlier they were slaves to English and now they are slaves to the thieves and dacoits [Congress and BJP]. Who is the Bahujan samaj? It is the SC, ST, OBC and Minorities. Of the 108 crore population of India most are Bahujans. If the majority are Bahujans then the government too has to be ours. We have the problem of water, road, poverty, farmer suicide. These problems are not given by Allah but by Congress, who have been ruling all this while. It is the people with evil *vichardhara* [by which he meant Manuwad] – the Congress and BJP.

> Let me remind you, the Muslims sacrificed their lives in the *gadar* [revolution] of 1857. Their names do not even figure in any of the history books […] It is all Bapu and Mahatma Gandhi, there is no Ashfaq-ullah or Fakr-ud-din Ali. Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad who was the education minister was also

responsible for the demise of the Urdu language. Remember the violence that has followed against Muslims; remember how Babri Masjid was martyred during Congress rule […] *La ila ha illala mahommadur rasul li la* – one who reads this *kalma* [words of Koran] believes in *iman* [faith]. Those with Congress are not with *iman* [...] How can we support them, be it the Congress or the BJP? Supporting them is against our *kalma*. That is why the Muslims of UP have supported BSP. (Recorded Speech: 22/9/08)

Shaikh Mohammed ended his speech with 'Jai Bhim, Jai Bharat and *Khuda Hafis*'. He constructed Muslims also as part of the Bahujan identity. He particularly reminded the audience of the role of Muslims in nation building and the Congress betrayal of Muslims and Muslim history, and retained the specificity of Muslims by adding *salaam* and *Khuda hafis*. He held Congress responsible for the deprived state of Muslims in the postcolonial period. Muslims are also made to feel proud of (and not sorry for) their glorious past – a ruling community that was (in the words of Shaikh Mohammed) turned into one of rag-pickers in current times.

Along with other BSP cadres Banage had formed a Muslim Bhaichara in Majalgaon. He convinced some of his Muslim friends to join, and, in his mid-30s, he was the one amongst them who had become president of this Bhaichara Committee. While the formation of Bhaichara was a top-down process through orders and ideas from above, the cadres in Majalgaon made it a personal socio-political effort. Mubarak had become actively involved in BSP after a communal clash between Wadars (stone-mason caste) and Muslims in Majalgaon. This clash had started after bikes of a Muslim youth and a Wadar youth crashed into each other. An argument grew into fights that led to stone-pelting between Muslims and Wadars. Following this, the police at around 2.30 a.m. arrested a Muslim youth who was not involved in the violence. Mubarak opposed this move and questioned the police. The police responded by arresting Mubarak as well for his act. Mubarak's brother had called Banage and informed him about this. Banage and Dr. Bhobade had rushed to the police station the next morning to secure bail for Mubarak. Mubarak's family had been against Mubarak joining the BSP but have actively supported him since this

incident. Mubarak described the distinction between BSP and other Dalit parties in the following terms: 'educated *bamans* (Brahmans) join RSS, our educated people join *Jamat* and the educated amongst you join BSP' (Fieldnotes: 23/12/08).

As part of the mobilisation of Muslim opinion in favour of BSP, a Muslim Bhaichara rally was organised in Majalgaon on 19th December 2008. In one of the planning meetings for this event, Siddharth (District in-charge) suggested to Mubarak that he should do home visits and invite educated people like Doctors, Engineers and Maulanas for the meeting. Mubarak asked Siddharth if they could print pictures of some Muslim Maharpurush along with Phule Shahu and Ambedkar like Tipu Sultan. Siddharth responded

> Shahu, Phule and Ambedkar were involved in social reform like education, reservation and constitution but Tipu Sultan was not. He added that Marathas continue to insist on respecting Shivaji[105] more than Shahu but Shahu remains important for us. Putting Mohammed Paigambar's picture [i.e. prophet Mohammed] would have been ideal as his thoughts were *samata mulak* [principles of equality] but we do not have his picture. [Fieldnotes: 11/12/08]

Siddharth suggested that Mubarak instead print his own picture on the pamphlet as organiser and that he give a speech in the Muslim Bhaichara Meeting. Pamphlets were printed with pictures of Ambedkar, Shahu, Phule and Kanshiram along with the symbol of Elephant. On the top of these symbols was a quote of Kanshiram in Hindi – *Jis samaj ka shashan hota, uska shoshan nahi hota* [the community which has political power is not exploited]. Along with a life size picture of Mayawati and Maulana Firoz Ali (a senior Muslim leader of BSP in Marathwada from Jalana) a picture of Mubarak was printed below. Contributions were raised for this meeting from Dalits (BAMCEF), OBCs and Muslims.

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[105] Shivaji is also evoked at times as a Bahujan king. Cadres in informal conversations pointed out that it was more strategic than ideological as Marathas find Shivaji's martial valour to be more important. While there were some Marathas in BSP who had joined, anticipating growth and success of BSP in post 2007 scenario, cadres also maintained that it was most difficult to get Marathas into the party and efforts were made especially to mobilise the poor Marathas against the rich.

This was a low budget gathering with no *pandal*, just a small stage on the market road side and mat for people to sit on the ground. Some BSP workers raised slogans like *BSP ke Teen Kaptan* [Three Captains of BSP]*, Dalit OBC Musalman.* Mubarak made his maiden speech here where he spoke on the benefits Muslims had derived out of BSP rule in UP like reservations within OBC quota and added that, 'all parties have fooled us, we are threatened if we do not vote for Congress that there will be riots. Therefore the need for Muslims to vote for BSP and make Mayawati the PM.' (Recorded Speech: 19/12/08). Mubarak's friends, Dalits and Muslims clapped here. Other Dalit and OBC speakers would end their speeches with Jai Bhim and Khuda Hafis. The key speaker was Maulana Firoz Ali who opened his speech with some prayer lines in Arabic and ritual salutations to Bahujan leaders. He repeated Ambedkar's role in securing universal adult franchise for Bahujans as against wishes of Gandhi who wanted the voting rights for those with education and property. Ali questioned how many graduates are there amongst the Shia, Sunni, Dhangar, Lohar or Kumbhar even after 60 years independence?

Ali attributed the deprived status of these communities to Congress misrule. He simultaneously constructed a Bahujan collective based on recognition of 'distinction' between these ethnic identities and the similarity they faced in their deprivation. He explained to the Muslim listeners how they voted under compulsion for Congress and they feared that not voting for Congress would mean coming of BJP-SS to power vis-à-vis riots. He gave the example of UP where Congress and BJP were both pushed to the margins by BSP growth and claimed that this could be replicated in Maharashtra.

> If you ask a Muslim during elections where they are planning to vote, they in turn ask which way the wind is blowing. Do not allow the wind to decide your future. There is an old saying Allah or god never helps those who are not concerned about helping themselves. You have to come forward to change your situation. (Recorded Speech: 19/12/08).

The support extended by Muslim League for Ambedkar's seat in the constituent assembly and Ambedkar's role in instituting Muslim Personal Law Board vis-à-vis religious freedom for Muslims were also cited in cadre trainings (Recorded speech:

7/12/08) evoking the history of Dalit-Muslim alliances. In an informal conversation after the rally Maulana, an old timer in BSP, shared with me how he was attracted to Kanshiram's selfless politics and added that BSP's Phule-Ambedkarite ideology was close to the basic fundamentals of Islam like that of equality written in *hadith* (Interview: 19.12.08). Maulana's quest, however, was not for mere representation of Muslims in parliament or in the legislative assembly. In his speech he gave examples of various measures in UP like scholarships for school-going Muslim children, aid for Madrasas, and the establishment of an Arabic University. Later in an informal conversation he informed me about how mere Muslim representation in Congress without ideology goes against Muslim interests. Maulana Firoz Ali is also part of a local NGO group in Marathwada called Muslim Vikas Manch (Development Forum); he shared an instance of organising a protest demanding scholarships for poor Muslim children going to schools. The concerned minister called Maulana for a meeting and asked him what else they needed as there was already a Muslim MLA from the region. Maulana requested the minister to remove the MLA and give scholarships to poor Muslim children. Maulana also ridiculed the word minority for Muslims and emphasised that it was only Dalits and Muslims who could mobilise support outside any state unlike Sharad Pawar (a Maratha leader) who has no support outside Maharashtra.

Besides unmasking Congress as an upper caste party and its SC candidates as stooges, BSP extracts a negative vote for itself through narratives of humiliation, observes Chandra (2000). She also suggests that the new type of ethnic politics of BSP offers an effective check on the escalation of social conflict and in renegotiation of power relations than the dominance of the Congress party. Chandra (2000) however underemphasizes the ideological dimensions of BSP's mobilisation. "Ideology dignifies discontent, identifies a target for grievances, and forms an umbrella over the discrete grievances of overlapping groups" (David Apter cited in Heller 2000: 506). The politics of BSP locates caste (and therefore religion) and not region or language at the centre of its ideology and mobilisation strategies, the other is 'Manuwad' an abstract formulation against which all castes can be mobilised including the Brahmans thus retaining an Ambedkarite agenda at the core.

BSP's politics problematises the idea of 'Hindu majority' by locating caste at the centre, no caste constitutes a majority. Bahujan is thus mobilised as an alliance between varied castes and communities on the basis of deprived status and through cultural repertoires by mobilising community pride and linking it to anti-caste histories.

Conclusion: mobilising of Bahujan from below and unsettling of caste order

This chapter has elaborated the non-political and ideological groundings of party-political mobilisation in BSP. Scholars have emphasised the similarity in strategies of Ambedkar and Kanshiram and the BSP in following the democratic path and politics (Kumar 2006: 131-132; Narayan 2006: 37-38; Jaffrelot 2003-424), thus pointing to a continuum of democratic politics in Dalit movements. BSP cadres, like Ambedkar, hold caste to be the central problematic of Indian society and their understanding of caste too is influenced by Ambedkar.

State and society were both important for Ambedkar in undoing untouchability and annihilating caste – as caste could not be reformed, it had to 'annihilated' (Ambedkar 1936). Ambedkar's imagination of a new society was therefore based on the emancipatory identity of Buddhism, which he argued had principles of equality and cultural roots in Indian soil. Ambedkar introduced a disjunction between the untouchable past and the modern present for Dalits, a tension that he saw as linked to the incompatibility of Hinduism and democracy and also of caste and civil society.

Gupta (1991) challenges the idea of hierarchy as the all embracing principle behind caste system and points to the existence of different hierarchies, for him, "differences dominate the articulation of hierarchy" in the caste system (Gupta 1991: 13). He suggests that conflicts arise on a far more general scale in caste societies because of the existence of multiple caste hierarchies, which are all separate and 'equal' and support their position through their own caste ideologies (1991: 18). However, Gupta fails to take note of anti-caste ideologies, something that Chatterjee (1989) pursues through the study of lower historical moments, subaltern consciousness and

identifying the *dharma* of minor sects. Chatterjee has convincingly argued that the *dharma* of the minor sects challenges the universal dominant Dharma.

The *dharma* of minor sects that Chatterjee points to are also referred to as Bhakti traditions, something that Ambedkar was very critical of. Ganguly(2004) calls for a post-secular/modernist reading of Ambedkar's conversion to theorise about the multifarious, heterotemporal ways in which caste writes itself into the body politic of India. She also points to the fact that Ambedkar and Buddha have been absorbed into the pantheon of 'Hindu' deities by Mahar worshippers, and emphasises the prevalence of the medieval Bhakti idiom in the Dalit religious everyday. Bhakti, however, is what political groups make out of it. In the Indian public sphere, 'Bhakti is like an empty vessel into which both nectar and poison can be poured' (Novetzke 2007). Ambedkar was therefore cautious of the Bhakti modes of mobilisation because of their susceptibility to co-option into the higher Hindu *dharma* which for him was synonymous with caste hierarchy.

BSP's politics takes note of the dynamic nature of caste and its potential in reproducing hierarchies. It can also be said that its mobilisation strategies therefore are not totally synchronised with the absolute alternative of Buddhism and they point toward a proximity to Bhakti traditions. Through evoking anti-caste symbols selectively, BSP adds to the substantialisation processes of caste and not its annihilation. It also confers on every caste the status of political minority, besides reminding them of their past anti-caste or power-holding status, thus attempting to merge these symbologies and ideologies with 'untouchable' ideologies of protest with Ambedkar at their core. All the symbols in this process including the Constitution of India are mobilised towards forming an Ambedkarite political community termed as 'Bahujan' with 'Dalits' at its core. In the practice of alternative political Bhakti, the BSP cadres merge the political and cultural. While the old Bhakti could only think of equality through God, the new imagines one through a merger of modern and traditional anti-caste symbols and through securing political power.[106]

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[106] Narayan (2008) has termed these innovative uses of history as process of de-marginalisation.

"Caste is *the* public secret of secular modernity in India." (Rao 2009: 267 emphasis in original). The making of caste visible and simultaneous evoking anti-caste traditions in BSP's politics may be among the necessary processes that could lead to the annihilation of castes. In constituting an alternative public sphere the BSP cadres have partially succeeded in moving '*Jai Bhim*' and Ambedkar beyond Mahars, not just to Chambars and Mangs but also to some Shudras.

Chapter 8

Caste in anti-caste politics

MHA and making of Phule-Ambedkarite Mangs

Mangs and Mahars have had traditional rivalries that revolved around competition for a better share in the local organisation of a caste economy in which Mahars were placed higher in the order than Mangs. Mangs and Mahars thus lived in close proximity and permanent animosity, remarks Pillai-Vetschera (1994: 46). Under pre-colonial rulers, 'the Mangs were public executioners, and it was said to be the proudest moment of Mang's life when he could perform his office on a Mahar' (Russell 1916: 241). Such repulsion and animosity in current times is associated with Mahar conversions to Buddhism, their relatively better socio-economic and political status and Mahar preponderance in government jobs in the quotas meant for untouchable castes. Mahars have historically dominated the Phule-Ambedkarite movement that challenged caste hierarchies. Thus the anti-caste identity of Buddhist has become one synonymous locally with Mahar identity.

The Mangs have largely remained at the periphery or outside such mobilisations. Such exclusion of Mangs from Phule-Ambedkarite movement is attributed by Burra (1986) to Ambedkar's Mahar identity. The Mang participants and activists of MHA, however, claim to be Ambedkarites. This stands in contrast to the general understanding of Mangs as Hindus or as anti-Mahars. Activists and some participants of MHA consider themselves as 'aware' and as ones who embrace Ambedkarite identity and ideology consciously as part of their protest against caste inequality and exclusions. Mang participants of MHA's mobilisation, however, travel through multiple collective identities in the context of caste competition and politics that pervades the larger political culture.

This chapter engages with the mobilisation and politicisation of Mangs in MHA. It details the paradox of anti-caste ideological mobilisation amongst Mangs through the MHA that leads to both the politicisation of Mangs and the simultaneous

substantialisation of Mang caste. I argue that though Jati (caste) as a resource for socio-political mobilisation is not an absolute social category, the mobilisation of Jati into a political community is a process shaped in the relational contexts of movements and may lead to multiple collective identities and socio-political outcomes. This chapter shows how the MHA functions in a multi-organisational field and explores the intersections of caste, class and culture that shape and get shaped by its mobilisation process. These processes are mapped through the participation of Mangs in MHA's mobilisation, their critical public discourses and strategic use of caste.

Locating MHA and its 'Mang' identity in Mahar-dominated Ambedkarite Politics

MHA in Beed is identified with Mang power. In an informal conversation (Fieldnotes: 31/1/09), a Mahar worker of BSP contested the universal claim in the name Manavi Hakk Abhiyaan and jokingly referred to MHA as "Mang" Hakk Abhiyaan (Campaign for Mang Rights). Similarly a Mahar worker of RDC said, 'Yes, we are seen as people who work for Mangs' (Fieldnotes: 27/1/09).

Senior workers of MHA acknowledge that MHA is particularly interested in the empowerment of Mangs. Ashok, one of the Mahar workers who has been part of MHA since its inception, explained the ideological reasons: 'One of the important objectives of MHA was to take Ambedkarvad (Ambedkarism) to Mangs. Mahars will simply follow if we take the name of Ambedkar whereas Mangs will not" (Interview: 23/5/09). Thus Mahars may become Ambedkarites and the Mangs may oppose Ambedkarism for Ambedkar being a Mahar. Ambedkarism amongst Mangs, though scant, is not new in Marathwada or Beed. Some of the Mangs who had accessed education at Milind College in Aurangabad during the late 1970s and early 1980s were influenced by Dalit movements and had converted to Buddhism. They had actively participated in the Namantar movement and in Dalit Panther mobilisation. I have already described Awad's role in movements that were dominated by Mahars like the Dalit Panthers, DS4, BAMCEF and BSP.

Awad and MHA have a strong non-political basis for their politics where Hindu practices that construct the untouchable status of Mangs is criticised. For instance, Awad converted to Buddhism in 2006 to commemorate 50 years of Ambedkar's conversion with some of his followers, a move that was seen as anti-Mang and anti-Hindu by some Mang social formations and some of his own followers. However, Awad emphasised that his 2006 conversion was symbolic to attract Mang and other castes towards Buddhism. He said he had been a Buddhist for a long time and gave the example of his 30 year old son's name which was Milind (a Buddhist name). Awad is thus known amongst non-Mang Ambedkarite circles and is called to address meetings and conventions on Ambedkarism.

Conversion to Buddhism was amongst the most important strategies of Ambedkar and was aimed at forming an anti-caste collective identity amongst the untouchable castes and other deprived sections. Ambedkarite ideology thus partially spread beyond the dominance of Mahars amongst non-Mahars and Mahars too played a role in this. Awad emphasised that even though his father was illiterate, he too had 'knowledge' about Ambedkar. Awad spoke of the closeness that existed between Mahars and Mangs at the village level and his being influenced by Ambedkarism. MHA had broad based its mobilisation by focusing on Dalits in general, but Mangs as the most deprived and non-politicised remain at the centre of such efforts. Eknath Awad thus discourages mang-isation of the MHA or RDC and has consciously included non-Mangs in it projects. He is particularly known for his aggressive stance in claiming Dalit rights locally through temple entry, campaigns against bonded labour, religious practices like *karan*, cutting long hair of Potraj and facilitating cultivations on *gaairan*. Senior workers of MHA acknowledge that MHA is particularly interested in the empowerment of Mangs. Awad saw Ambedkarite ideology as the reason for not emphasising Mang identity in MHA or in his own leadership:

> I never wanted to be a Mang leader. Mangs [those opposing him] have called me *maharachi aulad* (son of a Mahar). I started work radically. I did not fool them [Mangs]. I explained Ambedkarwad to them. When I started this work

there was no one with me, not even my wife. There is no compromise in *vichar* [ideology] (Interview: 24/8/08).

MHA activists see their strategy as different from some other Mang mobilisations due to its Phule-Ambedkarite emphasis, one which does not 'fool' Mangs. The emphasis in such mobilisation is not to essentialise Mang identity as Hindu against Mahars [as Buddhists] but to reiterate the socio-cultural radicalism of Phule and Ambedkar in rejecting caste values and socio-cultural practices that denigrate the social status of Mangs. One of the activists clarified the distinction between other particularistic Mang organisations and MHA: 'They [other movements] do not create a *watawaran* [context] of *sangharsh* [struggle and conflict], whereas we create awareness and *sangharsh* (informal discussion: 27/1/09)'. In creating such awareness, opinion is mobilised to facilitate acceptance of Ambedkar and Ambedkarite ideas amongst the Mangs. This is seen as a challenging process. Here is an excerpt from my fieldnotes that elucidates this challenge:

> Some workers of MHA and I were at a tea stall in Devdi village for a meeting which was to begin in sometime. Ashok informed Rajesh that Manisha will be soon getting Annabhau Sathe's photo [*pratima*][107] for the meeting. Rajesh asked if Babasaheb's photo was here. Ashok said yes. Rajesh then added, 'if Baap [father, referring to Ambedkar] is there then it is Ok to not have Bhau [brother, referring to Annabhau]'. Radhabai jokingly pulled Rajesh which made everyone laugh, 'In front of Mangs from Patri you will not (dare) say this' (Fieldnotes: 19/1/08).

Patri Taluka in Parbhani District is not as much a stronghold of MHA as Majalgaon in Beed district. Phule-Ambedkarism is generally seen as an ideology associated with Mahars amongst Dalits and everything that symbolises Ambedkar, including the

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[107] All the meetings begin with garlanding pictures of Dr. Ambedkar, Jotirao Phule, Annabhau Sathe and Shahu Maharaj. Activists and workers begin their speech by paying respects to these central figures. Savitribai Phule and Ramabai Ambedkar too are added at times in the list of Maha Purush [great men]. The list may extend based on the caste of people participating. The names of great men, however, never include the names or photographs of any gods and goddesses. There is no nostalgia for the past and most of history is seen as dominance of Brahmanism (except during the Buddhist period). The golden era in one sense begins with Phule followed by Ambedkar and Shahu.

'blue' colour or his 'framed picture' at a meeting may be seen in the local context as Mahar dominance.

In the context of Dalits, it is generally argued that 'the provision of constitutionally guaranteed parliamentary representation and civil service posts for members of the "Scheduled Castes" contributed to the emergence of collective identity' (Nagel 1994:157). On the contrary, in Maharashtra, the state actively engages in consolidation of *jatis* amongst the Scheduled Castes. For instance, there are separate Development Corporations meant for Mangs (Lokshahir Annabhau Sathe Vikas Mahamandal), Mahars (Mahatma Phule Vikas Mahamandal) and Chambhars (Sant Rohidas Maharaj Charmakar Vikas Mahamandal). Mang political mobilisation in current times has also been a product of anti-Mahar feelings with a call for separate representation for Mangs within the Scheduled Caste quotas. The formation of new collective identities amongst Mangs is partially a reaction to Mahar dominance. The Mangs however do not form a unified whole and are divided into hierarchically organised sub castes and not all Mang socio-political formations mobilise around anti-Mahar emotions, MHA being one of them.

Mangs, their sub-castes and socio-political contexts

In Beed district, Mangs mostly comprise landless labourers and sugarcane migrant workers. Some still carry out traditional caste occupations (considered polluting) like making ropes, brooms and baskets. They are also village musicians. The nature of their economic (inter)dependence with the dominant castes is changing at the village level. It is only recently that Mangs have started moving out of the traditional occupations of caste in the Marathwada region. They are educationally and economically more deprived than the Mahars and Chambars (Paik 2007). Socio-cultural, political and economic exclusions are thus still rampant in many villages against the Dalits in general and Mangs in particular. MHA has had a critical role in identifying and challenging cases of *veth begar* and the long sustained socio-economic exploitation of Mangs by the dominant castes.

While the current anti-Mahar mobilisations amongst Mangs and caste-based patronage encouraged by dominant political parties may have lead to some substantialisation of Mang caste, Mangs still remained divided on sub-caste grounds. Some Mang sub-castes like Mang Garodi, Ruckwuldar or Ghotalia Mangs were identified as criminal tribes during British rule (Gunthorpe 1882: 95-104). The Mangs are divided into various sub-castes which are hierarchically organised. The 1884 Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency notes this hierarchy.

> They (Mangs) are divided into Mangs proper (also referred to as Assal/real), Mang Garudis, Pend Mangs, Holar Mangs, Mochi Mangs and Dakalvars. Of these, the first are considered the highest, and their leavings are eaten by Holars and Dakalvars. The Dakalvars say that they are the highest branch of Mangs and that the others profess to despise them to punish the Dakalvars because they refused to touch the other Mangs. This story seems unlikely as Dakalvars eat the leavings of Mangs and Nade Mangs and no Mang will touch them. They are not allowed to drink water from a well or stream used by Mangs. (Bombay 1884:171).

There are supposed to be twelve sub-castes within the Mangs which are endogamous and are organised hierarchically. However, the *assal* Mangs constitute a dominant majority within Mangs and are ranked higher than other castes within Mangs. During my fieldwork, Mang workers of MHA acknowledged the differences within the Mangs which they said 'came up' while finalising marriages. They could however only think of five sub-castes and not all amongst the younger generation were aware of the sub-castes.

> Sudhamati after the discussion told me that even she did not know about the *pot jat* (sub-castes) in Mangs, Mahadev another elderly Mang explained again there are only three *pot jats*, Holar, Mang garudi and Mang. Sudhamati asked him, what about *telang* and *khakrya* sub-castes? Mahadev strongly disagreeing said hya [meant no] (group discussion: 10/12/08)

Mahadev said *hya* implying 'no' with discomfort at the mention of Khakrya and Telang Mangs. When I asked the caste of all the participants in the discussion on their sub-castes there was an interesting response:

> S: Are all sitting here *sreshta* [highest]?
>
> K: Yes we can say that.
>
> H: yes, No one from lower here.
>
> N: Even if someone is why should we say that we are this? (Laughter).
>
> K (asks N): Who is it?
>
> N: No one (laughs) (group discussion: 10/12/08)

Being a lower sub-caste within Mangs thus can be an embarrassment and may require one to hide one's caste while interacting with fellow Mangs. This is similar to Mangs or Mahars hiding their 'inferior' caste while interacting with castes higher to them in an anonymous context and resorting to sanskritised identities.

The absorption of sub-castes into castes (Mang in this case) is a process facilitated by modern caste organisations and is referred to 'substantialisation' of caste. This shift to more modern or 'substantialised' experiences of caste however is not complete. Both variants often co-exist and overlap in everyday life and thought (Bayly, 2001: 310). While there are differences of sub-castes there is major competition amongst Mang social and political leaders to claim sole leadership of Mangs. Mangs as a *jati* thus cease be a homogeneous whole in terms of identity, interest or ideology and an axis of mobilisation therefore is constructed locally in the praxis of MHA.

The construction of '*gulam*' (slave) Mangs

I have discussed the sub-castes and competing political currents within the Mangs which partially explain the internal complexities of the construction of Mang identity. Identity however needs to be understood as an internal-external dialectic of identification (Jenkins 1996: 171). There is thus another image of Mangs as 'docile' that circulates in Phule-Ambedkarite movements. This is also referred to as *gulam/i* (slave/ry). One of the Mahars from another social movement commented,

Mahars do not compromise … Mangs compromise ... The Mahars are militant as a rule whereas it is difficult to find such Mangs. The Mahars too are poor even then they are strong. Mahars left traditional polluting occupations [following call of Ambedkar], Mangs were happy, they thought everything now belongs to them (Fieldnotes: 8/4/09).

Mang leaders had historically opposed temple entry efforts for untouchables initiated by Ambedkar and had sided with Brahmins; similar was their opposition to the idea of conversions to Buddhism (Paik 2007: 173-187). Mangs are thus considered docile for not radically revolting against traditional inequalities of caste, for not converting to Buddhism, for not following Ambedkar's call for education and for not giving up traditional polluting occupations of caste.

Some Mang workers of MHA too had similar views and on the apathy of Mangs to Ambedkarism which they felt was apathy to change. Suvarna and Meena, women workers of MHA on varying occasions felt that, 'Mangs are *darindar* [in a culture of poverty] as they do not like to say *Jai Bhim* and are more interested in goddess *mari-aai*'. A competing category is thus created of radical Mangs who are 'aware' and of *darindar/gulam* Mangs who are not aware, therefore backward. In another conversation, Awad jokingly referred to Mangs as *thanda raktache prani* [not hot blooded] while responding to a Mahar friend's comment on a scheduled MHA-organised Mang meeting as 'revolutionary'.[108]

In a context of competing Mang and other Dalit mobilisations, MHA focuses not only on constructing a collective political identity for Mangs with Ambedkarite leanings, from a movement point of view it also describes who 'is' (and 'is not') a present Mang. Jaffrelot (2000) suggests that ethnicisation of caste in southern and western India [as against sanskritisation in north India] provided alternative non-hierarchical social *imaginaries.* The process of ethnicisation of caste involves acknowledging and asserting caste in a non-hierarchical fashion in anti-caste politics.

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[108] Mang workers of MHA are however not just critical of Mangs and they similarly critique Mahars who they feel are more Mahars and less Buddhists (anti-caste).

This is specifically true in the case of untouchable castes so as to purge their castes from 'untouchable' status.

In contrast to the *gulam* Mang identity, the MHA constructs a counter identity of *swabhimani* (self respecting) Mangs in its mobilisation process. Taking Ambedkar and his ideology beyond Mahars involves use of public discourses in multiple sites and forms. Such discourses encompass both public and private realms and constitute an important part of influencing public opinion of Mangs in favour of Ambedkarism. Such deliberations or discourses take place at various sites, ranging from family conversations to public meetings. It also involves the use of movement literature, CDs and movement songs performed by activists and local artists.

Against *gulami* and caste: the making of *swabhimani* Mangs

MHA has actively mobilised Mangs in favour of *gaairan* encroachment, a struggle that was dominated by Mahars amongst Dalits in the initial phase. Mobilisation of Mangs in MHA is thus not purely symbolic or cultural but has a material basis. Besides encroachment of *gaairan*, Mangs were also mobilised against bonded labour practices till mid-1990s and for temple entry. Encroachment of *gaairan*, refusal to carry out traditional occupations and insistence to enter the temple brought the Mangs in villages where MHA was active into conflict with the local dominant castes – mostly Marathas and Vanjaris. The activists of MHA also help the Mangs from such villages to gain access to government schemes and provisions (at times for a fee). The workers of MHA particularly intervene when there are cases of caste violence against the Mangs.

These are routine practices of the MHA which strengthen Mang affiliation and build a relationship of trust. Most of the politicisation of Mang identity and performance takes place through discourses in public meetings held during Jayantis or protest events. Annabhau Sathe Jayanti is particularly a site for Mang mobilisation as Annabhau belonged to the Mang caste and is seen as a symbol of Mang pride and

assertion along with others like Lahuji Salave and Mukta Salave.[109] Annabhau Sathe and Lahuji Salave are symbols of Mang assertion and identity which have consolidated in the last twenty years. They are also used by dominant political parties like Congress and BJP-Shiv Sena for attracting Mangs towards them. Annabhau and Lahuji thus have varied interpretations for mobilisation purposes. While Shiv-Sena-BJP focus more on Lahuji's physical strength and Hindu leanings, the movements with anti-caste leanings focus on his association with Phule and his role in recruiting Mang-Mahar children to school. The making of *swabhimani* Mangs thus involves mobilising Mangs to be united for challenging the daily hierarchies and oppression of caste that they may be facing, particularly the dominance of Marathas and Vanjaris.

Jayanti meetings/functions are not always particular caste gatherings, and in a village context while Dalits dominate, non-Dalits too may attend. The use of loudspeakers in a village context means that there are some who listen to such conversations without being interested. Jayanti gatherings are thus heterogeneous in their composition and discourse. Besides unwilling upper caste participants who may listen to the speeches or music through the loudspeakers there are invited upper caste guests who also attend these gatherings. Furthermore, Mangs attending such meetings may not be Ambedkarites, may not know about Annabhau and may be not be daring to challenge the practice of untouchability that they may face. Thus the Mang participant may carry varied values which do not fit into the *swabhimani* Mang identity with Ambedkarite ideology that MHA activists seek to construct. Schudson (1997) criticises elitist approaches that emphasise conversations of a particular kind ('civil') in the making of democracy. He argues for heterogeneous conversations as they are 'truly public' and raise the possibility of 'uncomfortable' talk vis-à-vis the aspiration to public reasonableness.

Due to their heterogeneous nature and uncomfortable talk on caste, Jayanti celebrations are also sites of conflict and violence. Jayantis are always organised

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[109] Muktabai Salve was Mang girl who studied in Phule's class of 1852 (Paik 2007: 52). Some of her critical short essays are circulated in movement circles like the one titled, *Oh God, what is the religion of us Mangs and Mahars* which was published by BAMCEF.

with prior permission from the Police and police constables are deputed even in village-level celebrations. Sites of Jayanti celebrations have been riddled with conflict particularly when the dominant castes resist the processions of Jayanti with Dalit symbols of political assertion from entering the village. Dalits are often advised to keep the celebrations restricted to the spatially excluded Mahar and Mang *wada*. In some cases non-Dalits contribute money for holding some gatherings if Dalits approach them for such contributions. There is also a provision in Panchayat budgets for holding such meetings and some panchayats may extend support.

MHA has encouraged Mangs in various villages to organise Annabhau Jayanti and MHA activists are called to address these gatherings. It is the Mangs who mostly take the initiative for organising Annabhau Jayanti. Jayanti gatherings in the village include procession of Annabhau's life size photograph in the village with a lot of pomp which includes music, dance (mostly Dalit men) and sloganeering with throwing of *gulal* in the air.[110] This may be followed with speeches (on microphone with speakers) and evening dinner. An atmosphere of festivity prevails in the local context amongst the Mangs, particularly the youth. I also came across Mahar youths in some villages participating in these Jayanti meetings actively, thus making Annabhau not just a Mang symbol but a symbol of the wider Phule-Ambedkarite movement.

Such a gathering in the village is mostly held in the *samaj mandirs* (community temples or halls built for Dalits – sometimes separate for Mangs and Mahars). In the absence of space in front of community halls the open spaces in front of village schools or panchayat buildings are made use of, depending on the relations with the dominant castes in the village. Mang claims for public space and performance in the village can radically alter their access to public spaces.

Pamphlets and posters of Jayanti are printed and distributed or pasted in other villages. These carry names and, at times, pictures of the organisers and chief guests and speakers and sometimes brief social messages. The pamphlet printed for

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[110] In some cases Jayantis become another venue for Dalit men to get drunk and dance. This is severely criticised by activists who give speeches during Jayanti.

Asardoha village had pictures of Ambedkar, Shahu and Phule starting from the left top and a picture double the size at the left corner of Annabhau. Written below in a bold large font was "Satyashodhak[111] Annabhau Sathe's 88th Public Jayanti Celebrations, Asardoha Village". It continued, 'hunger for food takes care of your stomach but the hunger for knowledge makes a revolution happen. Such direction was given by Annabhau so that the *samaj* [generally used to refer to caste] could follow the path of Dr. Ambedkar'.

This was the first Annabhau Jayanti organised in Asardoha by Bhagwan Patole from the Mang caste. He is elected Sarpanch on a 'un-reserved' seat. Some months back he was attacked by the Deshmukh Marathas, members of an elite caste within the Marathas, with sticks, resulting in severe head injuries. This had to do with Bhagwan changing the political history of this village. Historically, it was the Marathas who 'selected' the Sarpanch *bin-virodh* (without opposition). Bhagwan changed this by organising and fielding an independent panel of candidates. He himself contested on an un-reserved seat. This village does not have the general dominance of numbers that Marathas usually enjoy at the village level in Marathwada. The Hatkars (around 300 households) and the Lamans (around 300 households) are two dominant groups in terms of numbers whereas Mahars (60 households), Mangs (30 households) and Marathas (70 households) are in a minority. The Marathas are, however, landed gentry and have traditionally been the political heads of this village, until recently deciding who the Sarpanch would be. Bhagwan managed to mobilise support from Hatkars and Mahars whereas most of the Mangs and Deshmukhs and the Lamans did not support him. Bhagwan did not have any affiliation with MHA before being attacked by Marathas. He was in fact termed non-cooperative by some workers of MHA who had approached him for some NGO interventions of RDC. MHA had however rushed to his support after he was thrashed by the Marathas. Bhagwan had earlier worked in the Dalit wing of NCP and had underemphasized his Mang identity. Bhagwan now is part of MHA, but he also retains his membership of BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) which he joined, he says, to escape the discrimination he faced in NCP due to Maratha dominance.

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[111] This was to portray Annabhau as a follower of Phule's *Satyashodhak* (truth seeking) philosophy that was anti-brahmin/nic in nature.

The Annabhau jayanti was organised by Bhagwan in the hope that the Mangs will become 'aware' (*jagruk*) after listening to Awad. He felt that Mangs had not supported him in the panchayat elections under Maratha pressure whereas the Mahars did. Bhagwan explained the docile behaviour of Mangs who are neither united politically nor proud of their Mang identity:

'*jati ne kela tar sava rupaiya dand parjati ne kela tar aatma thand* [if someone from within the caste fucks them (Mangs) then that person is fined 1.25 rupees and if someone from other caste does it then their (Mangs) soul is at peace], this is the case of Mangs.' I did not agree with him and enquired further, 'well this is not the sole reason, and there may be other compulsions'. Patole replied, 'no compulsions, the Mangs were sure that I will get defeated and they did not want to antagonise the Deshmukhs for a Mang who was bound to be defeated'. I asked him if the Mahars supported him, he replied 'yes, 75 percent did, they are under the influence of Ambedkar ideology and wanted me to win' (Fieldnotes: 30/9/08).

For Bhagwan, the Mangs were docile in their approach and preferred to be ruled and raped by the upper castes and not by the Mangs. This was not the case with Mahars who despite their poor status took the risk of voting for Bhagwan. Bhagwan's proximity to Mahars here could also be seen in the celebration of Jayanti in Asardoha. Loud fire crackers and some workers whose head were smeared in blue powder marked Awad's entry in the village. Around 200 people were present to listen to the speeches. Most participants were men though there were around ten women from the Mang caste. One of the most important features of Jayanti in Aasardoha was of *Nila* (blue associated with Ambedkar) instead of *Gulal* (Fieldnotes: 24/8/08). The traditional *gulal* (red powder) used in some Hindu religious gatherings is also used in Annabhau Sathe Jayanti. *Nila* (blue powder) is a symbol of Ambedkarites (generally associated with Mahars and with conversion to Buddhism) and is viewed as reactionary by Savarnas.

While the *adhyakhsa* [president] of the Jayanti gathering in Asardoha was a local Maratha Deshmukh with whom Bhagwan enjoyed good relations, Sharad Gaikwad, a lecturer from Kolhapur University and Eknath Awad were the main speakers. Below are some portions of Awad's speech in Asardoha, which took an extremely high pitch while emphasising the backwardness of Mangs (and Mahars) and the possibilities of change through Phule-Ambedkarism.[112]

The status of Mangs in Maharashtra is worse than Adivasis.[113] No political leader will come and change the *samaj*, Eknath Awad too will not help. ... You will have to think and act and change yourself [...] I am son of a *potraj*. Sharad [the lecturer] himself was a *potraj*. We both have changed. We believed in Phule-Ambedkari *vichar* like one believes in parents and that is how we could see the world [high pitch followed by applause here]. [...] If you want to live as human beings then no one is going to serve it on a platter, for that you will have to struggle [*sangharsh*] against all the injustice that happens to you. And you will need to unite.

Our Atmaram Salave[114] used to sing in those days. I was in [Dalit] Pather then. Name the University after Bhima (Ambedkar) or else streams of blood will flow [*vidyapeethala naav dya bhimache nahitar path vahatil raktache*]. And our Mang boys and women sing [romantic songs], *Gaar dongarachi hava gaar ani baaila sosena gaar* [the winds in the mountains are cold and the woman cannot tolerate this cold]. What do you have to do with that *gaarva* [cold]? [laughter]. [In high pitch] If you want to change, your mother and father will not change you. Your *mai-baap* [mother and father] are Phule Ambedkar and Annabhau and only their *vichar* can change you [applause].

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[112] I attended various Jayanti and other similar gatherings organised by MHA like protests, *gairan* holders meeting, Women's Self Help Group meetings. Portions of this particular speech are chosen due to its representative nature. Such meetings are also used by the workers of MHA to create and circulate the charisma of Awad as a national leader of Dalits who travels around the world regularly to raise issues facing Dalits.

[113] Adivasis (literally means indigenous people) refers to Scheduled Tribes who are seen as most deprived in India especially in NGO discourses.

[114] Atmaram Salave was a known leader Dalit Panther in Beed from Majalgaon Taluka. He was a M.A in English and was part of the group that decided to be unmarried and not own property for the cause of the movement. He was known for his radical songs that critiqued Hinduism. Atmaram died in mysterious circumstances and some Dalits think that he was murdered.

[…] Our people listen to Ramayan with a lot of interest. I have no objection to this, but for how long are you going to listen to stories? Listening to stories will not change your life. Your hard work is going to be the source of your change.

Annabhau said, change the world with a strike, so Bhimrao told me, you need to understand this [...] Do not feel bad because I spoke like this. I speak because I am one of you […] The only purpose of speaking is that this *samaj* [caste – here meaning Mang] changes. Instead of living like a *gulam* you should live like a human being. In the 21 century you have to live not like a *potraj* but as a *swabhimani* citizen and samaj [applause]. *Jai Bhim, Jai Anna* (Speech recroded: 24/8/08)

There is an element of emotional antipathy towards *Jai Bhim* and Ambedkarism amongst the Mangs. Emotional speeches like the above seek to mobilise opinion in favour of Phule-Ambedkarite ideology against the troubled present and past of Mangs (and Mahars). Bonding of Mang-Mahar identities is facilitated by public discourses that take place in Jayantis. The Mangs however are kept separate and are called to claim *swabhimani* through following Phule-Ambedkarism and in actual practice by challenging daily oppressions that they may be facing. Such claiming of *swabhiman* may lead to violence against Mangs which is considered part of the change process by the activists. Sadashiv, the district head of MHA in Beed, distinguished the Mangs of western Maharashtra from those of Marathwada in the following way:

In our discussion on the increasing violence against Dalits particularly Mangs, Sadashiv told me that the situation here [Marathwada] was better than western Maharashtra. 'Here the Mangs are assertive and therefore the violence' […] to elaborate his point, he pinched my left nipple and said, 'if a Maratha boy does this to a Mang girl in western Maharashtra, she will be happy and will go and tell her friends *chotya malkane asa kela mala* [younger owner or landlord did this to me]. This is not the case here, Mangs are becoming aware (field notes:

27/1/09).

The formation of *swabhimani* [self-respecting] Mang identity thus is also constructed around the critique of socio-religious practices that make *gulam* Mangs. The critique of religious practices like *potraj* or *karan* is a regular discursive practice in public events. These are seen as inhuman practices that turn Mangs [and Mahars] into slaves [*gulam*]. The Phule-Ambedkarite ideology is associated with possibilities of progress and achievement for the current and coming generations through education, political organisation or through encroaching *gaairan*.

It is not only Mangs who carry out *gaavaki* currently: in some cases Mahars do so also. The Mahars are however presented as an assertive community who got rid of such practices. Mahar thus is not the absolute 'other' in such discourses but a socio-political and cultural ally who progressed due to Ambedkarite ideology. The focus is on merging the Mahar and Mang identities as oppressed in an alliance for change under the Phule-Ambedkarite ideology. The category of Mang is however also kept separate in its extreme deprivation, backwardness and also the increasing violence Mangs face. The need for Mangs to organise their 'own' political clout and leadership is emphasised. The deprived and excluded past is described as a primitive existence like animals that one has to consciously move out of. Annabhau's respect for Babasaheb is brought to the fore by reminding participants that Annabhau dedicated his famous novel *Fakira* to Ambedkar. This is contrasted with the respect of Mangs for gods and goddesses. Speakers emphasise their own identity as Mangs and therefore take care to explain this.

Besides speeches which contribute in communicating with the participants in Annabhau Jayanti, songs performed by local artists on harmonium and *tabla* are as effective. Some of the best local performers come from the Mang caste in Beed and are invited to perform on Jayanti and other such occasions. Male and female participants both enjoy the music. Below are a few lines of the songs that were played by a musical group of Mang women artists. Some listeners gave prize money ranging from five hundred to ten rupees to the performers (Fieldnotes: 22/8/08).

Dev dagdache pujun tula aj var milala kai [Worshipping gods of stones you have got nothing till date]

Ai maai tujhya jivanacha sona majhya bhimane kela ga bai [Oh mother, your life was made golden by my Ambedkar]

Another legend that is evoked in song is that of Pochiram Kamble, a Mang who was killed by the Marathas during the Namantar violence. He is said to have uttered *Jai Bhim* till his last breath despite being tortured to death by Marathas. His son is said to have taken revenge for his father's murder by killing the erring Marathas.[115] Such mobilisation of Mang pride through symbols of protest has led to politicisation by the MHA in Beed of some Mangs who have questioned their exclusion from the villages in various forms.

The politicisation of Bivaji and family

Participants of both BSP and MHA told me that the speeches that they heard during public gatherings were vital in changing their thinking. Bivaji (48) is one of the Mangs influenced by speeches of MHA workers. He used to be angered by *Jai Bhim* earlier, which he told me was not the case anymore. "It all began when I participated in the *gaairan parishad* [meeting or convention] in Ambejogai, when I listened to *Jija* [Awad], my blood started boiling" (Interview: 25/9/08). Bivaji has now also turned partially in favour of the cultural critique of the traditional Hindu beliefs (*mariaai*, *mangir baba* and other gods) that circulates within the movement. Bivaji's son Nitin is an active volunteer of MHA in Tandalwadi village. Along with others, Bivaji has also encroached *gaairan* land in Tandalwadi under the influence of the MHA.[116] Bivaji's family is also amongst those influenced by the charisma of Eknath

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[115] Mang-Ambedkarites insist that Mang participation in Namantar struggle has been downsized by Mahar dominance. Daya Hirwale a Mang writer has written a volume in Marathi on Mangs who had lost lives in the Namantar struggle.

[116] Bivaji's father Tatyaram shared with us that the past effort by the Dalits (Mahars and Mangs) around 20 years ago was shot down by Marathas in the village. "Marathas had mobilised money from each family for 'cutting the legs' of Dalits encroaching *gaairan* here, which forced the Dalits to back off" (Interview: 25/9/08).

Awad. Awad's riches[117] are also a matter of pride for some of the supporter of MHA as he moves around in one of the four SUV cars that he owns. When I asked Nitin 'why do you support Awad when there are various others Mang leaders?' he replied, 'There is no person like *jija* [Awad] in our *samaj*, he is a man of millions [referring to Awad's riches], a big leader, he belongs to our caste, and has not sold out like others.'

On the night I stayed at Bivaji's home a long discussion ensued between Bivaji, his wife (Bai), mother (Saku), father (Tatyaram) and his sons (Nitin and Raghu) on various issues including gods. Bivaji's father Tatyaram[118] (around 68) disagreed with Bivaji's rude comments on gods, and narrated how he and his brother had recovered from diarrhoea in their childhood when there was an epidemic in the village, due to *aai* [*mari-aai*]. His mother had vowed to goddess *mari-aai* that she will dedicate one of her sons as *potraj* to *mari-aai* if her sons got cured. This had worked and Tatyaram felt that he and his brother were saved because of *aai*. Bivaji further questioned Tatyaram, 'if your *aai* [mother] is true, I will do the *karan* to cure Bai's [his wife's] knee pain, let us see if it gets cured'. Tatyaram felt that this was very much possible 'but *aai* had nothing to do with knee ailments and the sacrifice will have to be made to god *khandoba*'. Bivaji probed further: 'What do these gods eat?' Tatyaram said, 'nothing'. 'Then how do they survive?' asked Bivaji. Bai intervened at this point and said, 'dogs pee on them, you see' and laughed out loud. Bai however did not seem to be a total believer in the rational, scientific discourse that her son advocates. I understood this when I had a long chat and interviewed two younger sisters of Tatyaram, Laxmi and Gulab. Both the sisters possess *aasara-aai* [goddesses of water] and *tuljapur bhawani-aai* in their bodies respectively. Gulab was the one who was possessed by the aasara and she told me that her goddess was with her all the time in various forms and that she had helped more than hundred

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[117] There is also criticism of Awad on these lines and one gets to hear regularly from other Mang leaders that Awad has earned a lot of money.
[118] Tatyaram is also considered a local healer in the village and people see him, to get cured of jaundice and snake bite. People use his prescriptions with modern medicines and he does not discourage this.

couples conceive including Bai.[119]

Bai is an admirer of Manishatai who is the head of women's wing of MHA and is influenced by her speeches. When I asked Bai about the divine intervention from Gulab and *aai*, she nodded in agreement acknowledging this (Fieldnotes: 26/9/08). Bai travels through multiple identities based on the varied contexts of daily life. She appreciates the critique of religion and associated oppression of Mangs that the activists advocate but is not totally convinced that Gulab does not have direct access to *aasara aai*. This is, however, not just the case with participants of movements. The activists too face dilemmas of identities in the competitive context of caste politics.

Saku was in tears while sharing the relative progress that her son and grandchildren had made especially after encroachment of *gaairan* and feared a Maratha backlash. The Mahars in this village had faced such violence earlier leading to some of them leaving the village for good. She expressed her fears, 'they (Maratha) say, earlier it was the Mahars who were *majalet* (excess body fat) and now it is the Mangs' (Fieldnotes: 26/9/08).

Mobilisation of MHA has thus politicised Mangs who challenge their exclusion in various forms. When I returned in January 2010 to Tandalwadi only Nitin was holding on to the critique of Hindu religious practices whereas Bivaji and Bai were not as convinced. Though there was disagreement on the ideological path to be followed, particularly giving up of Hindu religious practices, the family has continued cultivating the *gaairan* due to their politicisation through MHA. They also had had a good crop of bajra [ten quintals] and were hoping to reap around 5 quintals jowar on the *gaairan* they were cultivating.

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[119] Both the sisters explained to me about various social (including health) and economic problems of people that they solve through their access to goddesses. Some cases that goddess says cannot be handled are not dealt with. Some of the troubles (that people face) are engineered by priests (like them) who misuse their powers (and god) for wrong purposes. Despite her powers through access to goddesses, Laxmi sought advice from Nitin on the *gaairan* that she has encroached in Kaij. She aligned with another Mang organisation in Kaij led by Babasaheb Ghopale and had recently participated in the fasting protest that was organised by for regularising of *gaairan*. .

The collective identity of *swabhimani* Mangs is variedly achieved. In some villages, Mangs stop carrying out traditional caste occupations, enter the temple through protests, actively (and at times independently) participate in panchayat politics, organise Jayantis, encroach *gaairan* lands and at times even convert to Buddhism. One of the most revealing outcomes of such *swabhimani* mobilisation processes is the emerging social solidarity amongst Mangs and Mahars locally, where they unite on various occasions like Jayanti, protests, *gaairan* cultivation, and at times form political alliances during elections.

Caste in anti-caste praxis of MHA activists

An important critique in MHA activist narratives is of the Hindu dharma (religion). Dalit movements with Phule-Ambedkarite leanings question the relationship between status and power in caste and attribute most of Dalit exclusions to gradation of purity and pollution in Hindu Dharma. Chatterjee (1989) explores the subaltern consciousness on caste and offers a critique of Dumont (1980) for failing to understand that the '*dharma*' of the minor sects has a *homo equalis* outlook. An attempt therefore has to be made to undertake a criticism of 'common sense' on the basis of 'common sense' which already exists in popular life (Chatterjee 1989). The *dharma* of Mangs and Mahars that revolves around local deities is not distinguished from Hindu religion in the politics of MHA. Activists instead capitalise on the symbols of Annabhau Sathe, Lahuji Salave, Mukta Salave which are constructed as protest icons against caste hierarchy that constructs Hinduism. These icons are turned into modern symbols of Mang pride as against *mari-aai* or *potraj*. These symbols are interpreted in a form to suit merging them with Phule-Ambedkarite ideologies. Some Mang activists of MHA have gone to the extent of changing their names from Hindu ones to Buddhist and one of the workers of MHA from Hingoli also heads Bouddha Mahasangh in Hingoli.

However submerging of Mang identity into a Phule-Ambedkarite one is neither easy nor achieved everywhere. Some Mang workers regularly criticise the Hindu cultural practices of Mahars in informal and formal conversations, particularly their failure to become 'true Buddhists'. Sometimes such a critique is self-reflexive, for instance a

female activist at the Jayanti in Punarvasan was critical of MHA activists who preach Phule-Ambedkarite ideology but also do *karan* simultaneously (Fieldnotes: 22/8/08).

Mang participants of social movements respond to the competition amongst varied Mang and Dalit social movements by having multiple memberships. Interested Mangs attend meetings organised not only by MHA but by various socio-political formations including those organised by Mang segmental movements (Ghople, Dhobale Sakte, Bagawe). Only the activists are cautious of which meetings they attend as it may affect their standing both within and outside the movements.

Sudhamati (25), a single mother who had eloped with a Vanjari man only to be deserted later, is now an unpaid activist in MHA. Despite her MHA affiliations, she was appreciative of Mayawati's struggle as a single woman and said, 'Mayawati's work is good; she is a single woman but struggles for *samaj* [society]'. She was, however, critical of RPI leaders who had approached her with an offer to head the RPI's women's wing in Beed. She had declined this and was critical of RPI, particularly the Mahar dominance of RPI and their variety of activism that excluded Mangs.

> RPI people feel that the language of Yerekar [Mang music performer who is not attached to any political party] is *aashlil* [obscene]. Yerekar in his songs says that Krishna (Hindu god) was involved in *randbaji* [sleeping with prostitutes]. What is wrong in that? [...] do they dislike Yerekar because he does not belong to their caste? (Fieldnotes: 30/9/08)

Sudhamati would thus question both Mahar dominance within RPI and also the compromising nature of their activism which is not critical enough of Hindu culture. Caste and caste symbols are turned into a matter of pride by the activists of MHA. When senior leaders of MHA met Sharad Pawar (Rural Development Minister, Government of India) and Narayan Rane (Revenue Minister, Maharashtra) to lobby for regularizing encroached *gaairan* lands for Dalits, another senior Mang worker of MHA handed over a letter to Sharad Pawar. This was requesting conferment of

Bharat Ratna to Annabhau Sathe. He clarified, 'we will get anyways *gaairan* but this is a question of our *asmita* (selfhood).' Conferment of Bharat Ratna and respect to Annabhau is thus attached to the selfhood and self-respect of Mang identity which is seen as one beyond material needs like that of *gaairan* (Fieldnotes: 16/11/08).

In Asardoha Jayanti, Sadashiv (38) was another key leader of MHA who spoke on the need of cross-caste alliance based on Phule-Ambedkarite ideology, and criticised turning Jayantis into caste gatherings. Sadashiv, however, opposes every possibility of Mahar dominance in MHA by influencing Mang activists. He would also mobilise the opinion of the Mang women activists against the dominance of non-Mang women in MHA. While I was interviewing Sudhamati, Sadashiv, in his patronising fashion, intervened, 'What is wrong with Mang women? Why can't you speak? Has Taruni [non-Mang leader] taken the contract of speaking?' (Preliminary field work: May 2007).

While Sadashiv resented Mahar dominance in MHA he also worked towards forming an assertive Mang identity. In another small meeting of Mangs in Kaij Taluka, in his speech Sadashiv commented on the saffron dressing of one of the male participants (he was wearing saffron towel with a *tika* on forehead) to remind him of his Mang identity, 'If you wear *bhagwa* [saffron], you are not going to be *Chatrapati* [implied Maratha], you are a Mang. If you put a *gandha cha tikala* [a saffron mark on forehead], no one is going to call you *Chatrapati,* you will still be Mang or Mahar' (Fieldnotes: 25/9/08). The cultural proximity of Mangs and Mahars comes in handy while polarising these identities against inequalities of caste and creating a Phule-Ambedkarite community, but this is not always the case. While a need to emphasise Mang-Mahar unity is seen, RPI and other similar factions are shown as symbols of Mahar unity and Mangs have the hope of MHA Awad's genuine leadership.

When faced with other competitive Mang organisations and their leaders, Sadashiv holds on to Phule-Ambedkarism and his loyalty to Awad. Sadashiv and I happened to interact with Reddy, leader of Lahuji Sena [Lahuji's Army] in Mumbai. Sadashiv was in Mumbai to drop invitations to Mang Members of the Legislative Assembly to

participate in a meeting that MHA was holding to discuss the findings of a state commission on the socio-economic status of Mangs in Maharashtra. On seeing Reddy, it was decided to hand over an invitation to him as well. Sadashiv greeted Reddy with "Jai Lahuji" and introduced himself as Sadashiv Londe and handed over a copy of invitation letter. Looking at Sadashiv, Reddy said 'Londe … are you the same who had spoiled [*udhalali*] my *sabha* [meeting] in Paithan? Yes, you are the one' he insisted. 'No', said Sadashiv giving a surprised look, 'There are a lot of Londes in Paithan, it must have been someone else'. 'You work with Awad, don't you?' Sadashiv replied 'yes'. Reddy was still thinking on it trying to be sure. He simultaneously read the invitation letter and saw the names below of Eknath Awad and another co-organiser. He looked at Sadashiv again and asked, 'Why is Awad doing all this for Mangs. He is no more a Mang, he has become a Buddhist now, isn't he a Mahar now? He should work for Buddhists … He has earned a lot of money'. Looking at us he continued, 'Mangs are Hindus, Eknath Awad should hold such meetings for Buddhists and call us for such meetings'. Sadashiv did not respond for a while. However, after Reddy's persistent questioning, Sadashiv responded briefly, 'With the limited knowledge I have, I think we should remember what Mukta Salve said, "we do not have a religion." Reddy seemed least interested in listening to Sadashiv, though he also seemed to agree with him, 'Leave all that [*soda te sagla*] replied Reddy, 'I will come for the meeting and ask Awad about this. He is a friend, I won't leave him'. He gave us his visiting card and continued, 'what was the hurry [about conversions]? Why did he go alone? How can he be a Mang again now?' (Fieldnotes: 13/2/08)

MHA thus functions within a competitive field and context of Mang organisations. These organisations base their criticism of MHA and Awad for becoming a Mahar (by converting to Buddhism) and for making money through NGOs. MHA, however, carves its specific space within Mang organisations and other Dalit organisations by resorting to politicisation of Mangs and through attracting them towards Ambedkar. They criticise other Mang organisations for their particularistic agenda which is not seen as an ideological one. MHA also resorts to the opportunistic utility of Mang identity but tries to ensure it has an Ambedkarite orientation.

Sadashiv and I came out of the hotel after this conversation. Sadashiv burst into laughter, and said to me, 'Did you hear him? Sir, Let me tell you I was exactly the same 15 years back.' He added, 'I was the one who spoiled his *karyakram* [programme] in Paithan. He presented *daiva-vad* (fate-ism) and I presented Mukta Salve, Pochiram[120] and Babasaheb after him and got a good response from the audience.' (Fieldnotes: 13/2/08)

Sadashiv thus innovatively combines Mang identity with Phule-Ambedkarite ideology in his daily practice. Awad would jokingly term Sadashiv a Mang Neta (Mang leader) and not a Dalit or Bahujan leader as Sadashiv was earlier working with another Mang particularistic movement, which was known for its anti-Mahar and pro-Hindutva position. He was attracted towards MHA slowly and had changed his views over time.[121]

MHA makes use of Mang identity particularly during elections and Eknath Awad is turned into a leader of Mangs partly due to the pressures of party politics that revolves around caste identity. This is despite him being amongst the key leaders in Marathwada who have worked on the issue of *gaairan* and Dalit rights, and despite his anti-caste move of symbolic conversions to Buddhism. It is in party politics that caste identities get played out in the crudest forms when Dalit leaders struggle with each other to get recognition (seats and positions) from dominant political parties. The active politics of 'presence' thus in electoral politics does not have a broad transformative agenda; it is a politics of positional change, not structural reform (Hasan 2006). MHA too resorts to a conservative interpretation of Mang identity against Mang political rivals in electoral competition.[122]

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[120] Pochiram was a Mang who was killed in caste violence during Namantar riots. Some movement songs portray Pochiram and his radicalism in his sacrifice for Ambedkarite ideology till the end.
[121] There are also material reasons for such attraction. Sadashiv earns salary from one of the projects of RDC. Some of the Mang activist envied Sadashiv as he was more successful in getting schemes for those related to him amongst the activists. Similarly Bivaji too has partial material reasons (*gaarian*) for becoming Ambedkarite.
[122] This is discussed in detail in Chapter 9 on electoral politics.

Concluding discussion: Jati and anti-caste collective identity in Dalit movements

The making of Ambedkarite Mangs that I have charted in this chapter points to the dynamic nature of caste and its innovative interpretation and strategic use in the politicisation of Mangs by MHA. These processes lead to varied modes of substantialisation of caste. My account also reiterates that merging sub-castes into a substantialised whole is an incomplete but ongoing competitive project amongst the Mangs. Mang identity thus continues to be blurred and requires consolidation. The case of Phule-Ambedkarite Mangs who are *swabhimani* and not *gulam* calls for some rethinking on caste and its being.

Understanding of caste as discrete categories where each caste has intrinsic worth (Gupta 1991: 130) does not help in analysing the public performance and political utility of caste in Dalit movements. While difference, or the discrete nature of caste, can be examined through culture and internal circulation of substance amongst the *jatis*, caste plays a vital role in the dynamic public sphere. The intersections of political and cultural realms also reconstruct caste. Such processes may be overlooked in approaches that emphasise the study of the internal cultures and structures of each *jati*.

'The interpenetrations of caste concerns with caste-free thought are apparent throughout India's complex social terrain' (Bayly 1999: 314). Dalit movements are no exceptions, despite their anti-caste ideological claims. The rich history of the non-Brahman and Dalit movement in Maharashtra further shapes the competitive field of practice for Dalit movements, where the increasing demand for Phule-Ambedkarite ideology is faced with the lure of *jati* solidarities.

Jaffrelot's (2000) distinction between sanskritisation (in north) and ethnicisation (south-west) as modes of low caste mobilisation in India suggests that the latter, sustained by the ideology of pre-Aryanism or Buddhism, provided alternative imaginaries for radical transformation. The practice of such alternative imaginaries and formation of collective identities in Dalit movements faces several challenges. Important amongst them is the lure of *jati* mobilisation amongst Dalits, which can

also serve to consolidate Hindutva aspirations or merely to meet the requirement of Dalit 'presence' in dominant (non-Dalit) socio-political formations.

MHA, however, creates a culture of anti-caste conversations amongst the Mangs which is critical of the traditional Mang identity and existence. Jayanti celebrations and critical informal conversations amongst the activists and participants of MHA are venues of alternative public deliberations which are also heterogeneous in communication and outcomes. These result in social solidarities between Mangs and other Scheduled Castes, particularly Mahars. The practice of MHA challenges the status and power relationship in caste by constructing *swabhimani* Mangs and facilitating *sangharsh*. *Jati* in the public discourses of Phule-Ambedkarite Mangs is both difference and hierarchy, and difference (Mang) is mobilised against the perceived hierarchy of caste system. The 'difference' is however a political one (and not a socio-cultural one) where Mang is constructed as 'deprived', 'not organised', 'not Ambedkarite' and 'not educated'. Gupta (1991) emphasises the socio-cultural essentials in terms of origins and purity beliefs that each caste may talk about. The myths and beliefs about the origins of caste and caste status amongst the untouchables are, however, changing. Untouchable myths contradict the basic concepts of Hinduism (Deliege 1993). Mang historicity amongst MHA rests with Lahuji Salave, Annabhau, Mukta Salave and their closeness to Phule-Ambedkarite ideologues. The political difference of Mangs is thus turned in to a new *swabhimani* Mang collective identity, which is merged with various other identities of protest like those of *gaairan* or Dalit rights.

While the ideal to be achieved is abolition of the caste hierarchy, MHA's praxis in its relational contexts also contributes to the reconstruction of Mang identities. The public discourses of MHA, however, have radical contesting features in their critique of Hindu cultural practices that demean and deny possibilities of citizenship for Mangs (and all Dalits). The identity of Mang, Dalit and Bahujan is thus put to use variedly in MHA based on the dialectics of internal (agency) and external (structure) pressures. MHA thus contributes to the creation of an alternative public sphere, counter-culture and arguments against caste hegemony. Such critical reasoning is

largely missing in the mainstream discourses that pervade civil society and state institutions alike. Participants and activists of MHA thus contribute to constructing and re-constructing caste. It can also be argued that MHA constitutes a 'dynamic element' in the formation and realisation of civil society (Cohen and Arato 1994:498), but not without limitations. I will chart these limitations in the next chapter on MHA's participation in electoral politics.

Chapter 9

Electoral Politics and Marginalisation of Assertive Dalit Politics in Beed

Democratic citizenship, it is argued, promotes a degree of equity and reciprocity among citizens and voting rights (particularly adult suffrage) constitute a step towards equal citizenship (Bellamy 2008). Dalit belief in democratic processes and institutions is reflected in their robust participation in electoral politics both in voting and in formation of political parties. Sham Tangade who was one of my key respondents for BSP's earliest functioning in Marathwada saw party politics as *manav mukti* (Human Liberation) and felt that Ambedkar's followers could carry it out best (Interview: 5/6/09). The history of Dalit struggle for the 'rights to have rights' as equal citizens, however has been one of conflict with the mainstream political formations and the colonial and postcolonial state. Dalit claims for citizenship rights were in direct conflict with the inner realm of Hindu culture, which were considered pure and private by the Hindu political elites and were, therefore, defended from liberal colonial legislation. In their distinctive ways caste Hindus and the colonial government used the productive tension between custom and contract to counter Dalits' rights claims (Rao 2009: 105-106). A key point of contention for the Congress was assertive politics by Dalits, which was separatist in nature and purged untouchables from Hindu culture. Dalit assertive political behaviour continues to be considered a matter of deviation even after the collapse of the Congress system, thus marginalising Dalits in electoral politics.

This chapter details the dynamics and challenges of Dalit participation in electoral politics through the study of electoral mobilisation and strategies of BSP and MHA. It has four sections; the first section begins with a brief discussion on the intertwined nature of politics and culture in mainstream politics (represented by Congress) and Dalit counter-assertion (represented by Ambedkar). Ambedkar's anti-Congress/Hindu politics laid the roots of assertive Dalit politics in Maharashtra. The second section moves to our field site and maps the bi-polar politics in Beed which is dominated by Marathas operating through the NCP and is contested by the Vanjari

dominated BJP. The next two sections discuss the marginal location and strategies of BSP and MHA respectively in electoral politics of Beed. The challenges to sustenance and practice of assertive Dalit politics in Beed highlight the institutionalization of Dalit exclusion through patronage based political practices that strengthen the state vis-à-vis Maratha dominance. I also present the counter-culture that Dalit movements attempt to create through contesting the mainstream practices of electoral politics. These practices are however riddled with challenges and Dalit movements do at times end up replicating mainstream practices.

Dalit assertion and assimilation in electoral politics

The history of Dalit politics in Maharashtra can be summed up as assertive and autonomous political mobilisation that continuously faced the challenge of assimilation and co-option by the dominant political forces. Congress represented the dominant political force for well over three decades after independence, till the collapse of Congress system (Kohli 1990). The roots of assertive Dalit politics are found in Ambedkar's clash with the Congress leadership particularly Gandhi over the political rights of untouchables.

The Ambedkar Phase

Ambedkar sought to carve out a separate political identity for the untouchables (Depressed Classes as they were known then) from the beginning of his political project. The very first representation he made in front of the Southborough Committee which was collecting evidence from various groups for the anticipated Montague-Chelmsford reforms, made this clear. He observed, 'the real divisions of India then are, Touchable Hindus, Untouchable Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians, Parsees and Jews; it will not do good to ignore these real divisions in devising a system of policy, if policy is to take the form of popular government' (Ambedkar 1979). Similarly 10 years later when the Simon Commission was constituted to carry out further political reforms in 1927, Ambedkar again demanded political rights for Untouchables through political representation, he was keen that separate electorates with reserved seats be given for Untouchables (Kumar 1985). This brought him into

direct conflict with Congress and more specifically Gandhi; Congress had boycotted Simon Commission and had asserted its interest in *Purna Swaraj* (Complete Freedom). Congress assumed that the universal franchise would take care of the rights of all individuals; Nehru's draft constitution (Nehru Report 1928) therefore did not have any recognition or representation for the untouchables.

The Round Table Conferences in London ended in deadlock between the demands of various communities and (even) Gandhi failed to bring a compromise between competing groups, so the decision was taken by the British Government. Gandhi was opposed to the question of separate electorates especially in the context of untouchables. He questioned Ambedkar's claims of representing the depressed classes and thundered that he would protest the separation of untouchables from Hindus even at the cost of his life. Ramsay Macdonald announced the communal award in 1932 which, to much dismay of Gandhi and Congress, recognised the untouchables as a minority and awarded them separate electorates. The untouchables had been "divided" from the Hindus and the political battle had now turned into religious one – Untouchables vs Hindus or Untouchables as Hindus. Gandhi went on fast unto death to prevent this division; a compromise was reached between Gandhi and Ambedkar with the signing of Poona Pact in 1932. The compromise being, double number of reserved seats and doing away with the idea of separate electorates. Gandhi told Ambedkar, 'In accepting the Poona Pact you also accept the position that you are Hindus' (Jaffrelot 2005: 67).[123] Cultural assimilation of untouchables as Hindus was thus was at the heart of Congress response to untouchable politics.

Ambedkar on the other hand did not fit into any of the then existing major political forces – the Congress, Hindu Mahasabha or the Muslim League.[124] The next important phase in Ambedkar's political career began in 1937 when he decided to form a political party and contest the elections for provincial legislatures that were announced under the new constitution. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) was an

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[123] Ambedkar wrote a full volume in 1935 highlighting his differences with Congress and the manipulative politics that Congress resorted to while dealing with the untouchables (Ambedkar 1945).
[124] Occasionally he shared political platforms with Jinnah (Keer 2005: 330).

effort by Ambedkar to forge larger political alliances with deprived groups other than the depressed classes, Socialist in flavour the party accepted the "principle of state management and state ownership of the industry whenever it may become necessary in the interest of people" (Zelliot 2006: 106). Jaffrelot (2005: 74-90) suggests that ILP could never become a party of labourers and the *kunbi* gradually distanced themselves from the party – class did not help as a good axis of mobilisation as even the poorest non-untouchable considered themselves to be naturally superior to untouchables.

The Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) was formed after a convention of Depressed Classes (DCs) in July 1942, which protested the Cripps Mission for not taking into consideration DCs' special needs (as compared to Muslims). For Ambedkar it was moving back to caste from his labour ideology. The SCF fared badly in the 1945-46 elections and won only two seats in provincial assemblies. It did not do well in the 1951-52 elections either. Though the SCF transcended caste with issues like land reforms raising the economic condition of the poorer classes, it failed to appeal to non-Dalits. In postcolonial India Ambedkar joined the Congress efforts of nation building and was appointed the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee. He however felt ignored in Congress and went back to his labour party ideology in a *different* way by conceiving the Republican Party of India as an organisation representing the interests of Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Tribes (Jaffrelot 2005: 88-90). The Republican Party of India came into being only after Ambedkar's death in October 1956 and its political philosophy was understood as a return to the *shudra – atishudra* alliance that Phule envisaged, the only difference being the leadership was now to be held with the untouchables. I have dealt with the formation and fragmentation of RPI groups in Chapter 4. The formation of RPI cemented the break from Congress modes of nationalism and politics.

Ambedkar's demand for political commensuration had revealed that 'Dalits were incommensurable' (Rao 2009: 157); his struggle however had cast Dalits as a *non-Hindu* minority. This model of Dalit identity is placed at the centre of assertive Dalit

participation in party politics. RPI factions thus actively engage in cultural separatism through commemorative politics around symbols of Ambedkar and Buddha. Assertive Dalit party politics is however under continuous pressure of cooption by dominant political parties and the post-Ambedkar phase of Dalit politics is also marked with growth and fragmentation of RPI groups, which have been increasingly co-opted into Congress (and NCP). RPI is marred by factionalism and cooptation; it turns assertive momentarily against dominant political parties when the demands of RPI leaders (for positions of power) are not met. One of the major shortcomings of the RPI factions in electoral politics (except for Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh - which has strong presence in Akola district of Vidarbha) has been in their reach being limited to Buddhists -Mahar converts. Palshikar (2007a: 126-127) reminds that Dalits are not an ethnic or caste category which explains the uphill task of forming a political instrument amongst Dalits. In Beed, party politics is marked by bi-polar competition between NCP (Marathas) and BJP-SS the (Vanjaris+Marathas) and these dominant players construct the political field for the functioning of Dalit assertive politics.

NCP as Maratha party and the politics of non-Maratha accommodation in 2009 Elections

> Some friends in Beed and I were at the tea stall near a beef eating joint which we regularly visited for lunch, some Muslim men here were discussing elections with statistics and community-wise voting, one of them predicted NCP win with confidence - '*Maratha ke 6 lakh, Vanjari ke 4 lakh, momedan ke 2.5 lakh aur harijan ke 2 lakh,* NCP will win as the Muslims will go with Congress (NCP).' (Fieldnotes: 9/4/09).

They felt that an NCP win was certain in Lok Sabha elections given the definite logic that merged preponderance of Marathas with the inevitable Muslim support to NCP (because of its secular credentials). The internal competition within NCP however made the possibilities of this win difficult in the Lok Sabha elections of 2009. Though NCP is synonymous with Maratha power in Marathwada the control of Marathas is not absolute. The OBCs and Muslims in NCP compete within

themselves to hold their marginal but important locations in the Maratha party. Similarly the locally powerful Marathas too compete to expand their control of resources and patronage within the party. Elections are the critical events for the local political power holders to re-consolidate their strength through intense competition both within and outside the party and money along with caste plays a very important role in such politicking. The local MLAs and their powerful competitors in Beed thus have a thick network of control and patronage that runs deep to control all the development and administrative institutions of state. Local elections like those of Credit Cooperatives, Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Panchayats that hold the state opportunity structure in Beed are therefore much more fierce and competitive where money and caste get played in the crudest forms.

Interestingly however, the overwhelming competition for non-Marathas in the NCP is internal rather than the Maratha control of the party. On 9/8/08, there was an incidence of violence within the non-Maratha workers of NCP in Beed town. This scuffle was between Telis and Vanjaris, and a Mahar supporter of a Teli leader was shot at by a Vanjari leader. Jaydutt Kshirsagar, a powerful Teli leader within NCP, is a key non-Maratha leader and has a family lineage of holding power in Congress (I). His mother was elected Member of Parliament from Beed twice consecutively as Congress (I) candidate in 1980 and 1984. Jaydutt moved to NCP after its formation. Though he does not enjoy the stature that his mother enjoyed in Congress, he still remains a powerful leader locally because of his control of various government aided educational institutions in Beed. He also serves as a non-Maratha face of NCP to challenge BJP, which claims to be a party of Bahujans in Beed.

In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections such divisions within NCP were played overtly in Beed. Ramesh Adaskar, son of Maratha veteran Baburao Adaskar (who is known locally for his wealth, Maratha might and opposition to Namantar) was the candidate of NCP against Gopinath Munde. Adaskar's elevation as a Lok Sabha candidate was drastic as he was just a Zilla Parishad member. During election campaigning, discontent Marathas and Jaydutt did not put their full support behind Adaskar. Some of campaigners from Jaydutt's group would also explain the difficult task of beating

Munde instead of campaigning for Adaskar in the Lok Sabha elections. Jaydutt Kshirsagar was in charge for campaigning in the Beed Vidhan Sabha segment, a stronghold of his. NCP polled only 66,554 votes in the Lok Sabha election of April-May 2009[125] which Adaskar was contesting; however in the Beed Vidhan Sabha elections of October 2009 that Jaydutt contested he polled 109,163 votes.[126] Respondents attributed the difference in votes to the half-hearted campaign.

Some of the Maratha leaders too were discontent with Ramesh Adaskar's elevation from being a Zilla Parishad member to a Lok Sabha candidate. Dalit campaigners of Adaskar's group informed me that the dissenting Marathas and Jaydutt Kshirsagar were not liberal in spending money for campaigning. Adaskar however did mobilise caste emotions of the Marathas during the campaigning making it a direct fight between Marathas and Vanjaris. *Assal Maratha ek vha* (real Marathas unite) and *Vajawa tutari hatava Vanjari* (play the *tutari* [a kind of trumpet associated with Maratha warrior-hood] and chase away the Vanjari) were the sms messages circulated within the Maratha circles respondents alleged.

BJP and NCP as synonyms for dominant caste: Locating Dalit politics at margins

Electoral politics in Beed besides being competition between Vanjaris and Marathas through BJP and NCP is also a tussle within dominant Marathas who switch to the opposite parties when disgruntled. BJP though Vanjari dominated in Beed too is not absolutely so as the Vanjaris constitute a numerical dominant force only in Parali Vidhan Sabha constituency in the rest of Beed they are marginal numerically. The numerical compulsion of Munde to secure non-Vanjari votes works well for Maratha leaders (dissidents of NCP) who move between NCP and BJP to suit their interests while the Vanjaris largely remain attached to BJP because of Munde. Palshikar and Birmal rightly suggest that both NCP and Shiv Sena are Maratha parties, 'the social base of NCP and Shiv Sena is identical except for the support to the former by the

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[125] All figures for Lok Sabha elections 2009 are from the report compiled by Maharashtra Election commission accessed from http://220.225.73.214/pdff/lokresult.pdf
[126] All figures for Vidhan Sabha elections 2009 are from the report compiled by Maharashtra Election commission accessed from http://220.225.73.214/pdff/vidhanresult.pdf

Dalit and Muslim community' (2004: 5470). Indeed, in the present Vidhan Sabha of the 288 Members, over 170 are Marathas (Marpakwar 2010).

The Vanjari supporters of Munde (not BJP) used anti-Vanjari mobilisation of NCP during the Lok Sabha elections to portray Munde as a 'Bahujan' leader. Munde's landslide victory over Adaskar was attributed to Munde's generosity in incurring electoral expenses, which were estimated to be far higher than NCP. One Vanjari supporter told me, 'He spend lots […] around 150 crore, he bought over all the Marathas (leaders) overnight'. Vanjari supporters of Munde also resorted to violence against Vanjaris who were campaigning for NCP. Munde polled 51 per cent votes and won the elections with the highest winning margin in Maharashtra of 140,571. Munde remains absolute leader of BJP with no leadership roles assigned outside his family; he has also remained committed to Vanjari development[127] thus monopolising the Vanjari vote in Beed.

The local political leaders from dominant castes (Maratha and Vanjari) have a thick network of power spread till the villages through control of local bodies. The Maratha leaders are more powerful than the Vanjaris due to their stronger hold over all the state institutions, land and their numerical advantage. Most of these political strongmen in Beed have expanded their economic and political patronage power through control of state resources like credit cooperatives, sugar cooperatives, government aided educational institutes, Zilla Parishads, Panchayat Samitis and local panchayats. The expanding state in rural India further offers new patronage opportunities to these political elites thus consolidating identity politics (Chandra 2004). With the growth of Congress and BJP and the rising patronage culture in politics, the parties with left ideology have shrunk in the political landscapes of Beed. The leader of Peasants and Workers Party of India (PWPI), a Maratha with left leanings who polled 32 618 in the Majalgaon assembly elections of 2004, had come down to a meagre 10 077 in 2009. He attributed his shrinking support to the 'money

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[127] It is local knowledge in Beed that Vanjaris benefited most when Munde was Deputy Chief Minister during the BJP-SS rule. The Vanjaris over time in Beed have consolidated their power in the local state opportunity structure. They however remain dependent on Marathas (dissidents of NCP) in areas other than Parali to sustain their power.

power' of BJP and Congress candidates who distributed money, liquor and meat for votes (Interview: 28/1/10). Another left influenced female Vanjari leader who had hopped between all major parties except BJP observed, 'earlier there was a need to go and work with people now any one can become a leader by putting their cardboard cutouts on the streets' (Interview: 29/1/10).

Assertive Dalits in BJP and NCP do not hold any positions of importance in Beed nor do Dalit needs figure prominently in their manifestos. In the political rallies, both BJP and NCP emphasised that their objective was to hoist Shivaji's flag on the *red fort* (symbolizes capturing Delhi/India) while the former emphasised the saffron colour of the flag the latter did not. NCP symbolically printed pictures of Athawale and blue flags in political rallies as RPI (A) was in alliance with NCP-Congress during Lok Sabha elections. The manifestos circulated by BJP and NCP during these elections in Beed were almost identical in their emphasis on addressing issues like rail, roads, irrigation, industries, electricity, education, employment, water and health. Both noted only one identical issue for Dalits – 'schemes pertaining to hostels for Dalit students' will be implemented. Issues like gaairan, caste atrocities, and their exclusion from DRDA (District Rural Development Agency) list of Below Poverty Line (BPL) which affected the rural Dalits were not of importance. The silence of state and Dalit political representatives from NCP is most visible in cases of caste violence against Dalits. Kaij Vidhan Sabha constituency in Beed is a SC reserved constituency which has been won by Dr. Vimal Mundada continuously for the last three elections. Mundada is from Chambar caste, she had won this seat in 1999 on BJP ticket and as NCP candidate in 2004 and 2009. In Dalit activist circles Vimal Mundada is criticised for her absolute silence on cases of caste violence against Dalits in Kaij and Beed and also on the issue of gaairan land.

In terms of independent participation and performance, BSP was the main Dalit party in Beed for both Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. BBM was another key Dalit political party in Lok Sabha elections, which polled 11,006 votes. It however did not contest any of the Vidhan Sabha seats in Beed. RPI (A) turned assertive momentarily in the months following Lok Sabha elections as the Vidhan Sabha elections closed

in. RPI (A) leader Ramdas Athawale lost the 2009 Lok Sabha election in newly reserved Shirdi constituency and alleged that his defeat was a Congress ploy. He, therefore, severed ties with Congress-NCP and mobilised factions of RPI to unite against Congress in a RPI-Led Third Front. Smaller and important players like Peasants and Workers Party of India (PWPI) who had supported Congress in the Lok Sabha elections due to its 'secular' credentials switched to be part of the RPI-led third front. BBM (led by Prakash Ambedkar), however, stayed away from the RPI unity efforts insisting that they were opportunistic and not ideological.

RPI (A) contested the Beed Vidhan Sabha constituency as part of the Third Front and gained some non-Dalit support as Syed Salim, a local politically prominent Muslim, was the candidate. Syed Salim had won the Beed Vidhan Sabha seat in 1999 on NCP ticket and lost in 2004. The Beed Vidhan Sabha constituency was an issue of conflict between Jaydutt Kshirsagar and Syed Salim and the Maratha leadership had to solve this. Sensing that the seat may be given to Salim or to a Maratha, Jaydutt had prepared to contest as an independent candidate. Syed raised the issue of Muslim representation in NCP, he was however denied the ticket and Jaydutt bagged it. Syed protested by contesting as RPI (A) led third front candidate and polled 32, 999 votes in Beed. Opposition to NCP by the OBCs and Muslims is not long lasting, however, and Syed rejoined NCP in February 2010 when they came to power. Of the six Vidhan Sabha seats in Beed NCP had won five, it was only the Vanjari stronghold of Parali that was bagged by Pankaja Munde, daughter of Gopinath Munde. There were moments of informal aligning between BSP workers and RPI (A) in Beed as RPI workers used pamphlets issued by BSP workers giving details of NCP [Marathas] involvement in shielding atrocities against Dalits in Marathwada.

While the NCP lost the Lok Sabha elections because of internal competition, the Vidhan Sabha elections saw it return. Dalits politics remained marginal, illustrating how the Dalit relationship with state is one of continued exclusion and electoral politics institutionalizes such exclusion. Dalits and Dalit movements do not have the social, cultural, political and economic capital required to win elections and numerically too they are weak in Beed (and Maharashtra in general). It is within this

context of party politics that BSP and MHA operate as marginal but vibrant actors in Beed. BSP largely keeps at bay from agitations in its political performance terming agitations as mere reactions that are not constructive and valuable in the long run, whereas MHA couples protests with participation in electoral politics. I will present the electoral practices and marginalisation of BSP and MHA in the following sections. The trajectory of Awad's political choices and compulsions coupled with the dynamism of MHA workers' participation in decentralised politics, and BSP's ideological and principled critique of BJP and Congress coupled with the tensions between principled politics of ideology and real politics of caste are elaborated. I will particularly engage with their participation in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections of 2009.

BSP in 2009 Elections: mobilising for blue flag on red fort

The BSP's electoral campaigning in Maharashtra kicked off immediately after its victory in the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha elections of May 2007. *UP hui hamari hain ab Dilli ki baari hain* (UP is ours and now it is time for Delhi) was the new slogan amongst the workers. As noted by Hardtmann (2009: 129-130), 'one of the important changes that followed after BSP capturing power several times has been that of changing the Indian "culture of politics" where BSP introduced SCs as political rulers.' In the political fields of Marathwada where securing justice for Dalits even in cases of caste violence is an uphill task, 'Dalits as rulers' served as a real morale booster for Dalit activists. Overall a sense of self-belief and hope prevailed amongst the BSP cadre in Maharashtra, a state where BSP has yet to win a single Legislative Assembly or Lok Sabha seat, and the leadership of Dalits did not hinder attraction of non-Dalits to the party.

Workers from Beed attended a massive rally of BSP party workers was held in Mumbai in November 2007, which was addressed by Mayawati. Some bigwig dissidents from Congress joined BSP on this occasion and others followed later. The Dalit-Brahman alliance and the new found slogan of *sarvajan hitay* (welfare of all communities/castes) also gained some currency amongst the workers locally. As the Lok Sabha elections of 2009 closed in non-Dalit newspapers (including the English

ones) carried reports and articles on the possibility of Mayawati emerging as PM in case of hung parliament. The cadres attributed the newspaper and media coverage to inclusion of Brahmins in the party.[128] Some notable Brahmins in Maharashtra joined BSP including the Brahmin priest of Kalaram temple, who apologised for his grandfather not letting Ambedkar and his followers into the temple. Another formidable Brahmin was D.S Kulkarni a multi-millionaire builder from Pune who contested the Lok Sabha seat in Pune.

In Marathwada too some political bigwigs joined including Bhimrao Hattiambire from neighbouring Parbhani, a Dalit from NCP who termed this a 'home coming' and organised a rally of around 50 000 people to mark his entry in BSP. Locally in Beed, cadres mobilised resources and organised more cadre trainings, meetings and performances by Rahul Anvikar to mobilise Dalits, OBCs and Muslims to make Mayawati the PM of India. It was usual to find stickers (on bikes and cars) and screen savers on mobile phones of BSP cadres that displayed pictures of Mayawati with text below stating Prime Minister 2009. More BSP literature also came in circulation locally; for instance Ambedkar Today[129] which is published in Hindi from Lucknow/Delhi was sold by one of the workers during meetings.

Non-Mahar and Non-BSP Dalits too were attracted to BSP during this period as seen in Chapter seven. The leaders of RPI factions were critical of BSP but some local party workers moved to BSP in Beed. A Bauddha (Mahar) supporter of RPI who attended a BSP meeting said 'RPI is strong here so we support them'. I enquired what had brought him there? He replied, 'Mayawati has become CM of U.P, I feel proud [*abhiman vatato*] about it. I hope someone from Dalit samaj should become C.M. here too' (Fieldnotes: 23/1/09). The success of BSP in UP had raised hopes amongst the Dalits of the possibility of making a Dalit CM without any patronage. Dalit supporters of various socio-political factions that I came across would

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[128] While news reports in Marathi were read by workers the English ones were translated in Marathi and circulated in some Dalit magazines.

[129] This Magazine contained details of policies of BSP government in UP that were presented as in line with Ambedkarite ideology, articles on Ambedkar, Kanshiram and Mayawati and occasional criticism of caste beliefs and values of Hinduism. The cadres read this magazine with great interest. It was, however, banned by BSP Government in UP in 2010 after litigation filed against its editor for criticising Hindu religion as a system of inequality.

informally share their happiness over BSP gaining political power in UP and Mayawati becoming CM. Besides an increase in Dalit following, some non-Dalits were attracted towards the BSP which included OBCs, Muslims and Brahmins in Beed. The key Dalit opponents of BSP were RPI (A) and BBM and the debate thus was on claiming moral high ground and on being the true inheritors of Ambedkar. In their political rallies leaders of RPI (A) would criticise BSP as not being a Republican[130] party and for being a UP party, whereas BSP leaders would not acknowledge the RPI factions and focus on criticising BJP and Congress as enemies of Dalit. In their informal conversations the cadre and supporters of BSP would call the leaders of RPI stooges who had sold out to Congress. BBM had a similar critique of RPI (A) which they felt had left from Congress only because Athawale did not get elected to the Lok Sabha.

The cadres were aware that not all were attracted towards the party because of ideology and that the growing political clout of BSP was also a reason. BSP for some was also a source of what some the cadres termed *lagao le jao* (invest some, take lots) especially if they were made the candidates or had a role in identifying the candidate. BSP workers would however use Kanshiram's description of such entrants as 'ladders'. 'Ladders' (*sidi*) - contrasted to the committed cadres or 'missionaries' (synonymous with Dalits) - are those who enter the party with 'selfish' purposes and see the BSP as an opportunity for their economic and political gains. The missionaries, however, stick to the party irrespective of its performance in elections. Stories of 'missionary' sacrifices are common amongst the cadre. While Kanshiram and Mayawati are considered the pinnacle of such sacrifice – having given up family life for the party - various local names are evoked too. 'Missionaries' are seen as the bedrock of the party who understand not only the conservative behaviour of the ladders but also the utility of ladders to help reach their goal of 'political power'.

The workers of BSP actively laboured to replicate the Bhaichara (brotherhood) model of UP in Beed which involved forming committees of various castes/religions. Bhaichara committees of various castes came up locally, like the Vanjari bhaichara,

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[130] It is interesting to note that locally the word republican has become synonymous with Dalit particularly Mahar dominated parties.

the Muslim Bhaichara, the Mali (gardener) bhaichara, the Kaikadi (nomadic tribe) Bhaichara, Dhangar Bhaichara and Maratha Bhaichara. Those non-Dalit leaders that approached BSP workers or those who were mobilised by the workers were made heads of these Bhaichara committees and Dalit workers were the secretaries.

One of the notable distinctions of BSP's campaigning was its deliberation of Bahujan ideology both in mass campaigns and closed door cadre trainings, these included emphasising the right to vote as a remarkable breakthrough in the history of India for Bahujans, Voting for Bahujan ideology and not for money, Congress and BJP as anti-people (Bahujan) and BSP and Behenji (Mayawati) as the only hope. There were no promises made in the campaigning though some policies in UP were provided as evidence of change brought in by BSP there. Mayawati's charisma was thus strengthened by emphasising her 'Ambedkarite' power through cadre camps, public meetings and reading materials and musical performances by Rahul Anvikar. Mayawati and BSP were presented as the only alternative for Ambedkarites if they hoped to see the *blue flag on the red fort*. Around a lakh people attended Mayawati's rally in Nagpur on 8/4/09 which included a large number of women.[131]

> Mayawati appeared on the stage along with Satish Chandra Mishra. Everyone was up on their feet, there was some chaos with people wanting catch a glimpse of her. Mayawati came and waved at the crowd in all directions, the crowd responded similarly. […] Sachan introduced Mayawati as *Bharatvarsha ki Gaurav,* (the pride of India) the heart beat of *sarva-samaj* […] and the future Prime Minister of India. (Fieldnotes: 8/4/09)

In her speech at Nagpur, Mayawati reiterated the intersection of identity and interests of Bahujans and the quest of BSP as an ideology based movement to serve the interests of not just Bahujans but *sarvajans*.

> It is sad that despite 61 years of independence, in our country Bahujan Samaj [explains - includes SC, ST, OBC and religious minorities like Sikh, Muslim,

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[131] As the elections neared the cadres of BSP did not have to pay for their own travel. The money provided by the candidates helped in organising travel for cadre and participants.

Christians, Parsi and Baudha], their social and economic conditions have not changed much.

In some states the poor have become naxals because of continued poverty. We believe that Congress and other opposition parties are responsible for this […] Both Congress and BJP came into power with the help of capitalists and after coming to power, these governments […] made economic policies [...] to profit the big capitalists. BSP is the only party in the country which does not take money from big capitalists or sugar barons (seth) to run the party it collects money from lay workers who earn this money through blood and sweat (Claps here) [speech recorded: 8/4/09]

Support for BSP was mobilised through portraying BSP (and Mayawati) as a Bahujan party following Phule-Ambedkarite ideology and identifying the failure of Congress and BJP in providing dignity and poverty-free life to Bahujans. Campaigning was carried by the cadre without identifying the candidate/s to contest the elections and mobilisation was in favour of party (and Mayawati) and not the candidate. The cadre focussed on expanding the base of BSP by roping in Dalits and interested non-Dalits. BSP was also an opportunity to make money during the elections for some of the new entrants. It was difficult for the committed cadre to identify those who would stick in BSP in the long run and those who had entered for brokering, as the new entrants too would adapt to the Bahujan vocabulary in no time.

Maharashtra state-in-charge of BSP were two leaders (one Kurmi and one Chamar) from Uttar Pradesh, one of them was Member of Parliament in Rajya Sabha. In the special cadre training for the workers on elections the MP insisted on strengthening the organisation till the grassroots, i.e. voting booths and sectors as the success of BSP was based on taking the Bhaichara and sanghathan (organisation) to the lowest level. The workers were motivated to volunteer (time and money) for the Ambedkarite mission of creating a *Samata Mulak Samaj* (society based on principles of equality). 'Other parties have money we have movement and ideology' was the message for the cadres' (Fieldnotes: 31/1/09). Some important precautions suggested

for the elections included, being wary of (mainstream) media, possibility of candidate or even workers getting sold out and therefore the need for commitment to party and not candidate – "our candidate is the elephant (party symbol) and not any individual" (Fieldnotes:7/12/08). The Taluka and District Committees of BSP were criticised regularly by state-in-charge in the review meetings for not reaching out till the lowest level. Such demands of accountability from the district and Taluka committees were not accompanied with financial support for building organisation. Money was to be mobilised from supporters and well wishers, key amongst them was BAMCEF. BAMCEF had mobilised 60000 rupees for the party fund on *Aarthik Sahyog divas* (economic cooperation day synonymous with Mayawati's Birthday) and the cadre too had done their bit. This money had however gone to the party fund and was not available for local campaigning.

The cadre and the leaders of BSP were aware of economic costs of campaigning during the elections. Since the BSP does not distribute doles to voters or brokers, the workers are short of money even for travel during campaigning. The candidate thus if economically powerful was considered a good source of resource for expanding the party base through campaigning. This also meant that the cadres could not move up the party's organisational hierarchy, but they emphasised their voluntary spirit in supporting BSP and its ideology.

The names of BSP candidates for other Lok Sabha constituencies in Maharashtra had started rolling out from February onwards. In Beed however the candidate was not identified till early April. Part of the problem was in Munde being a powerful candidate, and no one was willing to gamble their resources on what seemed to be a sure loss. The cadres of BSP were close to convincing a Brahmin known in Beed for his *kirtans* (religious songs), but the leaders of BJP intervened.

A meeting of BSP workers (BAMCEF and party functionaries) in Beed was organised to discuss the 'type' of candidate they wanted. This was an interesting occasion to witness the conflict between principled politics and real politics as caste and money came to be discussed as the criteria for identifying the candidate with

some cadres calling for a balance between money/caste and ideology in the candidate. These choices were however influenced by the pervasive political culture and compulsions of BSP locally and not just ideology.

> We are all minorities here, Muslim, Mahar, Brahman […] Ours is a politics of minority (*alpasankhya*) […]. We should be giving the ticket to anyone who believes in social engineering and also to someone who does not split after the elections. (A Brahmin)
>
> Money is important and we need money for prachar (campaigning) […] and for spreading our *vichardhara* [ideology]. Identify a candidate who has money and believes in (our) ideology. (Mahar)
>
> I have only one request; do not do caste politics. Our party believes in having no caste, then why caste? Why do we support the party, it is because of the *vichar*. An economically strong candidate can help but that will be *kshanik sukh* (temporary bliss). I am working with the party for 15 year just because of the vichar. (Parit caste)
>
> BJP has fielded a Vanjari and NCP a Maratha. We should look at the caste arithmetic and give the ticket to Dhangar, Laman, Muslim or a Mali. The candidate has to be economically strong. He should be able to provide at least 5 vehicles (for campaigning) in each *vidhansabha*. We should form all the Bhaichara too in this process. (Mahar)
>
> Beed has a good Muslim population, we could consider giving it to Muslim or we can also give it to a Dhangar. We need a strong candidate, give primacy to a Muslim. (Mang) (Fieldnotes: 10/3/09).

The possibility of Dalit candidates or missionaries contesting was hardly raised; some who thought on these lines reiterated the difficulty of finding someone with the required resources. In informal discussions the cadres would see fielding an 'external' candidate/ladder as part of the strategy. Beyond caste and economic compulsions, the possibility of Dalit candidate winning on non-reserved seats remains dismal. For missionaries it is also difficult to contest elections as the costs of campaigning are generally out of their reach. The effort of the cadre was to identify a

candidate who was neither a Maratha nor a Vanjari and who would be willing to spend money for the campaign and ideally is inclined toward Bahujan ideology.

Experienced workers reiterated that Maratha candidates were least preferred as they fail to secure Maratha votes for BSP. A look at the caste profile of candidates who contested elections on BSP ticket in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections reveals that Marathas were the least preferred caste. Since the prime competition was between the Marathas (NCP) and the Vanjaris (BJP) in Beed, BSP cadres tried to become a powerful third player by not focusing on these two castes.

While the discussions held above to discuss the candidate pointed towards a democratic practice or seeking opinion of the workers who were lower down the hierarchy, the actual identification of candidate did not go as per their wishes. A Maratha candidate was finally identified to contest elections by one of the District leaders (who had moved from Congress to BSP in 2004) upsetting the committed cadres. This was more so as this candidate was supposedly 'planted' by the BJP in the hope that he would split the Maratha votes. The cadres did not anticipate a win in Beed, though they were hopeful of Mayawati emerging as PM and of putting up a good fight (vote percentage) in Beed. All the high hopes of the cadre were affected with the finalizing of this candidate who had neither a social base nor commitment to Bahujan ideology. Some of the BSP workers shared their unease and dissatisfaction over the choice of candidate.

Mhaske (candidate) has a past in Sangh and Congress, he is character-less. (Fieldnotes: 4/4/09)

Look at the Rajasthan example; all the six MLA's (of BSP) have joined Congress. The missionary and the mission are important for the movement. We did not agree with the candidate that was identified by the District head who is influenced by Congress culture. We opposed the candidate, some of us threatened to leave but they (state leadership) did not care. Mayawati seems to prefer ladder (sidi) more than missionaries, unlike Kanshiram who gave more importance to missionaries.

Excessive use of ladders can backfire as they are not committed to the party and leave the BSP at their convenience adversely affecting the morale of committed cadres who may also cherish the dream of contesting elections. The overwhelming absence of Maratha candidates affected the *sarva-samaj* (all castes) image of BSP. Thus the Beed Maratha candidates' willingness to contribute money to party funds and for campaigning locally were the key factors that led to the overruling of the concerns of the cadres. The candidate was neither interested nor involved in campaigning for votes after securing the candidature. Nor did he provide the promised amount. The district level head of BSP who had identified the candidate was also involved in swindling some money meant for campaigning. This led to internal conflict within BSP as the committed workers roughed him up. This concerned leader had moved to BSP from Congress in 2004 and after the Lok Sabha elections joined the BJP. Zonal level BAMCEF workers intervened to advise the cadre against using violence as a strategy as it went against the ideology of BSP.

The cadres however returned to campaigning and utilised the limited resources made available by the candidate to reach out to the villages. Separate booklets for Upper Caste, SC/ST and OBC and for Muslims in Hindi and (Urdu for Muslims) released from Lucknow were distributed by the cadres who particularly focussed on reaching Dalits. The villages that had not polled a single vote for BSP in the past returned with single digit votes for BSP, most of these were Dalit votes. BSP polled a total of 25, 284 votes, which was their highest so far in Beed Lok Sabha elections. This was much lower than other districts in Marathwada where BSP had done much better compared to past Lok Sabha elections. For instance in Hingoli the candidate from Laman caste with a background in Bahujan politics had polled 111,357 and the Muslim candidate in Nanded had polled 84,743. Strong candidates with clean political image who also belonged to a numerical caste (other than Maratha), thus, were able to make a dent in expanding votes for BSP. In Beed however there were various factors that contributed to BSP's un-impressive performance. Firstly it was the candidate, who besides not having a clean political image was also from the

'wrong' caste. Further BSP's claim of being 'Bahujan' party was not put into practice by giving ticket to a '*savarna*' [Marathas are not considered part of Bahujans by Dalits]. Secondly, the Dalit workers of BJP mobilised opinion and emotions against the NCP candidate by recalling the instances of Adaskar's father's involvement in humiliating Ambedkar (symbols) and Dalits during the *Namantar* conflict and Munde's support for the Namantar movement. This worked well in mobilising votes for Munde as a Bahujan candidate. Munde too resorted to 'Bahujan' rhetoric and claimed to be a Bahujan leader as against the non-inclusive Maratha-NCP. Further Munde did not allow Narendra Modi (Hindutva voice of BJP) to campaign in Beed thus attracting some Muslims towards BJP. Thirdly, the use of money affected performance of BSP as Dalits reportedly voted for money and liquor supplied by the dominant parties. Phule Pimpalgaaon (Majalgaon) village has a strong presence of BSP (and Dalits) had polled 171 (17 per cent in the village) votes[132]; the local cadres in the village were however disappointed as some Dalits here had voted in favour of BJP for money. BSP thus was a minor force in Beed Lok Sabha elections that sailed on the hard work of cadre.

The workers of BSP utilised their limited resources in mobilising Dalit votes and opinion in favour or BSP. By voting for BSP the Dalits however risk their welfare entitlements in the villages as the local state bodies are controlled by either Marathas or Vanjaris. Such control is deep rooted and encompasses panchayats, cooperatives and all aspects associated with welfare and other state entitlements for the poor. K, one of the Mang female supporters of BSP who was sure that BSP will not win in Maharashtra explained the specificity of fear (*dadpan*) that Dalits voting for BSP have to face- the fear of violence and exclusion from state entitlements meant for the poor particularly the Dalits.

> K: BSP will not come to power in Maharashtra, if BSP comes to power in Maharashtra the whole world will shake. It will be good if she (Mayawati) comes to power but it is not easy. It is a difficult situation for our people, they are under *dadpan.*

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[132] The booth wise voting results were published in all major news papers and the data from Phule Pimpalgaon is from the newspaper *Sakal*, Aurangabad edition dated 20/5/09.

S: Dadpan?

K: They cannot go with BSP; what if they vote and BSP does not come to power? No one will take us close later; they will say get lost you voted for elephant. Is this not *dadpan*? That is why I told you I will not tell you who I vote for and you should not ask me who I am voting for (Interview: 5/3/09).

As booth-wise voting is published in major newspapers locally, it is easy to identify who in the village has voted for whom. Dalit voting, if not in favour of dominant castes could also attract violence. This is a particular cause of fear for Dalits who are dependent on dominant castes for their daily survival. K further emphasised that voting for money offered by the dominant castes and parties did not ensure Dalits access to state entitlements. She was particularly referring to *sarkari kaam* (means government related jobs - like schemes of DRDA, Gharkul, Corporation Loans and various other state provisions).

[...] If we take their money we become their slaves, why will they do your *kaam*? He (elected representative) too will ask for money later. You have not voted for free why will you get the facilities for free? They will say, you took money, liquor and mutton for voting now get lost (Interview: 5/3/09).

BSP did not win a single seat in Lok Sabha elections of Maharashtra though its vote percentage increased sharply in Vidarbha and Marathwada. The tall hope of Mayawati becoming PM was faced with BSP not winning a single seat in Maharashtra and performance below expectation in UP; this lowered the morale of both the workers and supporters of BSP. The committed cadre however continued to talk of winning possibilities in the future and they would also emphasise that BSP is a movement and not a political party, so a loss did not affect them. In the Vidhan Sabha elections that followed the cadres played a greater role in identifying candidates. The Vidhan Sabha elections were however too competitive in terms of resource requirements for BSP to carve any niche. Local issues of indigenous

Marathi vs. north Indians was a counter force that gained much political importance and led to further splitting of Dalit votes in western region. In Marathwada candidates identified by BSP were no matches for the Maratha powerhouses of NCP under pressures of which even the BJP performed dismally in Beed. The only seat of hope in Beed was Georai as a Muslim candidate with clean political image who had (economic) resources was identified to contest. I will return to return to BSP's performance in Vidhan Sabha after discussing the challenges the cadres faced in mobilising non-Dalits toward BSP.

Non-Dalit Support and the challenge of *lagaoo lejaoo* (invest and reap) culture of party politics

The success of BSP depends on non-Dalit support and BSP has increasingly grown into a catch all party under Dalit leadership (Jaffrelot 2006). While BSP managed to instil self-belief within Dalits about the possibility of a Dalit party with Bahujan ideology (Phule-Ambedkarite) coming to power on its own, mobilising non-Dalit support remained a difficult task. The ideological dimensions remained un-attractive to most non-Dalits even if they were emphasised by non-Dalits in BSP. Satish Chandra Mishra who had gained much attention of the mainstream media as the Brahmin architect of BSP's victory in UP was accompanying Mayawati for the Nagpur rally. He gave a short speech emphasising the multi-caste character of BSP and its all-inclusive ideology before the salutary ending of *Jai Bhim* and *Jai Bharat*.

> The ideology of BSP is not against any caste or religion rather BSP is trying to change the social order that is based on inequality to make a *samata mulak samaj* [society based on principles of equality] where there is *insaniyaat* and *manavata* [both mean humanism]. I would also like to clarify here that if BSP would have been against upper caste then our party would not have made me General Secretary of BSP and also a Rajya Sabha MP (Recorded Speech: 8/4/09) .

The cadres thus worked towards mobilising non-Dalit support through formation of Bhaichara committees and by explaining ideological basis of BSP. Such ideological groundings that revolved around undoing historical humiliation and exclusion

(social, economic and political) were however not always attractive for non-Dalits. Syed Irshad Ali, a well-educated Muslim in his sixties, fluent in English was invited to attend one of these meetings. In our informal conversation he shared that this 'emotional' approach does not work (Fieldnotes: 24/2/09). However some Non-Dalits too had joined BSP in Beed in the post 2007 mobilisation that included Muslims, Brahmans and Marathas. The lure of money and power from dominant parties however worked in purging these new non-Dalit supporters from BSP. I will discuss two key cases here to further elaborate on the tension between principled politics and the substantive politics where caste and money matter. Uday Bhonjal (Brahman) from Beed Taluka and Safdar Khan Pathan (Muslim) from Georai joined BSP, their role and participation, compulsions that were influenced by the larger political culture of Marathwada are detailed below.

Sudhir Das, the Mahant (chief priest) of Kalaram Temple in Nasik joined BSP in May 2007 after BSP came to power in UP. Ambedkar had led the protests to enter Kalaram Temple in 1930 and the then Mahant (grandfather of Sudhir Das) had refused entry to the untouchables. Sudhir Das while joining BSP issued statements that he was joining the BSP to atone his grandfather's sin (IANS 2010). Mahant also called upon the Brahmins in Maharashtra to join BSP. Uday Bhonjal, in his mid-40s joined BSP following the call of Mahant of Kalaram Mandir. Bhonjal has a degree in automobile engineering but has been pursuing his party political ambitions since few years. He had made his wife contest elections on a Congress ticket in Beed Corporation elections in 2006 which they lost. After joining BSP, Bhonjal actively participated in campaigning for BSP with the BSP cadre in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. He was a very important resource of Rahul Anvikar to point out to participants in gatherings that BSP movement was a movement about spreading Ambedkarism to all sections of society and Bhonjal served as ready evidence.

Such is the magic of Mayawati that even Brahmins say Jai Bhim, one such Brahmin is in front of us.' Bhonjal saab please come here. Bhonjal rushed towards Rahul. Rahul would say *jor se bolo* (call out loudly), Bhonjal would follow 'Jai Bhim', Takat se bolo (call out with Might) Bhonjal would add 'Jai Bhim bolo',

with music playing in the back ground. Both Bhonjal and Rahul danced on this tune for a while as the crowd both men and women applauded. (Fieldnotes: 23/1/09).

Bhonjal had become friends with the cadre who would humour him as an exceptional Brahman, who had great liking for liquor and meat. Bhonjal provided both ideological and political reasons for joining BSP. He would emphasise the historic association of Brahmins with Phule-Ambedkarism where Phule and Ambedkar both were supported by some Brahmins. He simultaneously stressed that Brahmins too were a minority who were most disliked and ignored by the Marathas.

Have you seen or heard a Brahmin committing atrocity against Dalits in the village? No. It's the Marathas. I tell them [BSP cadre] do not to trust Borade [new Maratha in BSP Beed] but they don't listen. I am sure he has worked out a deal with NCP guys. (Informal conversation: 23/1/09)

Bhonjal (and Safdar) too had given a speech in the road blockade organised by BSP against the Shindi case of violence against Dalit girls. He had also contributed money to organise meetings of BSP and meet travel expenses of cadre and for putting up his posters in Beed. Bhonjal however was critical of the Dalit dominance in party posts and the decision making power they wielded. He was critical of the policy where 'missionaries' were given the key posts in the party. Bhonjal was hopeful of contesting the Beed Vidhan Sabha elections on a BSP ticket but this was given to a Maratha. Bhonjal though discontent is still with BSP, which is also a compulsion for him due to lack of better options. BJP is synonymous with Vanjari power in Beed, and Bhonjal particularly disliked Marathas and NCP. BSP thus is also a vehicle for self-interested politicians.

Safdar from Georai Taluka was another entrant who rose in party organisation to occupy the post of District vice president in Beed. He was most liked by the committed cadre for his clean image and for running an organisation that provided charity for poor Muslims. Safdar would emphasise in his speeches that BSP was 80

per cent movement and 20 per cent politics and that is what had attracted him to the party. 'I have been a social worker; I liked *vichar* (ideology) of the party. I am also economically well off [*arthik paristhiti bari aahe*] so I thought I should join them' (Fieldnotes: 19/12/08). Safdar owned two SUV cars which were plunged into campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections. Some workers of BSP were hoping for Safdar to contest the Lok Sabha elections. While the Lok Sabha seat was given to a Maratha, Safdar was confirmed candidate for Georai Vidhan Sabha seat much before the elections were announced.

Safdar who was a resident of Georai town was most critical of the political might of the Marathas in Georai Taluka, particularly the two Pandit (surname) families who controlled both BJP and NCP. He along with support of workers from BSP had protested on various occasions against the illegal sand mining in Godavari River that the NCP MLA of Georai Badamrao Pandit was involved in.

> These people have filled their own pockets so far, the best example is the Pandits in Georai, they have kept power in the family for so many years by controlling both Congress and BJP, they smuggle sand from Godavari and demand money from poor for sanctioning *gharkul* (housing scheme), or providing kerosene. They just want to earn money and nothing else. They feel that they were born to rule. (Speech from Fieldnotes: 22/2/09)

Some of these protests were reported in local newspapers, thus resulting in recognition for Safdar locally. The Dalit workers of Georai had mobilised noticeable support for BSP in Beed. In the Lok Sabha elections Georai polling booths had polled a total of 4446 votes. Safdar's contesting on BSP ticket for the Vidhan Sabha elections led to distress for the NCP MLA as the competition with BJP MLA was a very close one and smallest margin mattered. Safdar's clean political image and his being a Muslim made the matter worse as it meant transfer of some Muslim votes in favour of BSP. Dalit cadre in Georai laboured intensely to mobilise support for BSP and Safdar locally which made Georai a seat of hope not for win but for rocking the chances of NCP and the local MLA as both are known for their anti-Dalit stance.

Dalit workers were however in for a shock as Safdar withdrew his nomination at the last moment and joined the NCP MLA who he had been protesting against. The cadres of BSP had mistaken Safdar as someone who was attracted to BSP's ideology. Safdar was lured by Badamrao Pandit to join NCP, which assured Badamrao's win in the election of Georai Vidhan Sabha with a meagre margin of 2347 votes. Cadres of BSP generally kept an eye on candidates till the last date of nomination withdrawal but Safdar was not amongst the doubted ones. Safdar's contesting elections would have turned the tide against the dominant Pandit family of Georai and established him and BSP as an alternative third force in politics of Georai Vidhan Sabha. Dalit workers from Georai informed me in 2010 that Safdar had bagged heavy contracts for public works from the NCP MLA. Safdar changed his mobile number after he defected from BSP and has remained inaccessible for me and other BSP workers since.

The withdrawal of Safdar and the marginal performance of BSP may point to the failure of assertive Dalit politics if evaluated in an instrumentalist sense. BSP however has consolidated and sustained assertive Dalit politics in Maharashtra particularly Marathwada and Vidharbha despite various odds. The structure of patronage politics and bipolar competition between the Marathas and Vanjaris provides little space for Dalits to carve out space for separate identity and ideology; competition from RPI groups that are most malleable further complicates the matter. The growth of BSP in UP and the hard work of cadre in Marathwada have contributed in taking BSP as a political opportunity and as an ideology beyond Dalits. Patronage politics however remains the mainstream political culture that best merges and sustains through numerical advantage of Marathas and Vanjaris. Dalit cadre of BSP, despite failures continued to remain hopeful of change, they continue to spend from their pockets to attend meeting and rallies as far as Lucknow even after their defeat in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. While the case of BSP presents continued practice of assertive Dalit politics in electoral arena, the case of MHA points to opportunistic alliance with NCP that too did not yield to Dalits or MHA leaders the desired benefit.

MHA in electoral politics: alliances and exclusions

I have discussed in the context chapter the intersections between institutional and extra-institutional mobilisation of MHA. The workers of MHA see the participation in party politics as a necessity of activism and most of them actively participate in/or contest Panchayat elections. The reasons for participation in electoral politics echo those of other Dalit movements.

S: Between *samaj karan* (social work) and some do *rajkaran* (political work/politics), what do you think is the best way?

P: It is true that *samaj karan* helps to change the samaj, but even *rajkaran* can help in changing samaj. Look at Mayawati for instance [...] Mayawati feels that grassroots work does not change policy; we have to control the place where policy is made. We should have people of our *vichar* there. Therefore politics is important in changing the samaj.

S: Does anyone want to add something? (No response, all seemed in agreement) (Focus Group Discussion: 10/12/08)

The principled reasoning of MHA activists reiterates belief in democratic processes however the actual practice of elections is rooted in political competition where the dominant political players use intersections of caste, money and muscle variedly. MHA functions from its marginal location in contesting and at times replicating these substantive practices in electoral processes. MHA despite its temporal alliance with the dominant parties has also sustained its independent identity by not totally toeing the line of BJP or NCP.

Mapping MHA and Awad's political choices

Awad's active participation in party politics began through BSP; he was one of the state vice-presidents of BSP in the late 1990s and had contested the Lok Sabha elections from Beed constituency in 1998 polling 15666 votes. The Bhartiya Janata Party candidate who won the Beed seat polled 300 307 votes and the NCP candidate who was runner up had polled 294 204. Some Non-Maratha dissidents within NCP

had covertly extended support to Awad. The NCP Maratha candidate lost the seat only because of Awad contesting the elections as he managed to swing a large number of Dalit votes in favour of BSP. Awad considered contesting election for BSP as a sacrifice (*bali*) for the movement to 'liberate' the Dalit votes.

> Kanshiram told me you should contest elections; you should be a victim for the community. No one had such a strong campaigning as ours. There was an elephant and photograph of Babasaheb used in the campaign. We used to go in the village and say; the Patils from their forts (*gadivarchya wadyawarche patla*) have oppressed us. They have not allowed our vote to be free (*mukt*). I am contesting elections to free vote of *manguda* and *maharuda*[133]. (Interview: 24/8/08)

Though Awad entered politics in an assertive mode seeking to liberate Dalit votes from fear and to secure power for Dalits (Bahujans), MHA's political strategies have been most fluid for the last 10 years since Awad moved out of BSP. Awad attributed his departure from BSP primarily to his political involvement affecting the funding RDC (and MHA) was receiving from INGOs. This did not bring Awad's political ambitions to an end which were intrinsically linked to his social activism. *Bahujan Majoor Paksha* (Bahujan Labour Party, BMP hereon), a political party was formed in 2001. Dadasaheb Kshirsagar, another important leader from Mang caste was made the national president. Awad did not hold any position in the party but remained a key force behind the BMP. Awad maintained BMP as an effort to unite non-Mahars, particularly Mangs who were not as politicised as Mahars. The nomenclature and ideology was inspired by the Indian Labour Party formed by Ambedkar (Interview: 2/10/08).

BMP came to be active locally more as a Mang social movement than a political party with boards/shakahas coming up at village level, at times painted on the reverse of the existing boards of MHA. Growth of BMP and Awad did not go well with Jaydutt Kshirsagar who was also State Tourism Minister. BMP was seen as a threat to 'un-contested' Mang support of NCP as Mangs were not an organised political

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[133] Manguda and Maharuda refer to Mang and Mahar localities which are traditionally outside the main village where Maratha or Castes above Dalit reside.

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force in Beed before the growth of BMP. Jaydutt therefore attempted to check the growth of BMP by strengthening the base of another senior Mang leader of NCP (Dhobale) in Beed against Awad and BMP/MHA. Dhobale was made the guardian minister (*Palak Mantri*) of Beed during this period. This brought MHA in direct conflict with Dhobale, Jaydutt Kshrisagar and NCP locally forcing BMP to form an alliance with BJP.

> I had no alternative. I organised Annabhau Jayanti in Majalgaon and invited Gopinath Munde. Munde realised our strength in that meeting and other meetings that followed and assured me MLC (Member of Legislative Council) seat. I had not allied with BJP because of any political philosophy I wanted to straighten Dhobale and Jaydutt. (Interview: 8/6/09)

Above Awad explains the departure from his assertive Dalit politics to an alliance with BJP as not ideologically driven but driven by strategy and compulsions. What it also reflects is challenges the MHA met with due to organising and politicising Mangs. Awad thus came in conflict with a fellow Mang co-opted to serve the interest of NCP/Marathas.

While Dhobale was contesting from Osmanabad district for the Lok Sabha in 2004, MHA extended support to BSP candidate and also hosted an independent Mang candidate from BMP causing his defeat. Following this, Awad was attacked by some local followers of Dhobale with swords in Majalgaon causing some grave injuries. In the 2004 assembly elections that followed, MHA mobilised votes against Jaydutt in favour of BJP (BSP polled 2636 votes which also contributed in dividing traditional Congress votes) causing his defeat by a margin of 3377 votes. Jaydutt had anticipated his defeat and had approached Awad for support with handsome offer which Awad had declined (Fieldnotes: 2/10/08). This was a grave loss for Jaydutt who was a Minister in the earlier NCP-Congress government which retained power in the assembly elections of 2004. This victory of NCP however meant little for Jaydutt as he had lost the assembly elections and possibility of securing a ministerial berth. Awad and MHA (along with other Dalit parties) managed to cause defeat of

Jaydutt and Dhobale, two powerful leaders of NCP despite being small political players. While this points to a temporal success of MHA as a marginal player in talking back against the suppression of NCP what has followed is an interesting dichotomy of cooption of Awad in NCP and increased animosity between Dhobale and Awad (both Mangs within NCP).

Making of Awad as 'Mang' leader and Dhobale as permanent enemy

BMP did raise hopes amongst the Mangs who had mobilised to form an independent political party. An alliance with and support for BJP however had cost BMP its independent identity and assertive status. The support was not valued by BJP, which had chosen to ignore Awad and BMP after the election of 2004. The boards of BMP have turned rusty now but MHA (as non-political) continued to remain active. BMP is almost dormant now. Its national president Dadasaheb Kshirasagar works as an activist of MHA in some districts of Vidarbha on the issues of *gaairan* and caste atrocities without any NGO project support. He also converted with Eknath Awad to Buddhism in 2006 (Interview with Dadasaheb: 23/2/09). MHA focussed its energy on the *gaairan* issue more intensely since 2004 following the grant from Intermon-Oxfam. Large-scale mobilisation of *gaairan* claimants attracted attention of NCP, particularly Sharad Pawar who attended some of MHA's rallies of *gaairan* occupants. This brought Awad in close contact with the supreme leadership of NCP and the local NCP leaders too had to work with Awad under compulsion. Jaydutt too realised the strategic importance of being in Awad's good books and Awad on the other hand wanted to sever his ties with BJP. Awad's wife, Gayabai Awad thus contested on a NCP ticket during the Zilla Parishad elections on a reserved seat in 2007.

> BJP never gave me any MLC nor did they come around when I was attacked. After some time I had to sever the ties with BJP and that was also a reason for making my wife contest for Zilla Parishad on NCP ticket. It was Jaydutt my opponent who got me the ticket (laughs) despite us causing his defeat. (Interview: 8/6/09)

Gayabai Awad[134] won the ZP seat under stiff competition, which was primarily due to the Maratha angst against Eknath Awad for his activism on caste atrocities and some of the local RPI groups too mobilised against Gayabai. ZP elections were also a competition between two local Marathas one from BJP and the other from NCP. Local elections like Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat involve heavy competition amongst the established political elites which translates into heavy spending of money. The Zilla Parishad election win had cost Awad over 10 Lakh rupees; with this win MHA had severed its ties completely with BJP.

Awad's rising clout in NCP has been a matter of concern for Dhobale who is the Dalit face of NCP. While Jaydutt has solved his differences by offering Awad the Zilla Parishad ticket, the rivalry between Dhobale and Awad has continued. MHA's show of strength through *gaairan* mobilisation also raised chances of Awad being made a Member of Legislative Council (MLC) in 2008 by the ruling NCP, this was opposed by the Mang leaders of NCP under Dhobale. Awad too has resorted to identity politics to deal with the damage Dhobale was inflicting. It was alleged by MHA based on documentary evidence that Dhobale was a Holar (numerically less prominent sub-caste within Mangs and lower than Mang *assal* [real]) and not a Mang as Dhobale claimed.[135] Though MHA's local practice is Mang oriented it is not explicitly Mang centered and issues pertaining to Dalits as whole and other minor castes are actively taken up. Awad's engagement in party politics, however, has also turned him into a Mang leader representing Mang interests.

In 2009 as the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections closed in Awad organised meetings with 'Mangs' at their centre to counter Dhobale's influence in NCP and amongst Mangs. These meetings were meant to discuss the report produced by a government appointed commission on the socio-economic status of Mangs and the recommendations. The commission was a result of the demand for separate

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[134] Eknath Awad's wife Gayabai Awad and their son Milind Awad are involved in MHA though neither are seen as charismatic leaders nor do they enjoy the support of Dalits like Awad. Milind is a PhD in English from JNU and is a lecturer at a college in Delhi University. Milind's charisma is in making and activists refer to him as *Nana* with respect, though a few activists within the MHA were critical of Milind being seen as the second line leader.

[135] Awad shared the dilemma in resorting to this tactics and was wary of the fact that it may backfire. Luckily Dhobale turned reactionary and insisted that he was a Mang and not Holar.

reservations for Mangs that had been actively led by other Mang formations. As a result of this demand, a commission named Lahuji Salave Commission was set up by Congress-NCP government on the eve of the assembly elections of 2004 to study the socio-economic condition of Mangs and a report was prepared in 2008. One of the important recommendations of the commission's final report was separate reservations for Mangs within the Scheduled Caste category.[136] MHA organised meetings and discussions around this report despite Awad not being an aggressive proponent of separate reservations for Mangs;

> 'The movements on reservations do not mobilise against *andh-shraddha* (blind beliefs) or other such things. The Ambedkarite movement has a Buddhist school of thought, the communists have a Marxist thought and RSS has a Hindutva thought like that the Mang movement does not have a school of thought. Reservation cannot be a school of thought, reservations are a small thing (Interview: 2/10/08).

Awad's conversion to Buddhism has also been used by some Mang particularistic organisations to deny him a Mang identity. Awad explained the reasons for organising this meeting, 'the Mangs say that I have not done anything for them, so I thought I should' (Informal conversation on phone: 13/2/09).

The meeting of Mangs across party lines organised by MHA on 22/2/09 at Latur to discuss the recommendations of Lahuji Commission turned into a site of Mang solidarity around claiming 5 per cent reservations for Mangs within the SC category, criticising the government for excluding Mangs, underestimating their numbers and for reiterating that Dhobale was a Holar and not Mang. Major disagreement amongst the participants was on the political stand of Awad as some participants doubted that the meeting was merely a 'social' gathering with no political (party) agenda. One of the Mang members of BSP particularly alleged that this was a Congress ploy as elections were nearing and accused Awad of playing into the hands of Congress.

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[136] The implementation of separate reservation for Mangs is difficult to achieve which the Congress-NCP is not unaware of. This is due to the Supreme Court verdict that quashed a similar order in 2002 of Andhra Pradesh Government that divided Scheduled Caste reservations.

They also insisted on having an assertive political (party) position as most leaders (Awad in this case) use social activism to become politicians and never come back to community.

Toward the end of this meeting most participants acknowledged Awad was the true representative of Mangs and Awad in his speech agreed to lead the process as a 'Mang' and not as a MHA leader, he advocated for Mang unity across social and political lines. In this meeting one of the academic participants reminded the participants that, 'though the focus of meeting may be Mangs for Mangs we should not forget the larger goal that is 'annihilation of caste' and also the fact that Mang and Mahar relations have to be strengthened' (Recorded speech: 22/02/09). This suggestion of the academic received some applause. Awad himself has been an advocate of such unity between Mangs and Mahars.

The purpose of this meeting however was to challenge the established Mang leaders within the dominant political parties and to carve out space for Awad within these parties. Neither Awads' anti-caste move of converting to Buddhism nor his effort of Mang mobilisation in 2009 worked in his favour. Later at night there was a discussion amongst some key workers of MHA on the negatives of the meeting and Awad taking the lead in this Mang centred initiative as a 'Mang' leader was identified as a one that could affect his image of Dalit or Bahujan leader. Awad then suggested some other workers [Dadasaheb Kshirsagar] to take up the 'Mang' role in the future planned agitations to pressurise the government to implement the recommendations of the commission. Awad was hoping to secure a ticket from NCP to contest in the forthcoming Vidhan Sabha elections and part of this Mang mobilisation was influenced by his political ambitions. Awad's support to NCP however was belittled and Awad's clout was limited to Zilla Parishad and his Mang identity. Below are details of MHA's support to NCP and its limited utility for MHA.

The 2009 support for NCP

MHA workers campaigning for NCP in Dharur were waiting for the P.A of the

local NCP MLA, who was to come and pay money to this group so that we could leave for the day's campaigning. As we sat on the tar road facing the temporary NCP jan-sampark (people contact) office, Govardhan Lokhande, an old man from Mang caste who generally moves around with his wife singing Annabhau Sathe's *povada's* for a living in Dharur came closer performing and asking for money. He first went to a group sitting on our left who ignored him and laughed him away. He sang, 'have you heard the story of 16th century about shivaji.' The group ignored him and one of them told him, 'go inside the office, money is being distributed there.' Govardhan then walked towards us and stood on our right looking towards the office. 'Who is giving money? He asked one of our accomplices, a Dalit youth amongst us replied in humor, 'the cashier is not here yet.' How much is he giving asked Govardhan. Depends on how many votes you have, replied the youth.

Govardhan waited for while looking around through his thick glasses and then commented, 'Mata viknaryana mi jhat manat nahin (those who sell their votes I consider them worse than my pubic hair), aaj mata vikata, udya bayaka vikal (you sell your votes today, tomorrow you will sell your wives), Paused for some time, looking at us he added *tumhala 10 000 dile tar bayaka vikal tumhi* (if they give you 10000 you will sell your wife). Why take money and also their bulli (penis) in your ass… it then gets stuck like a dog's penis in your ass. You will not be able to remove it then. Waited for some more time and continued, why don't you vote for Mayawati? *desh bouddhamai karayla nighali aahe na ti* (she is hoping to make the country Buddhist, isn't it?). (Fieldnotes 22/4/09)

Govardhan though a non-entity in local Dalit politics was critical of the lack of assertive politics amongst Dalits. He criticised not just voting for money and Dalit activists acting as brokers but also the idea of dependency on dominant parties that necessarily use Dalit votes to oppress (for him equal to rape) Dalits. Awad and other workers of MHA too acknowledged in various informal conversations that NCP was more casteist (*jatiwadi*) due to Maratha dominance as compared to BJP, as those Marathas involved in committing atrocities against Dalits were mostly bailed out

through networks of NCP. The call of Mangs for Mangs and MHA's evoking of Dhobale's Holar identity went against its ideological groundings and anti-caste, so did their support for NCP. MHA however supported NCP in the hope of a favourable decision on the issue of *gaairan* and also the hope of Awad securing either an MLA or MLC seat. Awad's objective of securing of MLA or political power can be termed as a personal political ambition at the cost of Dalit assertive politics, however in the political geography of Marathwada assertive Dalits in general and Mangs in particular are mostly powerless (political) and Awad hoped to continue his Dalit radicalism within NCP.

In the general elections of 2009 MHA workers in Beed thus participated in campaigning for NCP candidate Ramesh Adaskar. Some of Awad's subordinates were involved giving speeches at NCP gatherings.[137] Awad attended some of these meetings and was on the stage but did not give a speech in these meetings. Besides a Jeep for travel and diesel cost, the local leader of NCP paid the workers of MHA 1000 rupees a day. During the Parliamentary elections the amount of money spent by BJP was much higher than NCP, informal estimates reached 100 crore rupees. Elections are also an event for Dalit brokers/leaders to earn some money besides consolidating their base amongst Dalits through campaigning. S, one of the senior workers of MHA was unhappy with NCP not providing him money and jeep for campaigning. He held Maratha arrogance as the reason for NCP ignoring MHA.

> When a BSP worker asked him why he was not campaigning? S looked around to make sure there was no Maratha and replied, *'Kai Marathyana bokandivar basvun ghyayacha kai?* (Should we make the Marathas sit on our ass?) […] Adaskar's father was against Dalits […] it was because of Gaairan that *jija* (Awad) was supporting NCP […] I think that Munde is secular (in English), even Muslims are canvassing for him. They say that Munde is a nice man. After all he is from minority [Fieldnotes: 12/4/09]

Workers committed to Awad utilised the opportunity (funds) during elections to

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[137] This was the case only in Beed whereas workers in other Districts followed parties that suited their local interests. In Hingoli and Nanded MHA workers had lobbied for BSP.

reach amongst Mangs and convince them of the need to follow Awad. Bogalwadi was one village the workers visited, the dominance of Vanjaris is absolute. The Mangs constitute around 100 households whereas the Vanjari number around 600. The Vanjaris leaders were divided here between NCP and BJP for local panchayat elections but were united in supporting Munde for the Lok Sabha elections. Most Mang families here are sugarcane migrant workers. When we visited the village on the afternoon, a day before the elections, most Mang men were drunk on the liquor provided by BJP. After canvassing with some youths who were not drunk, as we started leaving the village an old drunk man came towards the jeep shouting, he could barely stand on his feet, '*Rashtrawadi* (NCP) will not get a single vote, we will not give a single vote to *Rasthrawadi*' [Fieldnotes: 22.4.09]. The activist persuasions of expanding clout of MHA and Awad amongst the Mang in this village partially failed due to the power of Vanjaris and also because of Awad aligning with NCP. The patronage of Vanjaris over Mangs in this village coupled with money and liquor provided during elections were added incentives for Mangs to vote for BJP. MHA's efforts to mobilise support of Mangs for MHA (and NCP) did not work well when faced with money and liquor power.

Awad despite intense lobbying failed to gain an MLA ticket from NCP. Awad's name temporarily did the rounds for the reserved seat in Badnapur reserved constituency, however a local dominant Maratha leader of NCP opposed this as Awad was involved in filing 'atrocity' cases against some Marathas there as well. It was Dhobale who struck this possibility of Badnapur seat totally and in a press conference commented sarcastically on Awad's political ambitions, 'social workers going mad over joining politics' (Vartahar 2009). The assembly ticket was given to a Mang follower of Dhobale. The promise of making Awad a Member of Legislative Council or of regularising encroached *gaairan* lands of Dalits remained un-fulfilled. The only benefit that came out of supporting NCP was Gayabai Awad's elevation as Chairman of Social Welfare in Beed Zilla Parishad. Awad's assertive political past and present does not fit well with the dominant caste needs. Awad thus remained at the margins of NCP.

Dominant caste choices of Dalit politicians and the challenge of Dalit assertion

The intersections of cultural critique that assertive Dalit politics brings to party politics does not go well with the dominant castes who prefer to look for Dalit candidates who suit their interests and ideology. Ghule, a Maratha, shared proverbs used amongst the Non-Dalits particularly Marathas that made explicit the choices of Marathas for seats reserved for Dalits. *Mahara peksha Mang bara ani Manga peksha Chambar bara* (A Mang is better than a Mahar and a Chambar better than Mang), the other one was more specific, "*Jai Bhim peksha Ram Ram Bara*" (Ram Ram is better than Jai Bhim) (Fieldnotes: 22/4/09).

One of the important contributions of MHA and BSP has been to sustain the radical critique of exclusionary cultural practices that Dalits face and creation of a Dalit identity and community. Such unity comes under threat in the patronage seeking culture of electoral politics. Sachin was one amongst those who had attended the Charmakar rallies of BSP. Though he campaigned passionately for Mayawati and BSP, he was not fully convinced about BSP's utility in Maharashtra for Charmakars. He discussed his reservations with Banage who insisted on the need for rejecting patronising control of Congress and BJP.

> Sachin: A lot of Charmakars benefited when Babanrao Gholap was social welfare minister. Currently too there are lot of charmakars who are elected to Lok Sabha [..] Mayawati says jiski jitani sankhya bhari, usaki utani bhagidari (according to your numbers you get your share), if this is to happen then Charmakars are very few in numbers they will not get anything here.
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> Banage: Those elected Charmakars are all *Gulams* (slaves), they will make them ministers but they have no powers (Fieldnotes: 6/6/09)

Mang workers of MHA try to make most of the Maratha antagonism against Mahars in local politics. However assertive Dalits with 'Dalit' agenda and ideology are hardly accommodated in the mainstream politics. When I returned to Beed in January 2010 Awad was critical of party politics and termed them as terrorists who were law

makers. Awad's no-compromise stance on caste atrocities and his anti-caste conversions to Buddhism also obstruct his success in party politics.

> When a Mahar Dalit leader tries to make his independent mark in politics, Mangs are preferred because Mahars have revolted against Hindu culture, not totally but they have tried. And this has not been liked by this (Hindu) culture. Dalits who follow the traditional leadership or behave like slaves succeed. I am yet to see anyone other than Kanshiram and later Mayawati who have raised Dalit issues independently in parliament. What they have achieved is a matter of debate but they present their points assertively and have also managed to win elections. Such leaders are exceptions (Interview 8/6/09)

The choice of Chambars in Maharashtra does seem overwhelming given their minuscule population in Maharashtra as compared to Mangs and Mahars. Of the 33 Scheduled Caste MLAs elected in 2009 legislative assembly elections twelve are Chambars, eleven are Mahars and only three are Mangs and the rest come from other numerically less prominent castes. Chambars were also the most preferred locally in the Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat elections.

In Sadola village of Majalgaon Taluka where the post of Sarpanch was reserved for Scheduled Caste, the Marathas unanimously decided to shun the elections of Gram Panchayat and identified a Chambar who would be the 'unopposed' Sarpanch. The Marathas also announced the village decision to 'blacken the face' of anyone who filed nominations to contest the elections. R, one of the woman workers of MHA decided to file nominations.

> I was wondering why they talk of *bin-virodh* (selection without election/opposition) when the post of Sarpanch is reserved for us [....] It was ward no 2 that was reserved which had 200 Dalit votes (Mang and Mahar) [...] why would they blacken our face if we contested? I did not agree. (Focus Group: 4/3/09)

R's decision to contest Panchayat elections resulted in the united Marathas splitting in two groups and competing within themselves. Both the groups however remained firm on the choice of Chambar candidates as their representatives for the reserved Sarpanch post. It is however not a liking for Chambar community that Marathas have, clarified another worker for MHA.

> P: It is not about Mang, Mahar or Chambar. They do not need anyone who will overtake [meant cross or question] the village [Marathas/Vanjaris] here. (Focus Group: 4/3/09)

Some Dalits workers of MHA who resort to assertive Dalit politics locally face violence/threats of violence and humiliation. Tukaram another worker of MHA was elected as a ward member of Panchayat in Umri village of Majalgaon Taluka. Tukaram is postgraduate and also works in one of the projects of RDC. The seat of Sarpanch was reserved for OBC in Umri and one of the large landowning [Tukaram called him *Jamindar*] Marathas here incurred all the election expenses for the panel of candidates which included Tukaram. This Maratha was also a close confidante of Prakash Solanki (MLA of NCP). This Maratha vented his anger against Tukaram when Dalit workers of MHA had poked fun at god Hanuman in this village in one of their programmes as Dalits are not allowed to enter the Hanuman temple in this village. Tukaram too had criticised NCP government for their faulty educational policies that led to low quality education for the poor. The Maratha *jamindar* warned Tukaram not just against his political assertion but also his western dressing

> Your Karyakartas spoke against Hanuman and you tuck your shirt in and go around the village. You should not tuck your shirt in the village and once you enter the village you should remove your tucked shirt. You encroached upon the gaairan, did we say anything, no. Then why should you speak against our gods and religion. You think you are President (of India) after tucking your shirt in. (Interview with Tukaram: 5/12/08)

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Tukaram, though a little scared, did not stop tucking his shirt while in village. He however had toned down his cultural activism in the village and would blame other Dalits in the village for not being as aware and assertive. The *jamindar* had managed to partially tame Tukaram's political and cultural assertion.

Conclusion: the inevitability of electoral politics and the centrality of non-party politics in Dalit assertion

The marketisation of basic services and entitlements has become part of India's patronage based democracy which aids the politicians develop independent power bases and advance within party and government; politicians have developed a stake therefore not in democracy but in patronage (Chandra: 2004). Chandra suggests decentralisation and downsizing of India's dominant state as possible way of changing democracy in India but Dalit exclusion in villages of Marathwada is a product of the dynamic intersection between dominant caste powers with fragmented state institutions. The reliance of Dalit politics on democratic processes makes state and electoral politics central to their efforts and renders them susceptible to exclusion or marginalisation.

The case of MHA and BSP suggests that assertive Dalit politics is resented both by the dominant political formations and by Dalits within these formations. Awad, despite being amongst the key leaders in Marathwada who have worked on the issue of *gaairan*, Dalit rights, and his anti-caste move of symbolic conversions to Buddhism, is turned into a 'leader of Mangs' in NCP. The patronage based party politics in Marathwada casts Maratha leaders as 'secular' political representatives and denies Dalits the right to represent not just non-Dalits but Dalits themselves. The representation of Dalits in NCP and BJP results from constitutional obligations in party politics and not from non-Dalit concern for Dalits. Dalit representation there is decided to suit and sustain dominant caste patronage and interests. Awad's travel from BSP to BJP and NCP reveals the compulsions of Dalit in party politics and also Awad's strategic opportunism. However the numerical strength and other forms of capital (socio-cultural, economic and political) go against Dalit interests, ideology and cunning politics. MHA therefore continues to rely on non- party political means

of protests and campaigning against the exclusion and injustices that Dalits face and uses international networks to help sustains such activism.

Kanshiram's critique of the Poona Pact that forced Ambedkar into accepting joint electorate (instead of separate) and reserved seats seems relevant not just for Dalits but various other marginalised castes as well in Marathwada. It is not just Dalit representatives who are turned into symbols of self-representation serving dominant interests. While the dominant castes and parties prevent Dalits from representing their interests and ideology, BSP attempts to reverse the patronage-based system of party politics in the most difficult context of Marathwada. Dalits along with others here are mobilised to achieve the objective of *our vote our rule* outside the patronage of dominant parties and through volunteerism.[138] It also resorts to substantive politics where resources provided by ideologically disagreeing BSP candidates are put to use for consolidation of Bahujan ideology and politics. The call for independent Bahujan politics with Ambedkarite leadership has attracted both Dalits and some non-Dalits towards BSP. BSP's growth at a national level offers hope for the cadres of BSP who continue their activism as 'missionary' work to challenge dominant politics and free Dalit politics and votes from *dadpan* (fear). One of the major shortcomings of BSP however is its one-dimensional agenda of struggle for political power, this limited focus is not best suited for the grassroots for Marathwada where gaining of political power seems a distant possibility and real issues facing Dalits continue to exist on a daily basis.

The challenges faced by Dalit mobilisation in electoral politics also point to the continued importance and relevance of non-political spaces in creating 'Dalit' identity and cultures of protest. The case of MHA unravels the limited benefits of aligning with dominant parties, it particularly presents the curtailing of dynamic potentials of Dalit movements in such alliances where Dalits end up competing within themselves and replicate the patronage-based politics that pervades the political culture. MHA however retains its apolitical (non-party) politics and continues to challenge the dominance of dominant castes and parties. MHA and BSP

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[138] *vote humara raj tumhara nahi chalega nahi chalega* (Our vote and your rule will not work)

point to the importance of electoral politics in Dalit movements but also the centrality of non-electoral political spaces for assertive Dalit politics and ideology to survive.

Vote share of Mainstream parties and Dalit parties in Beed

	Lok Sabha Elections April 2009						
	Georai	Majalgaon	Beed	Ashti	Kaij	Parali	Total
BJP	93,779	81,901	77,659	109,971	91,958	98,673	553,994
NCP*	68,284	70,143	66,554	70,737	82,377	54,925	413,423
BSP	4,446	4,273	3,009	4,221	5,681	3,654	25,284
BBM	2,224	2,248	1,347	2,126	1,670	1,391	11, 006
	Vidhan Sabha Elections October 2009						
	Georai	Majalgaon	Beed	Ashti	Kaij	Parali	
BJP	98469	79,034	33,246	84,157	66,188	96,222	
NCP*	100 816	86,943	109,163	118,847	110,452	60,160	
BSP	Withdrawn	1948	1,551	2,369	3,917	3,662	
RPI (A)	Not Contested	Not Contested	32,999	Not Contested	Not Contested	1,144	

*MHA supported NCP in both Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha Elections

Chapter10

Dalit politics and the making of civility in India

My ethnographic study of Dalit politics in Maharashtra has illuminated not merely what civil society 'is' but what civil society 'does'. Through an anthropology of Dalit politics I have elaborated upon the intersections of the state and civil society, the penetration of dominant interests in the state and civil society and the resulting Dalit exclusion. I have also presented a nuanced picture of the ensuing politicisation of Dalits in civil society, their protests, daily civic engagement with caste inequalities and fractured institutions of state, processes of ideology building, formation of collective identities of protest and the intersections of Dalit politics with the state and international civil society actors. Dalit politics in many ways shapes the transformation of state, civil society and caste; it causes a revolution in the realm of civility and civil relations.

In this concluding chapter I argue that civil society remains central in democratic processes, but the making of civil society and of civility in India is a complex process which does not fit into the normative prescriptions of liberals. The politics of Dalit movements present the vernacular processes of democratisation that include protests and violent manifestations as part of democratisation. Social transformation is thus not achieved through gift of a benevolent state or the product of elite self-reform as Gandhi envisaged but sustained struggles of lesser citizens like those of Dalits.

Between high democracy and less civility

Civility is considered as a key virtue of civil society that helps in arriving at common good in liberal democracies; 'civility treats others as, at least, equal in dignity, never as inferior' (Shils 1991: 12). 'Civility is also a key ingredient in linking the general culture of a people to their political culture' (Pye 1999: 769). Challenges to universal and ideal practice of civility arise both from economic and non-economic factors. In the Indian context, caste privileges and power affect the possibilities of civility across castes. The liberal Constitution of India partially recognises the violent and

exclusionary potentials of caste, and envisages procedures for repairing civil relations and conduct affected by caste. In real practice however, neither the state nor non-caste collectives have been the locus of transforming caste and instilling civility amongst caste-privileged citizens. The violence and inequalities of caste have largely been made visible through politicisation of caste, more particularly through the politicisation of Dalits.

Liberal approaches to civility believe in arriving at a common-good through consensus building (Shils and Grosby 1997). Conflict or war is seen as return to the 'state of nature' therefore antithetical to civil society. A focus on reaching consensus through deliberation, however, can mistake silenced voices for consensus, it may also ignore the mixing of traditional modes of authority with more modern ones. If consensus for a common good is believed to be the core of civil society, then caste relations which participants and activists of Dalit movements term slavery (for Dalits), too could be termed 'civil' as they would seem to be operating with a political consensus. Dalit subjects even today in some villages of Marathwada operate in such manner, embracing silence over daily exclusions they face - by not entering the temple, not contesting elections, not cultivating gaairan, not celebrating Jayanti and by voting under compulsion. Dalit lower status thus sustains the privileged selfhood of dominants.

The moral impediment that liberals favour of deliberative procedures, politeness, rational communication and undoing of status privileges in the practice of civil society are not antithetical to the freedom of Dalits. The liberal procedures and institutions of civil society are crucial to unsettle the traditional modes of civility that construct Dalits as lesser subjects. These traditional modes of civility when merged with liberal democratic practices can reproduce Dalits as what Gorringe (2005) calls 'untouchable' citizens. I have argued in chapter one that the colonial imposition of civil society (and civility) served as a political space of freedom and self-realisation for Dalits, and its widening in postcolonial phase led to Dalit politics and associated political violence against Dalits. Civility in postcolonial politics thus is not merely a matter of politeness and deliberation but a political process involving extra-

institutional mobilisation for reforming both the state and civil society. While inter-ethnic associations ensure civic engagement and ethnic peace between Hindus and Muslims (Varshney 2001), the case of Dalit civic engagement seems to be a reverse one. Dalit participation and assertion in public spaces also evokes violence against them. India thus has a peculiar case of more democracy and less civility when it comes to Dalits and Dalit politics is at odds with this complex merger that sustains Dalit exclusion. Dalit thus face many forms of 'uncivil violence' they however are most committed to 'civil democracy'(Lynch 2001).

Violence, alternative civilities and collective identities

The making of civility across castes in India includes both violence and democratic deliberations. Violence, thus, need not mark a return to 'rude' society or the 'state of nature'. The real processes of the making of civility are demonstrated through violence that Dalits face and the Dalit response to such institutionalised violence. After four Dalits were burnt to death by Kunbi-Marathas in September 2006 in Khairlanji village of Bhandara District (Maharashtra), for example, most cities in Maharashtra came to a standstill temporarily as Dalits indulged in violence damaging 'public' property, creating a situation of 'anarchy' for the elite middle classes. Khairlanji, except for the scale of violence and Dalit protest, offers in many ways a routine story of violation of Dalit bodies and citizen status. The Dalit protest attracted national and international attention forcing the disinterested Maharashtra (Maratha) government into action. On September 24 2008, a fast track court delivered its verdict including the death penalty for some of the accused. Dalit activists from Beed who participated in the protests and public damage did not consider the verdict satisfactory, however, as the court did not recognise the case as one of 'caste atrocity'.

The denial of caste violence against Dalits in liberal institutions despite procedural recognition sheds light on the merger of liberal politics with local exclusionary traditions. It also helps understand that civility cannot be introduced by state interventions, since non-state socio-cultural practices are important. "Religions do greatest service to civility when they preach not only love of neighbour but resistance

to wrong," argues Carter (1998: 285). Dalit movements, therefore, are wary of Hinduism's role in the making of civility since it upholds caste, and share a similar but lesser suspicion of the state. An activist shared with me the news reports of the Judge in Khairlanji case making a special trip to a Hindu temple before delivering his verdict, which for him implied that there would be no justice. The High Court in July 2010 further commuted death penalty and reiterated that caste was 'not' the reason for Dalit killings in Khairlanji.

Continued violent humiliations against Dalits are aimed at reminding Dalits of their 'outcast' status, and point to the lack of civility in the local political culture and civil society. In cases of violence against Dalits, a sense of anarchy prevails in the village where the dominant castes undermine the political authority of the modern state. Dalit movements on the other hand bring the state back in through violent demonstrations aimed at the state and simultaneous evocations of the Constitution against the tradition of caste violence, making liberal institutions important despite their shortcomings. Chapter six has particularly demonstrated the violence evoked by Dalit assertion and citizenship claims in public spaces. It is not just through violent performances that Dalits seek to establish civility in political relations, they also participate in elections and engage in formation of pragmatic alliances and collective identities from below that civilise polity and democratise civil society.

Collective identities of protest and substantive electoral politics

One of the senior women leaders of MHA, a non-Dalit married to a Dalit activist enjoys much respect amongst Dalit women. In May 2009 she was nominated for the most valued annual prize of Bhartiya Vidhyarthi Sena (Indian Students' Army, a social organisation of Shiv Sena) as recognition for her activism. After some dilemma over accepting this award she decided to accept it. In her short award acceptance speech, instead of emphasising the historical martial valour of Shivaji as a Hindu King and Savarkar as a saviour of Hindus, she reminded the twenty thousand strong youth participants in Mumbai about Phule, Shahu and Ambedkar and particularly their contribution to 'democracy' in India. She also appreciated Shiv Sena for condemning the Shindi violence in Beed. Shiv Sena's antipathy to

Ambedkarite politics is well known and the MHA activist did not receive the routine applause one generally expects in Dalit dominated gatherings. Shiv Sena's compulsion of awarding their most prestigious award to an activist of MHA informs us of the dynamism that electoral politics and Dalit politics can bring to radical ideologies forcing them into civil conversations and positions.

Politics pursued by BSP and MHA does not fit into Schmitt's (2007) friend-foe[139] distinction. The objective of Dalit politics is not elimination of those oppressing them; it rather stretches the imagination of civil relations and civility of their opponents. Dalit politics has deepened and caused expansion of civil spaces and the state has continued to be at the core of Dalit politics. The key modes of forming alternative ideas and collective identities of protest are discussed in chapters seven and eight. I have elaborated on the dynamism of caste and its innovative uses in Dalit politics in influencing public opinion and forging collective identities of protest. In doing so, Dalit politics opposes the hierarchic and exclusionary traditions of caste and imaginatively reconstructs alternative identities towards Dalit liberation. The case of MHA presented Ambedkarisation beyond Mahars and the making of *swabhimani* Mangs whereas BSP's politics and the making of Bahujan exemplified mobilisation beyond the Dalit category.

I have presented the ideological persuasion by Mahars of non-Mahar Dalits, and of non-Dalits by Dalits in enlarging the scope of Dalit politics and ideology. Assertive Dalit participation in electoral politics stages distrust of Dalits not in party politics or political representatives but their failure to recognise caste inequality and Dalit issues. While Dalit movements, as shown in chapter nine, are partially affected by the patronage culture that prevails in the political culture they also attempt to reverse the domination of dominant castes and ideologies that make not just caste invisible but Dalits lower subjects.

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[139] Schmitt points to contradiction between liberal parliamentarism and democracy, for him the politics is essentially conflictual resulting in a friend-foe contradiction and annihilation of liberal parliamentarism (Scheuerman 1995).

A liberal notion of equality and inequality with individual at its centre overpowers the real inequalities that caste constructs in civil society. Similar can be the oversights of understanding the state as a monolithic and oppressive neo-liberal unit. Radical approaches with focus only on political economy ignore nuanced processes of the constitution of a modern caste-subject. They may also ignore the potential of caste as a problem and as a solution for the making of civility in India.

Further globalisation cannot be reduced to growth of neo-liberalism/imperialism as globalisation has also opened newer spaces for Dalit politics at grassroots. Global power does not operate as a 'well-oiled machine' and there is 'friction' at various levels through which hegemony can be 'made and unmade' (Tsing 2005: 6). Chapter six has outlined the loosening of caste associated labour practices that affected Dalit mobility. My primary concern however has been with transformation of civic spaces under globalisation and Dalit politics and status in these spaces. The intersections of the state and dominant caste interests had contributed to the local unequal civil realm. Dalits though subordinate have continued protest politics in Marathwada. Chapter five has particularly exemplified the workings of the globalised grassroots in Marathwada through the intersections of I/NGOs and Dalit politics, to argue against simplistic accounts that emphasise the ill effects of I/NGOs on politics in general and Dalit politics in particular. Intersections of Dalit politics with international civil society actors is coupled with Dalit politics revolving around the state. This suggests that radical transformations in society can be undertaken through engaging the (capitalist?) state and its hegemonic civil society. The practice of 'untouchablity' was made an offence by the modern postcolonial state. This 'political' decision in the Constitution went against the ethics of rural society where practice of untouchablity continued to remain at the heart of caste doxa. The ethical interests of Dalits were against the ethical interests of rural dominants.

Civil society and civility are not only merely related to property and capital and incivilities can be generated by non-economic factors too (Alexander 2006). The re-feudalisation of civil society through market forces and rising consumption culture that worries Habermas (1991) is considered 'less dangerous' (Awad's Phrase) for

Dalits who engage in the task of 'de-feudalising' local liberal practices that resurrect Dalit exclusion and deny the existence of caste inequalities. The incivility generated by caste has partially invented the current paradox of low civility and high democracy in India's politics. Parliamentary democracy in India is thus functioning without respect for principles of civility.

Caste, Dalit politics and the making of civility

The distinction between civil society as ideal and political society as substantive (Chatterjee 2004), refutes not only the intersections of civil and political in civil society but also subaltern aspirations to civility and civil society. In the case of Dalits the virtue of civility has much to offer due to dynamic incivilities generated by caste. Incivility in terms of denying equal status to some individuals/groups and authority of civil institutions like courts, media etc. exists in all cultures. These may continue to reinvent themselves according to changing politics. The promise of civility and civil society lies not in etiquettes of politeness but in the possibility of transforming civil relations and state through politics of ideology. The Hindutva mobilisation in India too fits within Chatterjee's (2004) conception of political society because of its reliance on non-civil means. The ideals of Ambedkarite ideology and Dalit politics on the other hand merge 'protest' politics with 'civil' discourses (Ambedkar's Constitution) of equality.
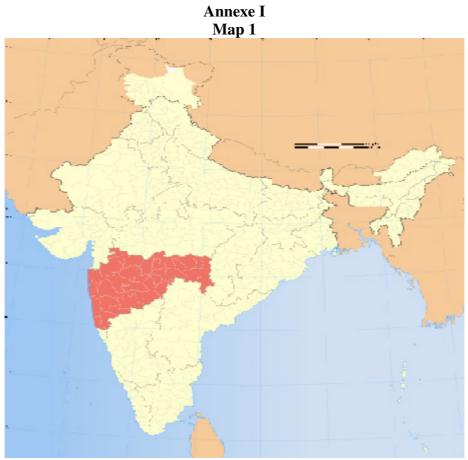
Dalit politics does not contradict civil society, it rather strengthens civil society and the state institutions, the modes by which they affect such developments however do not fit into liberal modes of civility. Dalit politics, despite not following the liberal terrain of civility, works towards politics of civility where the Constitution too becomes a cultural and political symbol of protest. These innovative symbols of civility travel deep amongst Dalits to the mud-walls of Dalit homes, which are decorated with framed pictures of Ambedkar.

The intersections of ideology, interests and identity in Dalit mobilisation leave Dalit politics in a state of pendulum swinging between the substantial (interest and identity) and ideological (anti-caste collectives). Dalit politics does not intend
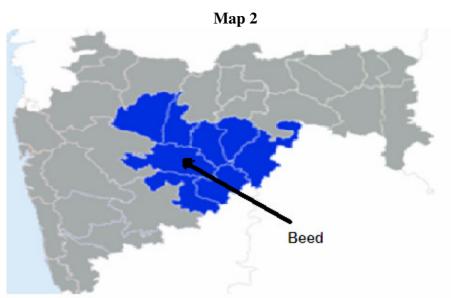
annihilation of state institutions, caste and of those who are not with Dalit ideology. Dalit ideology does not entail irreconcilable conflict based on identity and Dalit politics requires caste as a resource for politicisation of Dalits.

My research re-affirms that the state, civil society and caste are not static, homogeneous and absolute systems and that the state and its liberal tenets do not always work against Dalits. Besides their intersections and co-evolution of the state, caste and civil society, they are also malleable to the influence of the most marginalised groups like Dalits.

Dalit politics in Maharashtra, in the post-Panther phase, represents a cacophony of voices that compete and cooperate in the practice of Ambedkarite politics. The stigmatised bodies and existence of Dalits in insidious forms construct collective trauma and collective identities of Dalits. Caste, therefore, forms the core of anti-caste struggles that Dalit activists engage in. Dalit politics has unquestionably changed the local norms of civility and has partially challenged discriminatory elements of society. The ideal of political equality generated by civil society is infectious and has led to growth of Dalit politics. Like the project of civil society, Dalit politics is an ongoing project. The dynamism of Dalit politics thus makes it indispensible in the cultural process of democratisation. Dalit politics engages in what Alexander (2006) calls 'civil repair', thus contributing to the continuing process of reforming the state, society and civil society.

Map of India [State of Maharashtra highlighted in red] Accessed from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:India_Maharashtra_locator_map.svg

Map 2

Map of Maharashtra [Districts of Marathwada including Beed highlighted in blue] Accessed from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Aurangabad_Division.png

Network Respondents = 5	MHA Leaders/Workers = 13
1. Country Director Intermon Oxfam 2. Counrtry Director SWISS AID 3.Sharad Jadhav, Lecturer Kolhapur Uni (Mang) 4. Gangadhar Pol, MHA Parbhani (Mang) 5. B.P Suryawanshi MHA Latur (Mang)	1. Madhukar Londe - Male - Mang 2. Ashok Tangade- Male - Mahar (2007 and 2009). 3. D.R Jadhav Male - Mang 4. Keshav Avhcar - Male Mang 5. Eknath Awad- Male Mang (several interviews) 6. Subhash Gaikwad- Male – Mahar 7. Vimal Taskare- Female- Mahar 8. Manisha Tokale - Female- Yellam (2007) 9. Alkatai Taktode - Female- Mang 10. Parmeshwar Adagale Male Mang 11. Bhagwan Patole Male – Mang 12. Sudhamati Lokhande-Female-Mang (2007 and 2008) 13. Rajesh Kshirsagar – Male Mang
MHA Participants = 4 1. Bivaji - Interview turned into a family Discussion with grandparents, parents and grandchildren participating (Mang) 2. Kisan's family (Mang) 3. Hanumant and his wife, Ambewadgaon (May 2007) 4. Vishnu's Family, Rajewadi (Mangs) --------- **Focus Group Interviews** 1. Kolpimpri gairan occupiers (May 2007) Eight participants [Mangs and Mahars] 2. Sadola MHA participants (Seven participants- Mangs) 3. Women activists (Four participants) 4. MHA activists (Seven) 5. Focus group MHA activists and participants Dharur (Eight participants– all Mangs) 6. Focus group participants Rajewadi (Five-All Mangs)	**MHA Programmes/meetings** 1.Annabhau Sathe Jayanti - Wadawani, Bhopa, Chinchwati, Asardoha. (August 2008). 2.Awad's B'day Public Gathering, Devadi Village (January 2009) 3 Gairan Dharak – Women's rally-Kalamb (December 2008) 4.Gender Sensitisation Meeting Limbgaon (August 2008) 5. Kej workers meeting for Mang mobilisation (September 2008) 6.Ambedkar Jayanti Telganv (April 2009) 7. NCP Tally (April 2009) 8. Savitribai Phule Jayanti Navgond Rajori (January 20009) 9. Activist Meeting on Atrocity (January 2010) 10. Meeting on Mang Commission, Latur (February 2009) 11. Protest against rape case, Udgir, Latur (October 2008) 12. Womens group Meeting Chinchvati

	(May 2009) 13. Gaairandharak Training, Beed (August 2008) 14. Meeting with Sharad Powar and Narayan Rane (November 2008)

BSP

Bahujan Samaj Party Workers/volunteers = 7	BSP Supporters = 9
1. Chanderlal Banage -Male- Charmakar	1. Sanjeevani Jadhav Female- Mahar
2.Dr. Bhobade - Male - Mali	2. Machindra Paike Male- Mahar
3.Keshav Waghmare Male- Mahar	3. Shanta Sadashiv Salave Female - Mahar
4.Sarvajit Bansode Male- Mahar	4. Kshirsagar Female - Mang
5. Vitthal Vairage - Male - Matang	5. Chaya Salave Female - Mahar
6. Abhimanyu Salave Mahar	6. Haribhau Salave Male - Mahar
7 Bhonjal Male- Brahman	7. Hankare Male - Chambhar
	8. Shinde Male - Chambhar
	9. Advocate Salave Male Mahar

BSP Meetings/Speeches

Leaders = 4
1. Dr. Sachan   Male- Kurmi
2. Chaube Male- Brahman
3. Suresh ManeMale – Mahar
4. Maulana Firz Ali Muslim

1. Chetana Rally Beed (September 2008)
2. Majalganv Muslim Bhaichara Meeting (December 2008)
3. Charmakar Samaj Sammelan (January 2009)
4. BSP Workers Meeting Beed (January 2009)
5. Mayawati - Election Public Rally, Nagpur (April 2009)
6. BAMCEF Cadre Camp, Mumbai (June 2009)
7. Rahul Anvikar Cadre Programme, Parali (January 2009)
8. Cadre Camp Beed(February 2009)
9. Cadre meeting on candidate (March 2009
10. BSP internal conflict resolution meeting (April 2009 not recorded)
11. Kanshiram Jayanti, Beed (March 2009)
12. BSP Rasta Roko, Massjog (January 2009)

Other Meetings/Processions/rallies

Focus Group interviews 2
Workers of AIMBUS, BSP, SKP and BRP[3 Mahars, 1 Takari, 1 Maratha]

1. Bahujan Samaj Federation, Mumbai (September 2009)
2. RPI Dalit Hakk Parishad (October 2009)
3. All Party/Group Meeting after violence (January 2009)
4. Mulniwasi Sangh, Delhi and Mumbai (part of a BAMCEF faction- was called to address the meeting)

Participants of BSP Phule Pimpalgaon [Six members turned into an argument between RPI and BSP worker]

5. Pune University of scholars and activists 6. Ambedkar Jayanti, Beed (April 2009)	

Key informant interviews (context)
1. D.S Kambale
2. Eknath Awad
3. Sudhakar Kshirsagar
4. Sham Tangade
5. Rajbhoj [Eldest Dalit movement participant from Phule Pimpalgaon]
6. Sanap [Potraj] Rajewadi
7. Aasarubai [possesses goddess Aasara]
8. Laxmi [possesses goddess Mari-aai]
9. Sushila Morale [A local academic and politician from Vanjari caste]
10. Motiram [72 year old Maratha ex-CPI worker)
11. Bhagwat Nakhate [92 year old Maratha ex-CPI worker]
12. Gangabhisan Thavare (leader peasant and workers party of India)
13. Prof. Bhosale, Mumbai University.

Total Interviews = 43 Key informant interviews = 12 Focus Group Interviews = 8

Annexure III

Some Pictures

Dalit Hakk Parishad [Dalit Rights Convention] organised by RPI (A) in Beed

MHA protest rally organised in Udgir [Latur District] for registering a case of rape against a Dalit woman under 'caste atrocity'

Pictures of Kanshiram and Mayawati at a BSP workers home along with Ambedkar
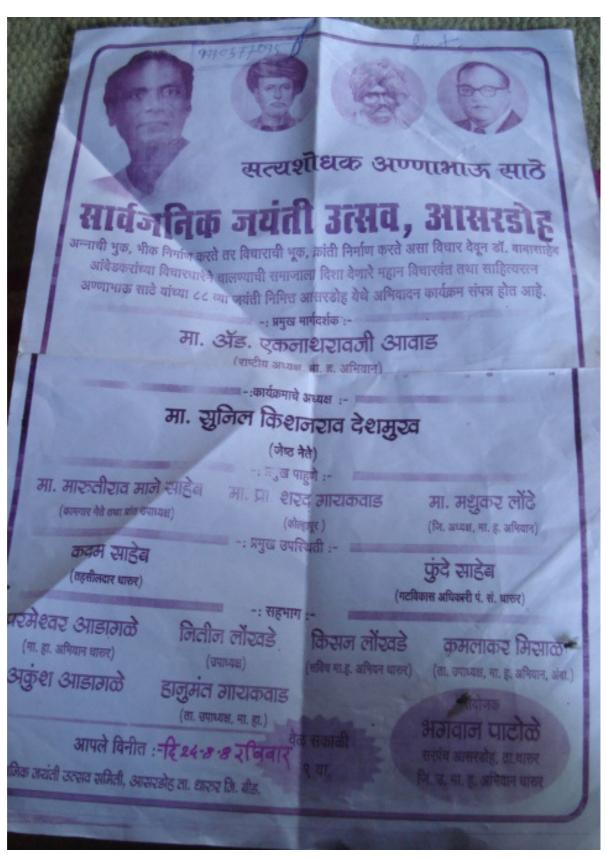
Eknath Awad addressing Dalits at a programme of Ambedkar Jayanti in April 2009

[This picture was taken by an activist of MHA]

Participants at a BSP rally in Nagpur trying to get a view of Mayawati after her two hour delayed arrival

Pamphlets for a Dalit family event where Rahul Anvikar [BSP cultural performer] was invited to perform

Pamphlet of Annabhau Jayanti in Asardoha village

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