

Scheduled Castes/Dalits In India



Who We Are?

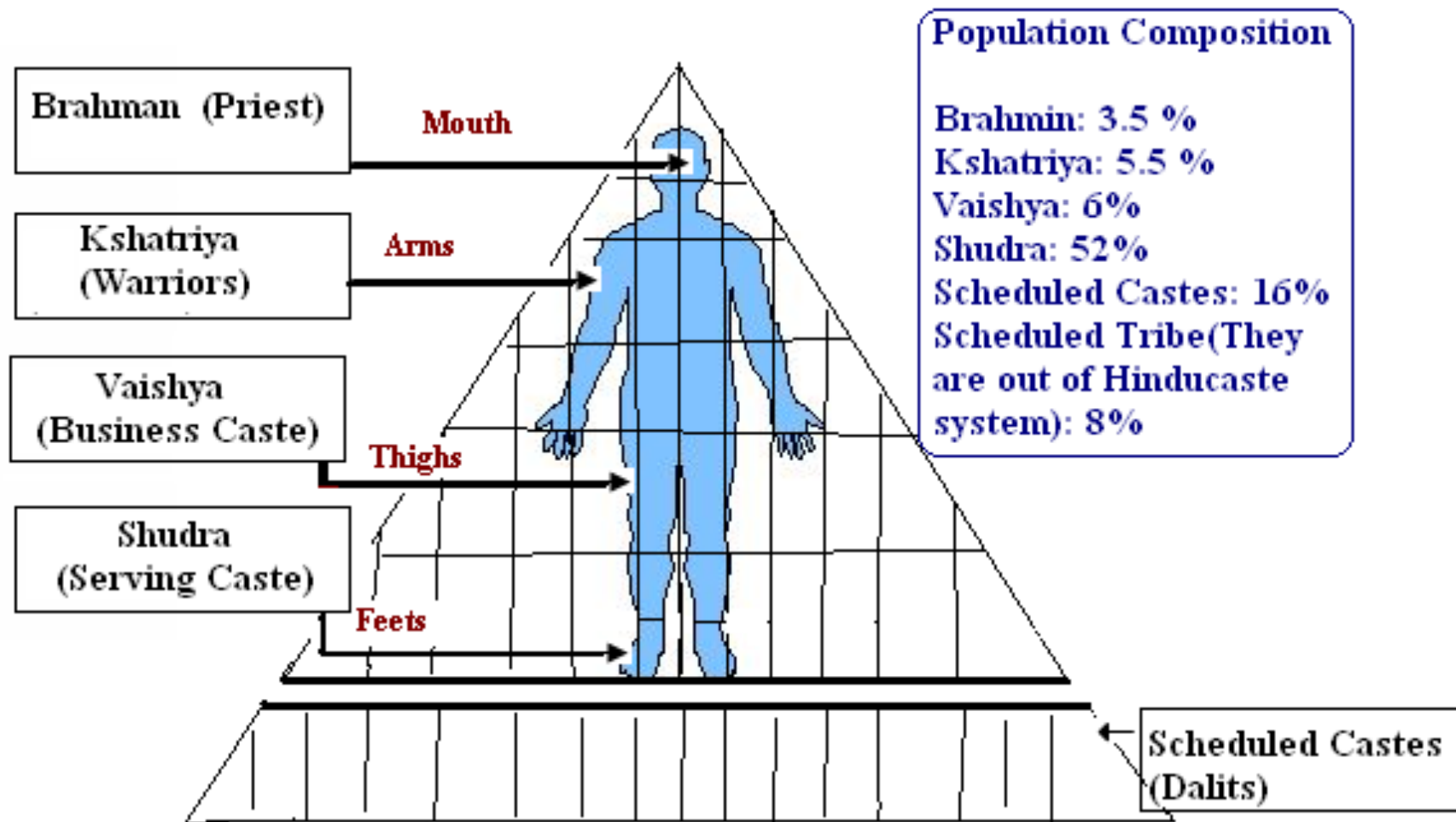
- In India, we are known as Dalits, the ex-untouchables.
- We are 160 million, forming 16% of the total Indian population and over 250 million in the Indian subcontinent that suffer from 3000 years of the Hindu caste system

Who We Are?

- We continue to suffer from discrimination which is an obstacle to the fulfilment of our basic human rights
- (civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights)

Evolution of Human Being & Caste by Birth

Reference: Khandare Lalit
(2006)



Caste System in India



- The caste hierarchy, which is central to the Hindu religion, prescribes a gruesome punishment for the Dalits, who must forever obediently serve the other, twice-born, *varnas*.
(*Manusmriti*)

Caste System in India



- This discrimination is legitimated by the spiritual, legal and moral sanctions of the *Dharmashastras*.

Gandhi on Caste and Untouchability



■ “I consider the four divisions to be fundamental, natural and essential” (Mahatma Gandhi, 1920)

■ “Hinduism does most emphatically discourage inter-dining and intermarriage between divisions... Prohibitions against intermarriage and inter-dining is essential for the rapid evolution of the soul” (Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, October, 1921)

Ambedkar- Father of The Indian Constitution

- Our fight is to claim our basic human rights and dignity(1932)
- Educate- Organize- Agitate

Post Independent India: Living as outcastes







Who wants to a doctor?



Claiming for Dignity

In the world of civilised society

Every day three Dalit women are raped.
Every hour two Dalits are assaulted

Every day two Dalits are murdered & two
Dalit houses are burnt in India.”

(Crime in India, Govt. of India



Discriminative Discipline



- “Our schools provide us the kind of education that will land us into low paid informal sector. These schools either force to drop us out of schools or become security guards or servants. Their schools make them Doctors, Engineers or professionals”

A High School student of Dalit Community

Dalit Girls Say....

- “Our teachers force us to behave like submissive girls.... We cannot think beyond our family jobs such as domestic servants and as vegetable vendors. My teachers laughed at me, when I said I wanted to be a Doctor”

– *Rajni, a high school student*

Impact of Discrimination

“What use is school? It's a waste of time and money. Even if our children do get an education, they will never be allowed to use it. If she starts sweeping and garbage collection now, at least she'll learn the trade and be able to make some money for us one day.”

A Dalit mother explains why she handed her daughter a broom when she turned four.

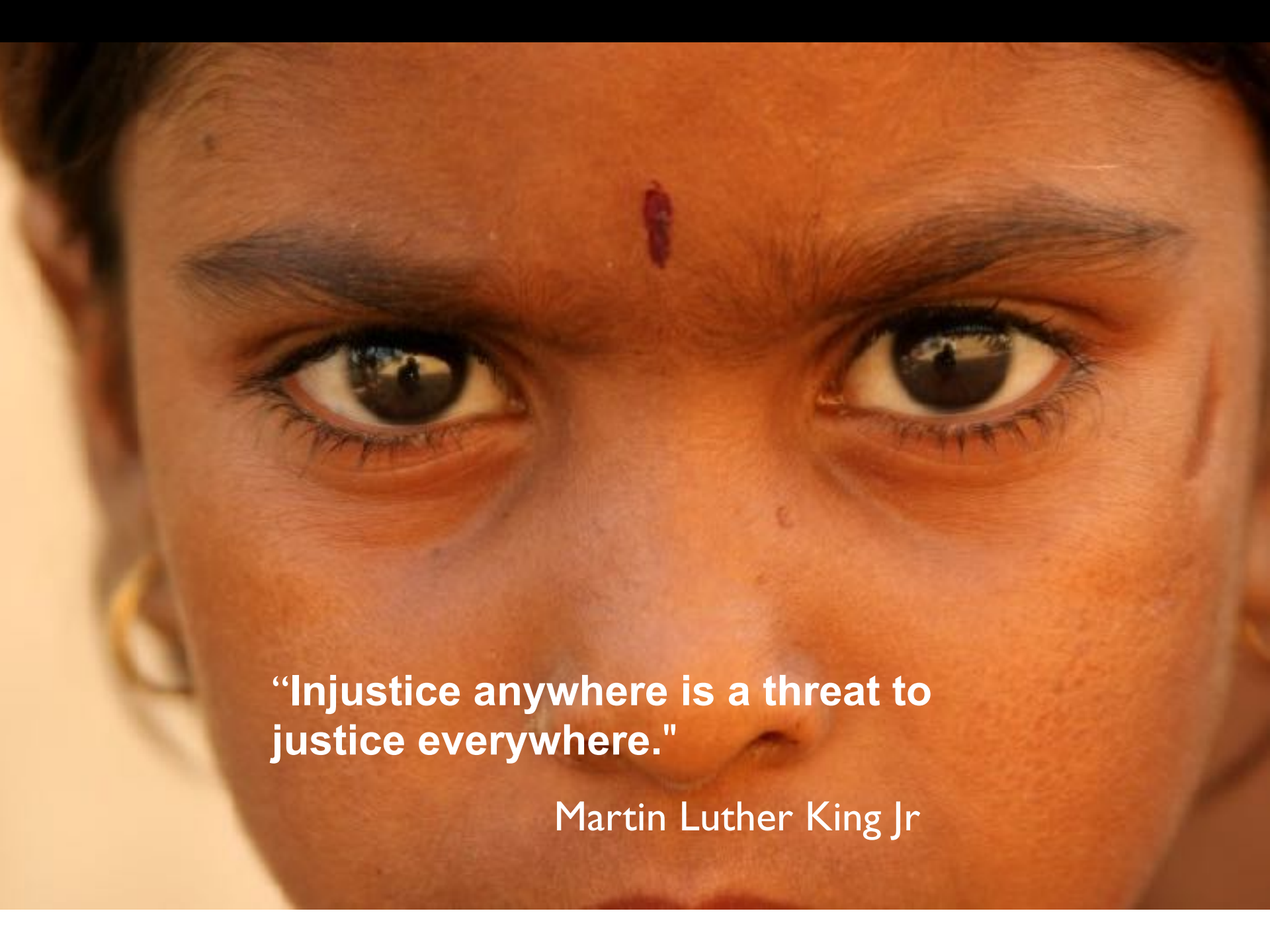


The vicious cycle continues.....



Rag Pickers in the making...

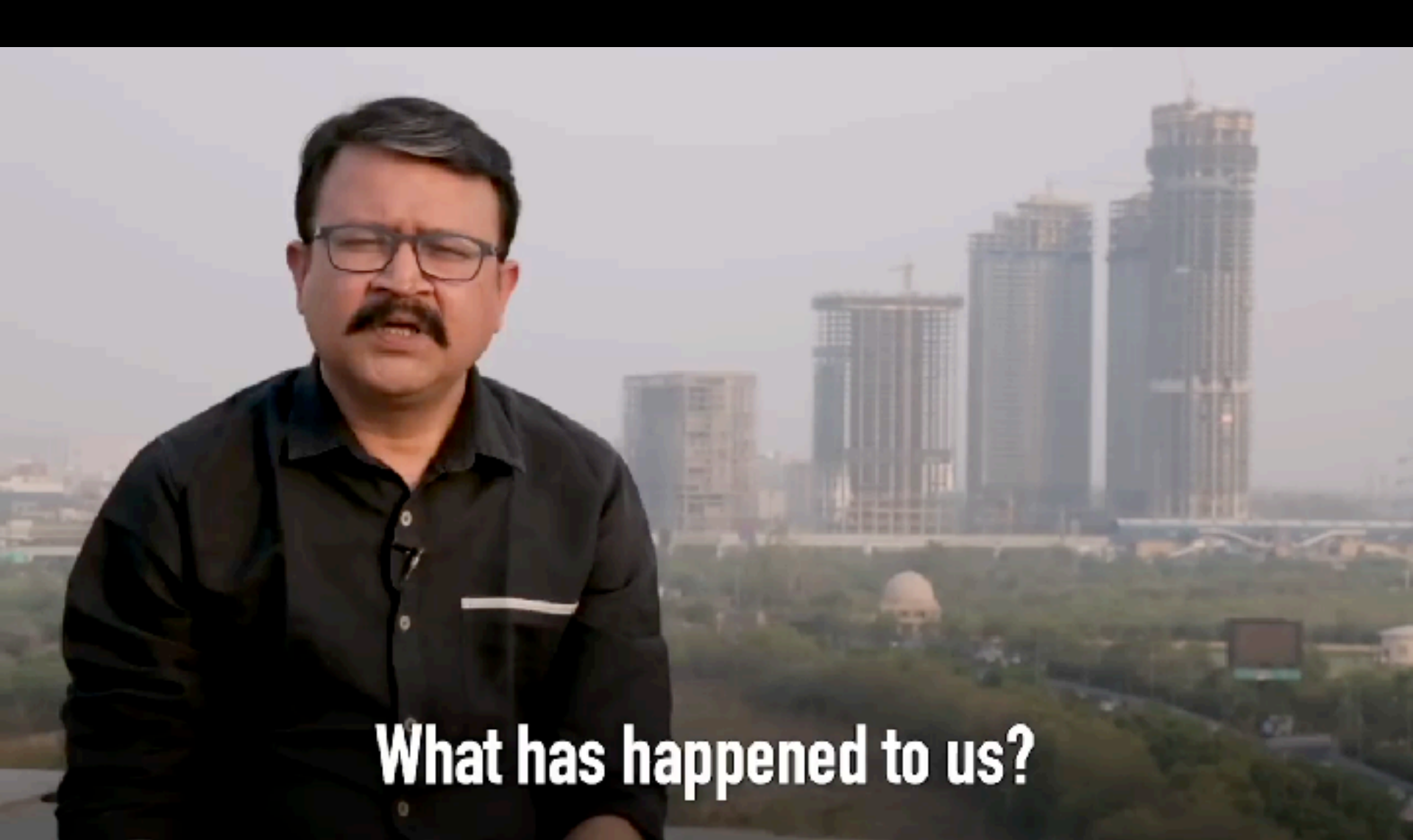


A close-up portrait of Martin Luther King Jr. He has a serious expression, looking directly at the camera. He has a small, dark, vertical mark on his forehead, likely a religious symbol. The lighting is warm and focused on his face.

**“Injustice anywhere is a threat to
justice everywhere.”**

Martin Luther King Jr





What has happened to us?





Contributions of Jyothiba Bhule

- flagged off the anti-caste movement in Maharashtra
- Background- bitter experience of humiliation.
- His theory – varna-concept- a myth – concoction invented to subdue the natives.

- he started schools...
- inspired by the successive venture he started more schools.
- Later he got immersed in reformist work-
- campaign for remarriage of widows – prevention of infanticide.

■ Organisation called- Sathya Shodhak Samj

■ newspaper called- Din Bandhu



*Life should be great
rather than long*

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Jayanti



- With arrival of Dr. Ambedkar- movement become more powerful and popular
- As a revolutionary reformer- he formed a peasant – proletariat lower caste front
- He was also influenced by Marxism

- Not being happy with the alliance of caste and class –
- or not being able to overcome the inherent
dichotomy between the two
- he embraced Buddhism

- He also supervised one of most massive religious conversions in history







- He also accepted the Marxian view of the dialectical interplay of classes
- organized movements of workers and peasants against capitalists and landlords
- along with the fight of Dalits against caste-based atrocities.

- According to Marxian class theory-
- An Individual's position within a class hierarchy is determined by his or her role in the production process, and argues that political and ideological consciousness is determined by class position.

- A class is those who share common economic interests, are conscious of those interests, and engage in collective action which advances those interests.

- Ambedkar – for two decades from 1920



- completely immersed (in neck-deep) in such activities

- leaving him little time to reflect theoretically over the two-pronged agitation of the times.

- He also organized public speeches
- wrote in the periodical called - Janata
- Ambedkar kept on reiterating the two fold objective of the struggle.
- The two enemies
- to combat were- Brahmanism and Capitalism

- He elucidates (explain) it in his speech...

- Let's read. P- 100-101

- In the draft of sections of the Constitution
- – *States and Minorities*–
- he urges the **nationalisation of the land** while at the same time suggesting separate settlements for Dalits.

- Do you think, this is inappropriate
- He did not see anything incongruous in the juxtaposition of the two suggestions

- towards the close of his career that he **became enamoured** (be filled with) **of Buddhism**, which he reinterpreted in significant ways.

- Buddhism with its **rejection of God**
- **soul, ritualism and casteism** appealed to Ambedkar as **a faith capable of creating a new identity for the people of the lower classes.**

- Buddhism also fitted into the **secular and political aspirations of the Dalits**
- increasingly becoming aware of their strength.

■ In short –

■ it is the worldliness of the belief that received emphasis from the converted Dalits.

■ **Middle ages- general tendency – religious**

- The happiness people yearned through being otherworldly
- Those days – one which was believed to exist only in the future world after death

- Religious life was regarded as noble
- Secular life as vile and mean
- **Shift from other worldliness to this worldliness**
- Some Buddhist reformers tried to change their attitude

additional attitude. For instance, Suzuki Shōsan might tell his lay followers that:

To pray for a happy future does not mean to pray for a world after death. It means to be delivered here and now and thus to attain a great comfort. Then, where do you think the afflictions of this world come from? They are originated from your attachment to your own flesh and to the demands of it. To be delivered from this attachment is the way to become a buddha.

- Part of the conversion - Ambedkar provides a critique of Indian history.

- three stages in the evolution of ancient Indian history.

- The first - the **Vedic Age** - represents a barbaric phase;

- the second is the **Age of Buddhism**

- spanning the Mauryan and Madha empires

- which marks **the golden phase of civilisation**

- The third is the **India of Hindu counter revolution associated with Manu**
- the Hindu law giver who legitimised and codified the caste system.

- Ambedkar's critique is significant:
- the middle phase (**Age of Buddhism - the golden phase of civilisation**) which attained a high level of perfection
- had to challenge and eclipse (conceal) the earlier period of decadence (moral or cultural decline)

- The ascendancy (superiority) of Buddhism thus marks a rupture (break) with the tradition of Hinduism.

- The embrace of Buddhism by the Dalits is at one level
- a symbolic re-enactment of the historical break
- retrieving (reclaiming) a potent (powerful) ideology from the debris (remains - garbage) of the past

By espousing (advocate) a new faith they find a
legitimacy, (legality, authority) historical and religious
for the encounter with Brahmanism

and find themselves metaphorically (figuratively)
elevated to a lofty (superior) level of culture.

■ very well expressed by the new converts - literary works

■ - The pride of the new converts on having rejected what for them was a religion of oppression is seen in the literary expressions

- A marked feature of the literature is the deification of Ambedkar
- and the equation of Ambedkar with Buddha.

- Indira Y. Junghare-

- who has collected the folk songs dealing with
Ambedkar comments: P.102

- established writers as well as in folk songs –
- They exalt Ambedkar
- Certain new rituals also sprung up

- The Dalith Sahitya Movement
- Failure of Republican Party – Disillusionment and fragmentation
- Out of poetry of revolt

- The literary exuberance of the period began to form – what we call
- Dalit Sathya Movement
- the Dalit Rangbhoomi
- the All India Backward SC OBC and Minority Communities Employees Federation

- The literary exuberance of the period began to form – what we call
- the Bahujan Samaj Party came up
- the Republican Party of India
- The Dalit Panther's Party
- the Bahujan Samaj Party

- The Republican Party of India worked in many areas such as:
- 1. To voice their concern against the atrocities committed to Dalits and to make them conscious.
- 2. Revitalization of the Samata Sainik, founded by Dr Ambedkar in 1928, to maintain discipline in the party.

- 3. All India/Women's Conference was organized in 1957 at Nagpur.

- 4. It contributed enormously to the Dalit Sahitya Sangh, the first conference was held in 1958 under the Chairmanship of B.C. Kamble.
- 5. All India Republic Students Federation was established by the Republican Party of India.

- 6. The Republican Party of India also spread the message of Lord Buddha.

■ Dalit Panther Movement:

- The Dalit Panther Movement was formed in 1972, when the Dalit youths came forward and took up the task of bringing all the Dalits on to one single platform and mobilizes them for the struggle for their civil rights and justice.



- To Panthers

- Dalit meant members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes

- Neo-Buddhists

- the working class

- the landless and poor farmer

- Women

■ To Panthers

■ and all those who are being exploited politically,
weaker economically and neglected in the name of
religion.

- The most crucial factor for the rise of the Dalit Panther Movement was the repression and terror under which the oppressed Scheduled Castes continued to live in the rural areas.

- The Dalit Panther Movement spread to cities such as Bombay, Poona, Nasik, and Aurangabad where a large number of Dalit population is concentrated.
- Since its inception, the Panther Party was solely based on the ideology of Dr Ambedkar and was quite radical in nature.

- However, later in other states at least a faction of the Panthers was found inclined to the leftist, especially to the Marxist ideology.



- they tried to create a class consciousness among the Dalits.
- They purposefully opted for confrontation and total revolution.

- Some of the achievements of the Dalit Panthers are as follows:
- 1. Dalit Panther Party provided courage to fight against the ghastly incidents perpetrated on the Dalits.
- 2. They shattered the myth that the untouchables are mute and passive.
- 3. They raised their voice against the unjust caste system.

- 4.They acted as a bulwark against the power politics and Republican Party leaders.
- 5.They started a debate on Dr Ambedkar s ideology.
- 6.They compelled the government to fill the backlog.
- 7.They contributed immensely towards Dalit literature.

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