

A Publication of Asian Human Rights Commission

COPY FOR OFFICE
NOT TO BE
TAKEN AWAY!

DEMORALIZATION AND HOPE

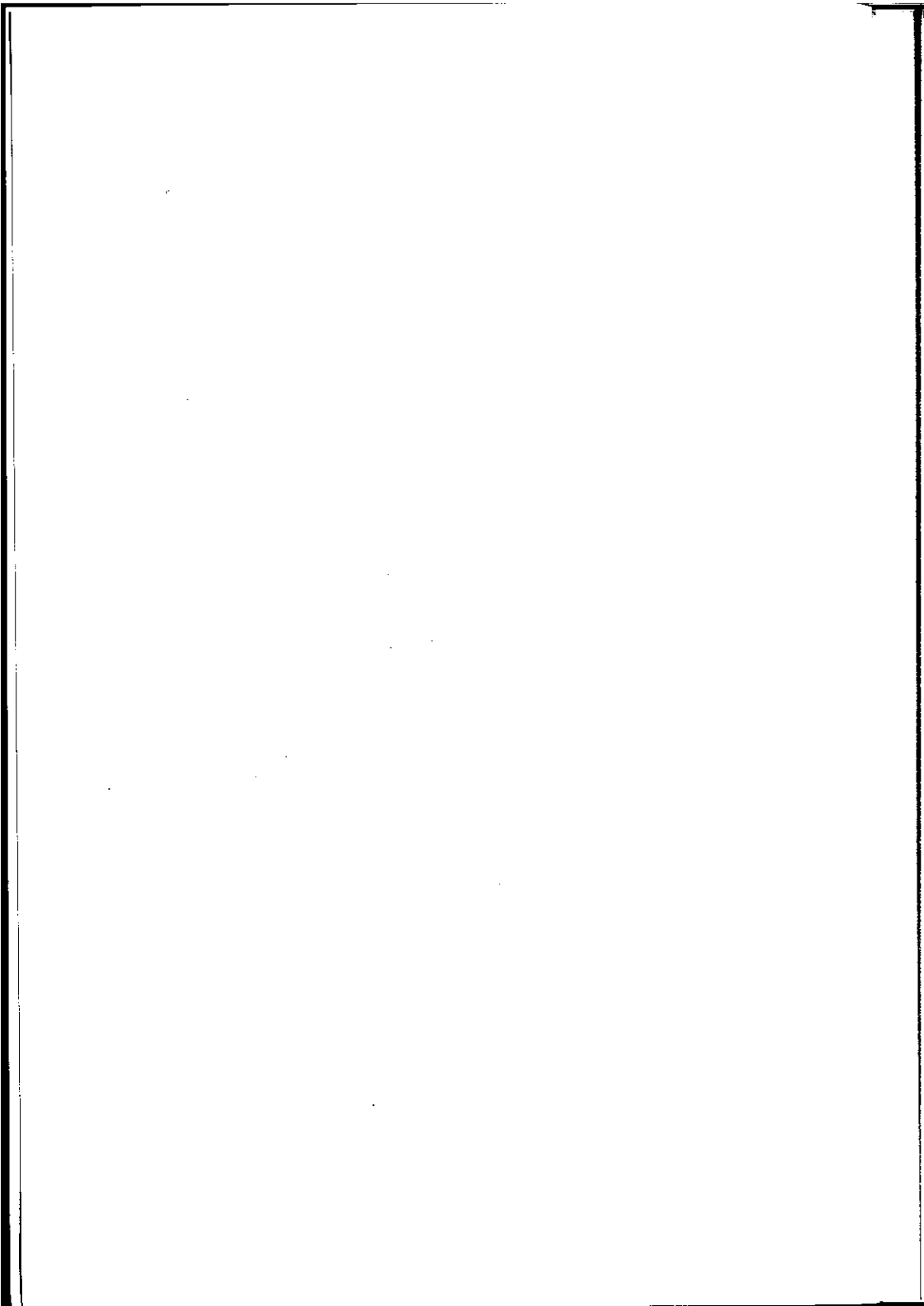


**Creating the Social Foundation
for Sustaining Democracy**

**A Comparative Study of the Ideas of
N. E. S. Grungtvig of Denmark and
B. R. Ambedkar of India**

W. J. Basil Fernando

**Demoralization
and
Hope**



Demoralization
and
Hope

A Comparative Study
of the Ideas of
N. F. S. Grundtvig
(1783 -1872), Denmark
and
B. R. Ambedkar
(1881-1956), India

BASIL FERNANDO

Asian Human Rights Commission 2000

Material contained in this document may be reproduced for the promotion and protection of human rights. In such reproduction, an acknowledgement of the authors and the publisher would be greatly appreciated.

ISBN 962-8314-08-4

Published by

Asian Human Rights Commission
Unit D, 7/ Floor, Mongkok Commercial Centre
16 Argyle Street, Kowloon,
Hong Kong SAR, China
Telephone: +(852) 2698-6339
Fax: +(852) 2698-6367
E-mail: ahrchk@ahrchk.org
Web site: <http://www.ahrchk.net>

August 2000

Typesetting by Catherine Fok Chiu Ping

Printed by Clear-Cut Publishing and Printing Co.
B1, 15/F, Fortune Factory Building
40 Lee Chung Street, Chai Wan, Hong Kong SAR, China

CONTENTS

Introduction	i
Foreward	1
Chapter I	
The Theme: Demoralization and Hope	3
Chapter II	
The Basic Similarities between the Ideas of Grundtvig and Ambedkar	11
Chapter III	
A Seeming Difference	19
Chapter IV	
The Caste Notion and the Nation	33
Chapter V	
Living Dialogue Beyond Party Politics	45
Chapter VI	
The Indian Renaissance	55
Chapter VII	
Social Demoralization	63
Chapter VIII	
Hope and the Spirit of the Nation	71
Chapter IX	
The Inner Balance	75

Chapter X	
Shudras - Untouchables - Dalits	85
Chapter XI	
The Intellectuals and Social Equality	95
An Afterword	99
Appendices	
Appendix 1:	
Ambedkar: A Nightmare to Cast Minded Indians?	103
Appendix 2:	
Can Asians Think?	121
Appendix 3:	
The First Great Revolt Against Chaturwarna	129

Introduction

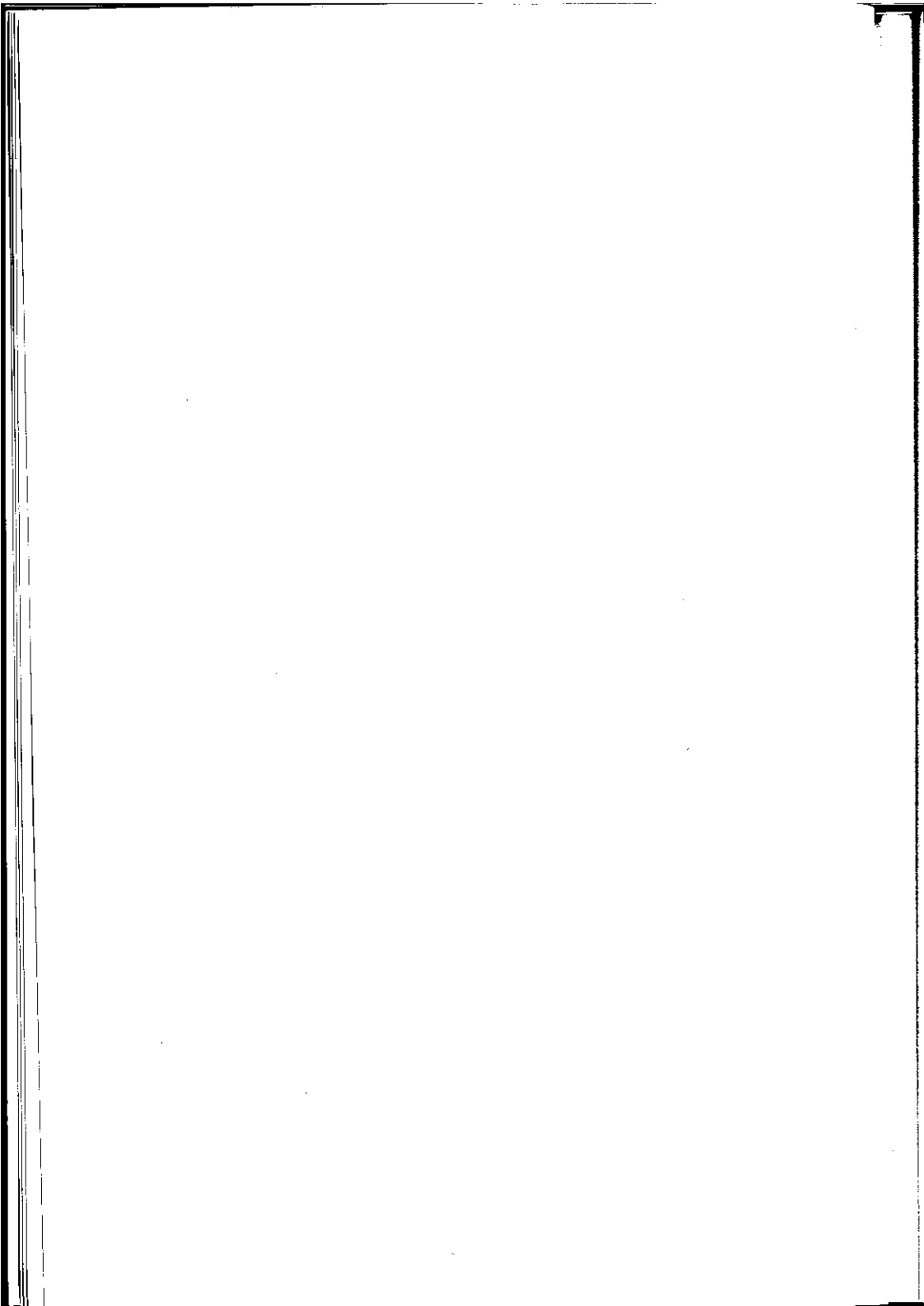
The essay Demoralization and Hope was initially written as a research paper for the Danish Centre for Human Rights (DCHR). Several people, particularly in Asian countries have also read this essay. It has already been translated into Sinhalese and the translation is being published. It will also be published in Khmer language soon.

For the present publication, I have also added three, shorter articles published earlier as appendices. I hope these articles will help to explain some of the issues discussed in “Demoralization and Hope”.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Danish Centre For Human Rights for making my stay for research and writing in Copenhagen possible. I must particularly mention Bigrit Lindsnaes, Lis Dhundale and Charlotte Flindt Pedersen for their kind assistance. I also thank my colleagues at the Asian Human Rights Commission who have gone through the text many times and helped with the editing, and also Dr. Mark Tamthai, for writing a foreword for this publication.

I hope the publication will generate a discussion on the issues of culture, human rights and democracy. Such a discussion is very much needed in the context of the Post-Cold War world, particularly in Asia.

Basil Fernando



Foreward

“A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step”. This ancient Chinese proverb probably has its equivalents in the sayings of nearly every society. But too often when the first step of a journey itself is accomplished with great difficulty, it becomes the last step as well. Instead of resting temporarily and then moving on, the journey is understood to be almost complete with only a few steps more to take.

Nowhere is this phenomena illustrated more clearly than in the long journey called ‘democratisation’ which many traditional societies are undertaking today. The first step in many of these journeys are written constitutions and participation in the political process through elections. Achieving this first step has often come with much struggle and hence it is understandable that the sense of accomplishment, which is quite justifiable, turns into a kind of inertia and the rest of the journey becomes forgotten. But in the case of this journey of democratisation, the rest of the journey is the essence of it.

Institutionalised inequality arising from customs, social practices and even legal systems are a common trademark of many of these societies, and until these underlying realities are dealt with the journey will never be complete. Democracy can be sustained in a society only when all members of that society have a sense of ‘self-worth’ which allows them

to believe that they really are able to participate effectively in the decisions of the society. This is because this feeling of being of some 'worth', of having some value, empowers one and destroys the sense of hopelessness which pervades the lives of many people in such societies. The Thai word for dignity (Saksri) when translated literally means 'beauty which comes from power'. Though some have interpreted beauty and power here in physical terms, interpreting these terms as inner beauty and a feeling of empowerment would seem to fit in more with our understanding of 'dignity'.

The journey of democratisation nears its end when all the people of the society undertaking this journey have a feeling of dignity.

With time, political processes such as elections may be able to gradually create this sense of dignity for all people, or these changes may not occur at all and the sense of powerlessness continues to remain beneath the surface of some societies. What is then needed are people to point out in detail what these obstacles are in each such society so that the entire society can face their own realities, which is the only way to take up the journey again and continue on together. In *DEMORALIZATION AND HOPE* Basil Fernando shows us examples both of someone who strove to uncover the social obstacles to democracy, in the person of B.R.Ambedkar, and someone who strove to continually enrich the democracy achieved, in the person of N.F.S.Grundtvig. Through this comparative study he provides further evidence for that belief which is needed to hold today's World together, namely, our common humanity.

Dr. Mark Tamthai
Director, The Humanities for Society Center
Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand

CHAPTER ONE

THE THEME: DEMORALIZATION AND HOPE

This paper deals with two great traditions of humanism: Danish humanism as represented by¹ Nicolas Frederick Severin Grundtvig, a churchman, a poet, a song and hymn writer, a prolific writer, a politician and the founder and inspirer of the Folk High School movement; and the Indian humanist tradition represented by Dr. Bhim Rao (Babasaheb) Ambedkar, who was the undisputed leader of the largest group of extremely oppressed persons yet remaining in the world, who are known as Shudras-untouchables-and Dalits,¹ as well as an eminent jurist, a politician, a religious philosopher and also a prolific writer.

Both are large subjects who defy definition; legends in their own countries who continue to have an influence in the societies they belonged to and both of who are increasingly recognised internationally.

¹ For explanation of the words Shudra, Untouchable and Dalit see Chapter Ten

The paper involves four parties: the two persons whose ideas and practices are discussed; the author of this paper and the readers. About the two persons, Grundtvig and Ambedkar, much has been said in the following paper. As for the author, myself, my interest in this study begins from the situations of my own country-Sri Lanka and that of Cambodia with which I have become very much involved. During my adult life, my country got into a serious crisis resulting in violence both in the North as well as the South. In my view the basic causes which produced this situation in both parts of the country are the same: it was the failure to work towards social equality, following the political and juridical equality which began with the independence from the British colonialism. Both persons studied here have dealt with the issue of social equality in the different contexts of their respective society. Cambodia presents a classic example of a complete tragedy. The causes, which gave rise to it, are analysed by different persons from varying perspectives. However, the almost total neglect of the people and social factors is the internal source, which made the tragedy possible.

On the other hand, the alternative was much worse; it too completely dismissed the human aspect of social change. The internal impact of these events on me as well as on so many others I know has made it necessary to look for those who thought differently and did things differently. This study is motivated by this search.

As for the readers, who may vary in their backgrounds, there is, I believe, one thing in common: we are all living today in the context of a rapid change, if not revolution, in communication, which has brought about potentials for a change which is beyond imagination. No one I believe will contend that these are merely technological changes. Given the transformation of communication it is simply impossible to avoid a

fundamental change in relationships. What this means is not a mere increase in the receipt of information. This communication revolution implies enormous possibilities of action. If Grundtvig and Ambedkar were living in this current communication context and wanted to do the very same things they did in their lifetimes, how may have the communication transformation have affected them? If they were able to use the relatively backward communication systems of their time, with enormous implications on their labour, time and organisational work, and achieved as much as they have in fact done, what greater possibilities would there have been for them in the modern context? Those possibilities are now available to us. Giving serious thought to their ideas and practices may make it possible for us to achieve these objectives in our present context.

I have introduced the theme of demoralization and hope as the basic thrust of this paper. Social inequality is the greatest source of demoralization. Hope in those circumstances cannot arise from mere words. It can arise only from social practices that makes social equality possible. It is not mere formal equality - the duty of each person standing in the queue - that is implied by the term social equality. The humanist concept of equality, the assertion of our common humanity, is what is at stake. That alone is the real source of genuine hope. Of this we have much to learn from the two persons we study here. In studying them we study the traditions they represented and to which they too contributed.

Grundtvig's humanism was conditioned by his world outlook as a participant of the Lutheran Christian tradition. His belief that something had gone wrong in the world and with humanity on the one hand and that something had to be done to correct this wrong on the other was fundamental to his thinking and to his world outlook

(*Anskuelse*)². This he expressed through Christian expressions. However, he saw that those whom he called *Naturaliser* (naturalists) shared this same view and expressed it through secular expressions. In stating folk life as a precondition for Christianity and primacy of the human - an expression in his poems is Man First, Then Christian - he recognised equality among those who are engaged in trying to understand and change the world. His conception of joyful Christianity was opposed to Puritanism and some sects, which advocated a morose approach to life. Joyfulness combined with seriousness fitted to contribute towards an outlook, which encouraged working towards change. Ambedkar's world outlook was influenced by many sources. An outstanding jurist, equal to any in any country, he had a secular outlook: the cause of the caste system being the doctrines of the very religion he was born into, he rebelled against that tradition with the whole of his being. Having discovered the historical roots of Buddhism as the philosophy that attacked the fundamental basis of caste, he converted himself to Buddhism with a large following, and Buddhism became the framework of reference for him on the issue of liberation from caste and all other matters.

² Here the following explanation given by Grundtvig himself to the word *Anskuelse* may be useful "The Mosaic-Christian view of life (*Anskuelse*) is for me now as previously the only divinely true one. I have, however, learned to distinguish sharply between Church and School, Faith and Philosophy, mortal and eternal. I am thoroughly convinced that just as the Christian Church must refute every attempt to state or philosophy to change it according to their ideas, just as wrongful it is to force state or school to become church-like instructions."

(Translation from Grundtvig's *Udvalgte Skrifter*, i.e. Selected Writings, ed. by Holger Begtrup. Vol. VI, 1907, P.12)

- Dr. K.E. Bugge says " *Anskuelse*", is therefore, not exclusively Christian. It is a stance shared by Christians, Jews and 'all men of Spirit' as (Grundtvig has expressed it) by the way also Muslims" (a personal note)

Such are the humanitarian traditions they belonged to. They were however, not passive recipients of these traditions. They contributed not only to the renewal but also to the reshaping of these traditions.

Some of the main ideas of this essay are as follows:

The vitality of a society depends on the internal communication within that society, said Ambedkar. Grundtvig expressed the same concept as the need for internal fertilisation of one part by the other.

The authenticity and the strength of this communication and fertilisation will depend on the extent to which the ordinary people participate in such a process: There is a natural tendency in the people who belong to the privileged sections of any society to be unmindful of the need for internal communication and cross fertilisation; and there is a tendency in formal education systems to ignore the capacity of the oral communication, which is the main medium of communication of ordinary people. The ordinary people bring into the social discourse the ordinary ways of thinking which exist within a particular culture, the ordinary sensibilities of the people, and the ordinary ways of how human reactions take place in a particular society. In this way the greatest humanist traditions existing in society get expressed through the participation of ordinary people in social discourse.

Where internal communication is blocked, such obstruction of communication can bring about a complete crisis in that society and if it lasts long, it can result in creating deep internal divisions and polarisation. This in turn makes it impossible for a society to be a democracy. What the caste system has done to India provides a sad but glaring example of the process of social and cultural decay resulting from the breakdown of internal communication and fertilisation. As the problem is a common one, it can be useful to study this extreme example in depth. (The situation in ancient India however provides a different

picture. India has had its own great models of internal communication and fertilisation.)

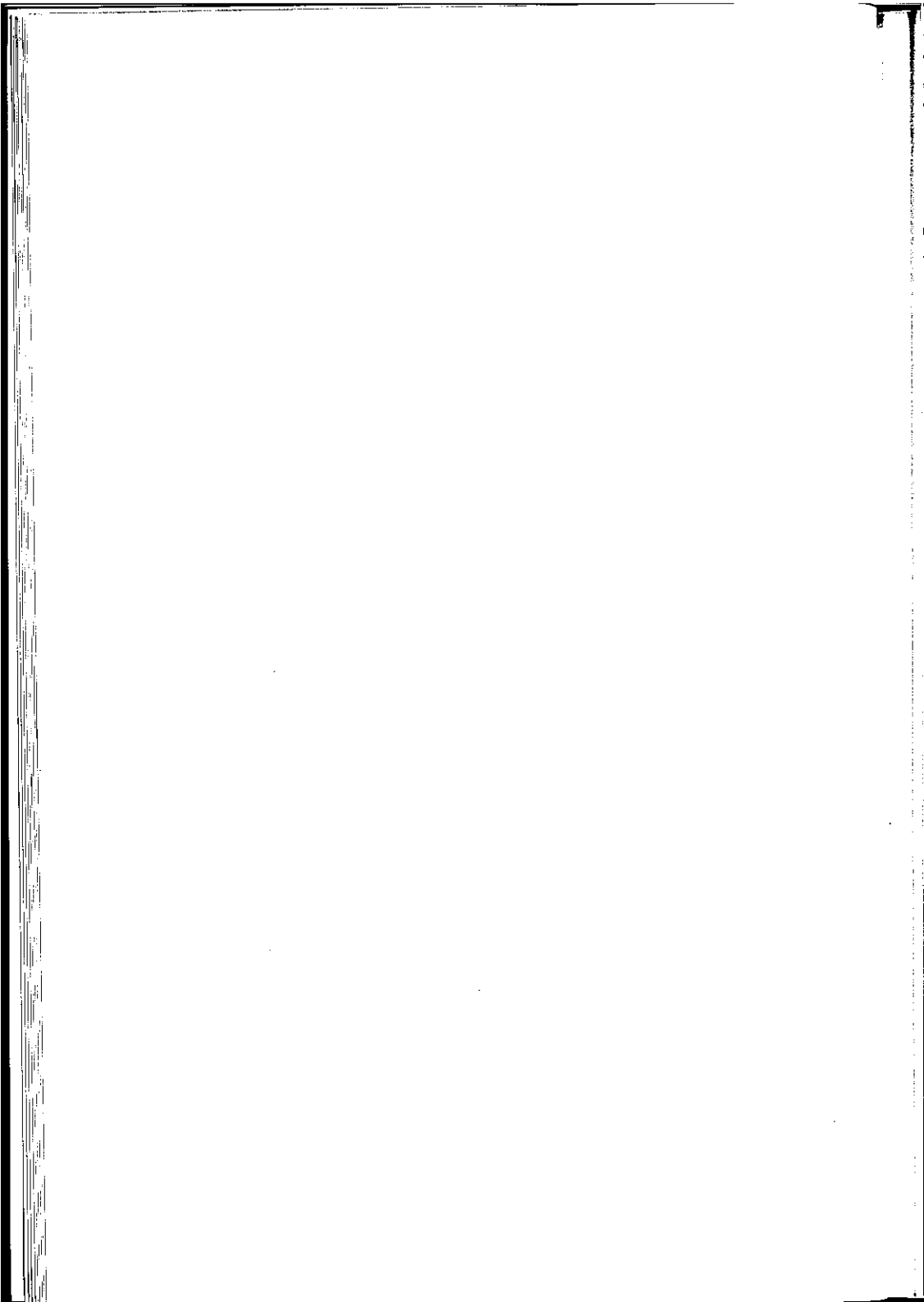
On the other hand the experience of Denmark in the 18th and 19th centuries can be an example in the opposite direction. Encouraged by the country's own internal land reforms and the traditions of religious reformation and European revolutions, new ways of thinking were developed to keep an ongoing process of internal communication and fertilisation. This took the form of practical experiments like the folk school movement. The study of the thinking behind these experiments and the lessons gained from actual implementation of these ideas can be useful.

Both these experiences can now be discussed only in the context of an enormous transformation in communications, which has put the discussion on internal communication and fertilisation into a completely altered context. The new context provides hitherto unimaginable possibilities to ordinary people for inter-personal exchanges and communication of ideas and for development of action. The new context thus provides greater possibilities of pursuing the ideas of the two persons studied in this paper.

The issue of communication and fertilisation needs now to be discussed not only in relationship to the local contexts but also in relation to the international context. In fact both in the Folk School movement and the Dalit movement the realisation of the need for a deeper international understanding has come about quite some time back. The new communication context has created greater possibilities to pursue the actualisation of such realisations.

This study can also be relevant to the ongoing debate on globalisation. In particular it is very relevant to the discussion on the rights of minorities. It is also relevant for peace studies in general. The issue of internal

communication and cross fertilisation is very much an issue in poverty eradication. In fact, the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights very much depends on the understanding of the processes of communication and cross-fertilisation.



CHAPTER TWO

THE BASIC SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE IDEAS OF GRUNDTVIG AND AMBEDKAR

The similarities between the two persons studied here are not peripheral or superficial but fundamental. Some of these fundamental aspects are as follows.

They were both serious democrats. Democracy to both was not a means but an end. As Denmark moves from the 19th century to the 21st century, the visible forms of traditional farm life may have completely disappeared. As people have become more sophisticated, technology has imposed its tremendous grip on every aspect of life, forms of direct democratic discourse may have changed its form. However, what is important is to see how the inner democratic traditions of the 19th century fare in this new communication climate. For India, things have become even worse during the last fifty years. The inner divisions, which were made invisible by the needs of maintaining the appearance of a common front to liberate India from colonial domination, have now come to the forefront. The issues that Ambedkar raised in relation to democracy in India are as valid as

ever. Ambedkar is usually presented, if at all, as a minority leader. These days Grundtvig is presented mostly as an educationist. However, their work cannot be separated from the radical conceptions of democracy they had. Their conceptions of democracy were formulated in opposition to the elite traditions of their countries, the Latin speaking elite of Denmark for Grundtvig and the Brahmins of India for Ambedkar. It must be admitted that the task that Ambedkar faced was much more formidable than that of Grundtvig.

Their serious approaches to democracy come from their views on the place of people in a democracy. In their views people are not mere electors of their representatives. People continue to participate directly in day-to-day affairs; their participation is not just political participation but direct participation in all aspects of their communities. The concept and practice of the folk school introduced a new living enlightenment, where the people constantly fertilised the social and political process. The people are always present. This is neither the Greek concept of citizen's assembly nor is it the modern British model of representative democracy. It is somewhere in between. The people create their own milieu through fellowship of the school and community activities and keep up the on-going process of dialogue through their own creative discourses. Meanwhile the state exists differently from the people and people exist differently from the state. While remaining distinct and separate they constantly cross-fertilise each other. All the time people matter. As for Ambedkar, he expressed this by way of his fundamental idea of social equality. All his contributions on the democratic process in India were based on his critique of the dichotomy between political equality and social inequality. In fact, his critique of Indian history as a whole was based on this core idea of failure to create social equality as the source of failure of India to become a nation. To him too, people fundamentally mattered. This perspective

that people matter also remains controversial in the West, even now. The controversy surrounding the work of Dr. Theo Van Boven³ the director of the United Nations Human Rights Division in Geneva in the early 1980's was on this issue. He published papers relating to this controversy under the title *People Matter*.

Implied in the concepts of Ambedkar and Grundtvig about the people, is their views on the nature of political culture which sustain an active democracy on a constant basis. The achievements of the Folk School movement are part of the heritage of Denmark. This was put to me by a thirteen-year-old Danish boy: "Our teachers encourage us to discuss. There is a belief that if we discuss we become better persons." How different to the usual idea that silence is the sign of a good student! And how vastly different to the idea in the caste system, that the breaking of silence by those who are considered low caste should be punished violently. Even today murders and rapes take place simply because such persons dared to speak. What Ambedkar sought was a complete change. In fact much has already been achieved on this basis; by and large, the Dalits of today are much more articulate than their forefathers and are actively asserting their presence. India's political troubles of today come from these awakened and active people who are breaking the draconian control of caste. India looks forward to a crucial change where the ideas of Ambedkar will become a reality, in the way Grundtvig's ideas did come to realisation in Danish life.

They both gave central importance to social aspects of democracy over political aspects, unlike many others whose discourse on democracy is confined to the political and institutional aspects. The two of them paid greater attention to social linkages among people

³ Theo Van Bovan, *People Matter*, Published by Meulenhoff-Amstrdam 1982

than separation of powers and constitutional safeguards for democracy. The concept of power contained in their thinking has a direct relationship between social power and political power. Foucault spoke about the need of a new conception of rights⁴, as against the 18th century concept of the juridical model of contract between sovereign individual and the sovereign state. In fact, the work of both Grundtvig and Ambedkar are based on much different conception of rights. Their ideas bear a direct relevance to the discourse on power, which has been taking place during the last fifty years. In this context, it may also be noted that the concepts of discipline held by both of them were influenced by their conceptions of democracy and they transcended the rule of law type of discipline found in most democracies of the West. The religious outlooks of both were also bound with their conception of discipline.

Both paid serious attention to religious notions that promote democracy. In the case of Grundtvig, this took the form of the primacy of the human being as a pre-condition for anything, including being a Christian and in the case of Ambedkar, the religious foundation of caste as the fundamental obstacle to democracy in India on the one hand and the Buddhist doctrine of liberty, equality and fraternity as the foundations for democracy on the other hand. It can be said that Grundtvig's ideas came from the influence of the tradition of religious reformation, which had a profound impact on his country. The Reformation implied not just a change of ideas but the change in relationships, particularly in the church. The relationship within the Catholic structure broke down, paving the way for a new understanding of the relationship between the priests and the laity. The concept of set forms of mediation between God and the people was radically undermined. The link to this undermining was the

⁴ Foucault, *Power and Knowledge*, Pantheon Books London 1972

concept of individual responsibility for salvation. Salvation could not be left to mechanical means such as indulgences. Nothing can take away individual's responsibility. These principles, when applied to political life, meant that political leaders or bureaucrats could not be absolute mediators for people. People cannot abdicate their own responsibility. There has to be a living link between the people and the agents of the state. Keeping this link is not just the privilege of the individual; it is his/her duty.

Both saw the involvement of ordinary people in the participatory process as not merely a means of democracy but as the necessary foundation for achieving democracy. Quite explicitly expressed in their conceptions is the nature of communication that needs to exist between all sectors of society. Ordinary people are not considered as those who should be brought under the discipline of democracy, but as those whose creativity provides life for democracy. When the form of social organisation of a society stops the communication between all its parts, society as a whole, decays. When folk life is alive it keeps the entire society alive.

Both of them considered education different as going beyond and being deeper than formal education. They thought of education as education for critical participation in society and the enhancement of the creative possibilities of life.

They come from two different continents and different times: one from a European nation with a small population, living from the 18th to the 19th century; and the other from one of the largest countries in the world, with a huge population, living from the end of 19th century to the first half of 20th century. The histories of both countries differed in terms of their historical development, economic development, political experiences. At the time Denmark was living through the ethos of European revolutions and emancipation, while

India was living under colonialism and practically the whole of the Asian continent was facing a period of subjugation. How then, were they able to develop similar attitudes, similar ideas and similar fundamental commitments? It is more their characters that explain this similarity than any other external factor. They were both extraordinary humanists. That the two persons from two continents with different religious backgrounds, different histories and different levels of enjoyment of materials goods, were able to reach such a height of humanism, bears testimony to the existence of something in humanity which rises from the fact of common humanity alone. Both were very cultivated men, with a tremendous knowledge of books, the literature of their own cultures as well as Western literature as a whole. Still both felt the compelling need to reach beyond books to people. They were both activists par excellence. They both sought to share their lot with the less privileged members of society and both believed that the activism of the common people could determine the course of human history. This activist-intellectual model that they both represented is of paramount importance. The mainstream intellectual tradition of the West and also that of Asia (which is mostly shaped by mainstream Western tradition) still looks down on the activist-intellectuals. Perhaps, such attitudes are a by-product of the dichotomies of Western thought itself. Here in contrast are two activists, who qualify to be ranked highest in the ladder of activism, who are also great intellectuals by any standard. One can contend that Ambedkar is the greatest political thinker India produced for a long time. Outwardly this may seem strange in a country where intellectual life was the monopoly of the Brahmin caste and was completely denied to other castes for thousands of years. However, here no contradiction is involved. It was the very privileged position assigned to the Brahmin that became the cause of their retardation. That the very first generation of Dalits who were able to gain higher education were able to create an

intellectual of Ambedkar's calibre is a clear proof of Grundtvig's thesis of the creative power of ordinary people.

Their similarities also point to another very important factor. The emancipatory tradition of Europe, which flowered in the 18 and 19th centuries, is not alien to Indian soil. In fact, there was a whole period of Indian history where a very deep tradition of emancipation has prevailed. This tradition though since lost, still carries its inner influence. Those whose roots are in this tradition easily respond to the emancipatory tradition of the West. Thus the Asian response to the West in this century has been two fold:

On the one hand it violently reacted to domination by the West; on the other hand, it creatively, loving and hopefully responded to the emancipatory tradition of the West. The link is the greatest humanist traditions of both continents. A close study of Ambedkar and Grundtvig shows how deep the links are.

As for the personalities, both of them in their mature years were persons who affirmed their views with their whole being. Though involved in controversy all their lives, the contents of their thoughts reached beyond these controversies. They both, if measured by the test of fundamental character set out by Soren Kierkegaard⁵, were persons able to radically reduce the distance between what they understood and what they did.

Both remain legends in their countries. Ambedkar is loved by one section of Indians and is hated equally by another section of his society. His importance is likely to be recognised more as the romantic conceptions of independence from colonialism, symbolized by Mahatma Ghandi, turned

⁵ Paul Muller- Kierkegaard, *Works of Love -Christian Ethics and Meiotic Ideal*, Published by C.A. Reitzel, 1993

into disillusionment and as more and more Indians and others recognise a need for a radical change of perspectives of India, if it is to emerge out of its divisions. Grundtvig is known as one of the three best-known Danish thinkers: Hans Christian Anderson, Soren Kiekegaard and himself. The international recognition of Grundtvig is now growing. What has received more attention at the moment are his ideas on education.

However, the philosophical importance of his ideas, in terms of the later thought of Nietzsche and Foucault, is likely to grow also. In my view, the concept of the primacy of folk life and of the human contained in Grundtvig's thought bears a deep affinity to Nietzsche's views on will to power. Above all, in terms of the end of the cold war and the emergence of new democratic movements, interest in the Danish experience is likely to grow. In Denmark itself, as doubts are expressed about the direction that Denmark is taking in terms of the globalisation process, the need to return to its roots and the need to reflect on the past may be felt more. In all crucial moments of their democracy, living Danes cannot avoid facing Grundtvig face to face. The re-interpretation of Lutheran tradition he made has a permanent value. So too is the place of Ambedkar in relation to future generations of Indians.

CHAPTER THREE

A SEEMING DIFFERENCE

We may begin this study by dealing with one area in the approaches of the two persons we study where there seems to be a fundamental difference. This is about the interpretation of the scriptures and the myths of one's culture. Grundtvig, judging by the interpretation given by his interpreters⁶ constantly used the Christian scriptures and Nordic myths as his points of reference. He reinterpreted these in terms of the particular context of his time and his country.

Ambedkar's greatest difficulties came from the scriptures and the myths of India. They were the foundation on which the notion of caste was created and maintained. Thus the greatest obstacle to the making of a nation came from the scriptures and myths on which the social divisions of the people were based and legitimised.

However, the way Ambedkar dealt with this issue bears a resemblance to the way Grundtvig dealt with the Lutheran tradition,

⁶ Tradition and Renewal, Edited by Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen

that shaped him and the tradition to which he contributed. Ambedkar called for making a distinction between mere rules, contained in ancient scriptures and principles. He called for discarding archaic rules even if the scriptures proscribed them and to look for abiding principles which have moral value. This was quite forbidden by the Hindu scriptures, which prescribed their acceptance irrespective of whether such rules were considered good or bad. In fact good and bad were determined by obedience to rules and not by the merits of the rules themselves.⁷

This led him to call for the right of interpretation. There was no right of interpretation of these texts. They were sacred and they had to be strictly observed. The only excuse for non-observance was physical impossibility, for example in train journeys and foreign travel, where different castes may face each other, without being able to observe the rules meant to ensure caste segregation. In such instances, a person who has so sinned could cleanse him or herself by observance of certain rituals.

Calling for the right of interpretation implied denying the sacredness of these rules, which were contained in the texts. As caste was based on a single interpretation of each religious text, multiple interpretations would be possible only if the sacredness attached to these texts were removed.

However, Ambedkar was aware that such rejection alone would not ensure the issue of re-interpretation of scriptures and myths. To

⁷ B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 1937 - *Annihilation of Caste* is a text of a long speech which was not allowed to be delivered. Ambedkar published text. It became a popular text and was translated to many Indian language. This text is considered as the best exposition of the Indian caste system. The text is available in the internet www.hrschool.org.

resolve this problem he adopted a two-way strategy. He advocated the selection of texts, in terms of what can be morally justified and humanely acceptable and those that cannot be thus accepted. He called for abandoning morally unjustifiable texts, particularly those which justified the caste system and selected those texts in the Vedas, which supported democratic ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity.

He wrote "Whether you do that or you do not, you must give a new doctrinal basis to your Religion—a basis that will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, in short, with Democracy. I am no authority on the subject. But I am told that for such religious principles as will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity it may not be necessary for you to borrow from foreign sources and that you could draw for such principles on the Upanishads. Whether you could do so without a complete remoulding, a considerable scraping and chipping off the ore they contain, is more than I can say. This means a complete

change in the fundamental notions of life. It means a complete change in the values of life. It means a complete change in outlook and in attitude towards men and things. It means conversion; but if you do not like the word, I will say, it means new life. But a new life cannot enter a body that is dead. New life can enter only in a new body. The old body must die before a new body can

come into existence and a new life can enter into it. To put it simply, the old must cease to be operative before the new can begin to enliven and to pulsate."⁸

On the other hand, he turned to another tradition within Indian history, which had been buried for centuries. That was the Buddhist

⁸ *ibid*

tradition. In fact the latter part of Ambedkar's life was spent on studying and presenting Buddhist teachings. Buddha, he found, had raised the very same questions that he did and further had answered them already in the sixth century BC. Buddha evolved a basis for morality, which completely rejected caste and accepted the equality of all. Equality, liberty and fraternity were central to his teaching. He accepted no religious authority, including his own authority.

On the basis of Buddha's and his followers' radical teachings, there had emerged a whole civilisation which had spread to most parts of India and to neighbouring countries. During this period culture flourished. Emperor Asoka who was converted to Buddhism gave up war and devoted to doing good works such as building hospitals, spreading education, and laying the foundations for a different type of society. Chandra Gupta had based his political revolution on the basis of Buddha's philosophical and moral revolution. In fact, Ambedkar compared the link between Buddhism and Chandra Gupta's political revolution to Reformation and the making of modern Europe.

Ambedkar saw his own work in the spirit of the reformation. He wrote:

“One can say that generally speaking History bears out the proposition that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. The religious Reformation started by Luther was the Precursor of the political emancipation of the European people. In England, Puritanism led to the establishment of political liberty. Puritanism founded the New World. It was Puritanism, which won the war of American Independence, and Puritanism was a religious movement. The same is true of the Muslim Empire. Before the Arabs became a political power they had undergone a thorough religious revolution started by the Prophet Mohammed. Even Indian History supports the same conclusion. The political revolution led by

Chandra Gupta was preceded by the religious and social revolution of Buddha. The political revolution led by Shivaji was preceded by the religious and social reform brought about by the saints of Maharashtra. The political revolution of the Sikhs was preceded by the religious and social revolution led by Guru Nanak. It is unnecessary to add more illustrations. These will suffice to show that the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people.”⁹

Ambedkar maintained that there was a tradition of democracy in India and that it was lost.

“It is not that India did not know what is democracy. There was a time when India was studded with republics and where there were monarchies, they were either elected or limited. They were never absolute. It is not that India did not know Parliament or Parliamentary Procedures. A study of Buddhist Bhikshu Sangas discloses that not only there were Parliaments- for the Sangas were nothing but Parliaments - but the Sangas knew and observed all the rules of parliamentary procedure known to modern times. They had rules regarding seating arrangements, rules regarding Motions, Resolutions, Quorum, Whip, Counting of Votes, Voting by Ballots, Censure motion, Regularisation, *RES JUDICATA*, etc. Although these rules of Parliamentary Procedure were applied by Buddha to the meetings of the Bhikshu Sanga, he must have borrowed them from the rules of the political assemblies functioning in the country in his time.”¹⁰

Thus in this respect despite seeming differences, there was a fundamental similarity with the principles of the Reformation, though

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ speech delivered by B.R. Ambedkar in the constituent assembly of India on 25th November, 1949

applied to a different religion.

However, there still is a much greater difficulty. Central to the approaches of both these persons was the concept of the nation. For Grundtvig, it was the Danish nation. The concept of Danishness was one of the central components of his thinking, though this was not used chauvinistically,¹¹ but delicately. The central difficulty for Ambedkar was that in India, caste had only created separate and absolutely segregated groups.¹² Socially speaking there was no nation, though politically there was one. Ambedkar called India not a nation, but a nation in the making. In fact, what remained one country, for most of Ambedkar's lifetime, has now become three different countries: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, what Ambedkar, pointed out was the deep divisions in Hindu India itself, in terms of caste.

The issue then was whether there could be one people. It was the caste above all things which was preventing this in Hindu India.

Even on this difficult issue, one can see a similarity of approaches regarding a solution, which is that the social aspect of the nation must be built above the political and economic aspects. Ambedkar's famous statement regarding the Indian independence reveals this theme.

He said:

“On January 26, 1950, we will have equality in politics and inequality in social and economic life.

We must remove this contradiction at the earliest moment or else

¹¹ Stephen M. Borish, *Land of the living*

¹² B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*

those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy."¹³

Here we may consider the ideal Ambedkar held for society. He wrote,

‘What is your ideal society if you do not want caste is a question that is bound to be asked of you’ If you ask me, my ideal would be a society based on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. And why not? What objection can there be to Fraternity? I cannot imagine any. An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change, taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicate, - An experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow men. Any objection to Liberty? Few object to liberty in the sense of a right to free movement, in the sense of a right to life and limb. There is no objection to liberty in the sense of a right to property, tools and materials as being necessary for earning a living to keep the body in due state of health. Why not allow liberty to benefit by an effective and competent use of a person’s powers? The supporters of caste who would allow liberty in the sense of a right to life, limb and property, would not

¹³ From a Speech delivered to Constitutional Assembly of India on 25th November 1949. Ambedkar as the chief of the drafting committee of the Constitution became also the main exponent of the draft Constitution. His speeches at the Constitutional Assembly were many and are included in the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, published by Education Department of Maharashtra Government - 1989.

readily consent to liberty in this sense, inasmuch as it involves liberty to choose one's profession. But to object to this kind of liberty is to perpetuate slavery. For slavery does not merely mean a legalised form of subjection. It means a state of society in which some men are forced to accept from others the purposes, which control their conduct. This condition obtains even where there is no slavery in the legal sense. It is found where, as in the Caste System, some persons are compelled to carry on certain prescribed callings which are not of their choice. Any objection to equality? This has obviously been the most contentious part of the slogan of the French Revolution. The objections to equality may be sound and one may have to admit that all men are not equal. But what of that? Equality may be a fiction but nonetheless one must accept it as the governing principle. A man's power is dependent upon (1) physical heredity, (2) social inheritance or endowment in the form of parental care, education, accumulation of scientific knowledge, everything which enables him to be more efficient than the savage, and finally, (3) on his own efforts. In all these three respects men are undoubtedly unequal. But the question is, shall we treat them as unequal because they are unequal? This is a question, which the opponents of equality must answer. From the standpoint of the individualist it may be just to treat men unequally so far as their efforts are unequal. It may be desirable to give as much incentive as possible to the full development of every one's powers. But what would happen if men were treated unequally as they are, in the first two respects? It is obvious that those individuals also in whose favour there is birth, education, family name, and business connections and inherited wealth would be selected in the race. But selection under such circumstances would not be a selection of the able. It would be the selection of the privileged. The reason therefore, which forces that in the third respect we should treat men unequally demands that in the first two respects we should treat men as equally as possible.

On the other hand it can be urged that if it is good for the social body to get the most out of its members, it can get most out of them only by making them equal as far as possible at the very start of the race. That is one reason why we cannot escape equality. But there is another reason why we must accept equality. A statesman is concerned with vast numbers of people. He has neither the time nor the knowledge to draw fine distinctions and to treat each equitably i.e. according to need or according to capacity. However desirable or reasonable an equitable treatment of men may be, humanity is not capable of assortment and classification. The statesman, therefore, must follow some rough and ready rule and that rough and ready rule is to treat all men alike not because they are alike but because classification and assortment is impossible. The doctrine of equality is glaringly fallacious but, taking all in all it is the only way a statesman can proceed in politics which is a severely practical affair and which demands a severely practical test.¹⁴

It is this ideal, this way of understanding democracy, which brings together the ideas of the nation of these two persons. It is democracy that made the nation and not the nation that should shape democracy. Democracy was the higher notion and nation was subordinate to this notion. In contrast, there is today the argument that each nation can determine its democracy. The political construct of democracy is agreed or imposed first, often by way of a Constitution and this construct then determines democracy. Instead of this model Ambedkar speaks of democracy not merely as a form of government; It is primarily - a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicate - an experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards other

¹⁴ B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 1937

persons.

Were not the basis for Grundtvig's contributions, such as his publications *Danevirke*, *The Dane*, *Dannerborg (Danish Flag)*,¹⁵ his involvement in the national assemblies of his time, the associations he founded such as the *Danish Association* in 1853,¹⁶ his preaching, writings, hymns and poems and above all the concept and practice of the Folk High Schools, a view of democracy, which regarded it as a conjoint communicate, an experience and attitude of respect and reverence towards his or her fellow people? Often attempts to educate peasantry take place in many countries, which are nothing more than attempt to incorporate peasants into modern society. Reforms thus are seen as ways to form them into an acceptable lot within the modern context. Was Folk High School such an experiment or was it an attempt to change the concept of nation itself as a higher communication experience among all those who constitute the nation? If all that the peasants had to do was to adjust to change and to adapt to the external experience, there is no difference between the Folk High School and most adult education institutions in the world. In fact even re-education camps have been used as forms of adult education under communist countries, particularly in the early period of the Chinese revolution. The elite -- be they right wing or left wing -- determined the social, political and economic models and the peasants were especially helped to adjust through instruction or by force or by both means. Folk High School came in fact from a resistance to the Latin educated elite of Grundtvig's time. The contempt that the elite usually had for the peasantry, a common experience in almost all countries, had to be

¹⁵ *Tradition and Renewal*, Edited by Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen

¹⁶ *ibid*

replaced by respect. The elite were encouraged to sit together with peasants in a common school to discuss national affairs.

The radicality of the Folk School concept can be understood when compared to other models of peasants' education in several other places. The Russian experience in the 19th century is well known. Intellectuals went to the peasants' areas, lived with them, tried to learn from the peasants and to teach them. Some of them married and settled down in peasant areas. In China, during the early period of communism, the educated people were sent to rural areas to work with peasants. In India there were many experiments of this sort. In fact,

Mahatma Gandhi, a British-educated barrister, changed his ways of dress and living adapting to the styles of the poor and he lived among them. Many movements arose which stressed that elite must go with the people.

The model of the Folk High School was different. It was at the beginning an initiative where the peasants were brought to education and discussion in their leisure times. As the schools spread, the articulateness of the peasantry increased. The elite had to enter into dialogue in shaping policy and conducting their work. Folk High School became a nationally recognised instrumentality through which a type of communication was created among peasants themselves and with outsiders, including state officers. In fact, Grundtvig's ideas of bringing about enlightenment changed over time. He first thought educated groups may be the vehicle. However, later the whole approach changed. It was not just a change of mode of education. The change was based on greater understanding of who would represent the interests of the nation better. In India too experience showed how easily the elite adjust to alien interests. It is those who

have roots in the localities that define their own lives in terms of their society.

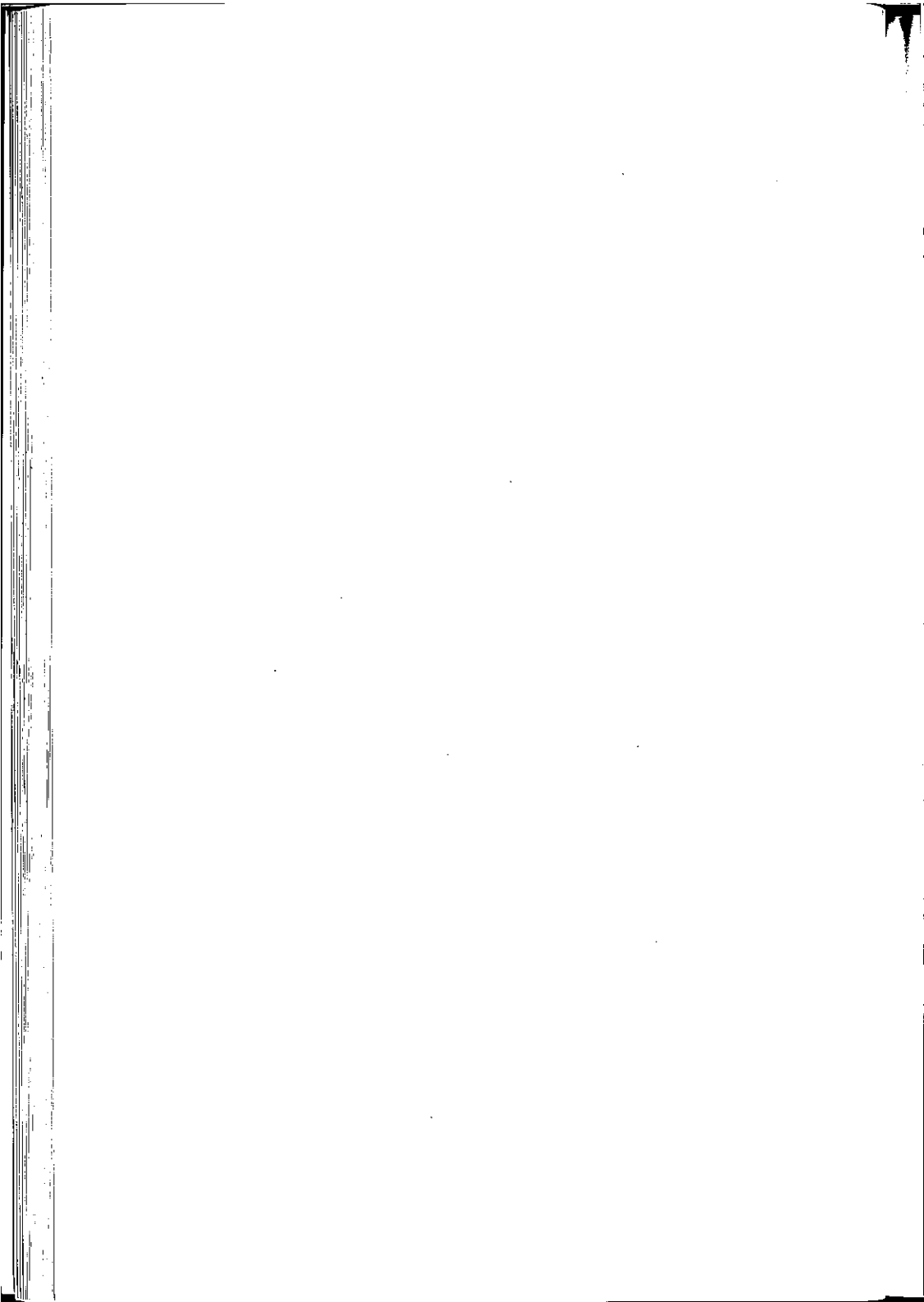
This model of Folk School differed from other models mentioned above, primarily in that it was not meant to be an instrument of coercion either directly or indirectly, while all other models are that to varying degrees, whether it be coercive reform or persuasion for reform that they advocate. In fact, Folk School presupposed a type of transformation in which the old will continue into the new and there will be an organic link between the old and the new. Modernisation will not be a wiping out of the past but a creative metamorphosis. It was a link not to institutions but a direct link of the people who could fertilise each other. The principle of fertilisation is fundamental to Grundtvig's way of thinking. Taken this way this new mode of communication had potential not for a higher form of democracy but also a higher form of respect for human beings, which is the foundation of human rights.

Once this type of communication is established as a physical fact, the link between people and the government becomes something different to the 18th century classical model of contract, where sovereign people contract out their sovereignty. Here in the Danish model a new mode of communication has been established within which the power concept is one of fertilisation and not of domination of one by the other. However, for juridical purposes the old model prevailed, as elsewhere in the legal society.

Ambedkar's struggle against caste was essentially an attempt to bring in the lower strata of Indian society for a social discourse and thereby change the nature of the political discourse and the nature of the nation. In this sense Ambedkar's ideas are richer and more radical than any other Indian thinker of modern times. Several Indian intellectuals and radicals have been attracted to the Russian model of

intellectuals going to the less advantaged areas and the Chinese model of the Cultural Revolution. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement have alone stood for the empowerment of the bottom and breaking the barriers of internal communication within Indian society. (In their case they did not have to go out anywhere to find the oppressed people. They themselves were the most neglected people.) In the area of minority rights too, many Indian minority groups have been attracted to separation. In fact there are many political movements based on that at present. Ambedkar had stood for a more fundamental transformation, by way of breaking down the walls of separation that already existed. While several minority groups fight for the juridical and political recognition of the separation which in fact exists, Ambedkar had fought for breaking down the internal structure of separation and therefore making cross-fertilisation possible.

This broader perspective is similar to Grundtvig's, though particular historical circumstances differed. It seems that Grundtvig was lucky with the historic circumstances he found himself in, at least at the latter part of his life. It may be said that Grundtvig found a good situation, which he made it even better. Ambedkar, was a swimmer against the current. The human suffering he was trying to eradicate was beyond description. The suffering he was exposed personally remained immense. He was basically an unwelcomed reformer of a nation that excommunicated dissenters. Perhaps the parallel is closer to that of Martin Luther and the early reformers.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE CASTE NOTION AND THE NATION

Ambedkar counterposed the concept of nation as against the concept of caste, which was the pre-eminent mode of social organisation in India. For him, the idea of a nation was not just political sovereignty. A nation was a people who were socially bound as one. India however was divided by caste groups and people were unable to think in any other terms except as caste groups or caste sub-groups.

“The Hindus often complain of the isolation and exclusiveness of a gang or a clique and blame them for anti-social spirit. But they conveniently forget that this anti-social spirit is the worst feature of their own Caste System. One caste enjoys singing a hymn of hate against another caste as much as the Germans did in singing their hymn of hate against the English during the last war. The

literature of the Hindus is full of caste genealogies in which an attempt is made to give a noble origin to one caste and an ignoble origin to other castes. The *Sahyadrikhand* is a notorious instance of this class of literature. This anti-social spirit is not confined to caste alone. It has gone deeper and has poisoned the mutual relations of the sub-castes as well. In my province the Golak Brahmins, Deorukha

Brahmins, Karada Brahmins, Palshe Brahmins and Chitpavan Brahmins, all claim to be subdivisions of the Brahmin Caste. But the anti-social spirit that prevails between them is quite as marked and quite as virulent as the anti-social spirit that prevails between them and other non-Brahmin castes. There is nothing strange in this. An antisocial spirit is found wherever one group has 'interests of its own' who shut it out from full interaction with other groups, so that its prevailing purpose is protection of what it has got. This antisocial spirit, this spirit of protecting its own interests is as much a marked feature of the different castes in their isolation from one another as it is of nations in their isolation. The Brahmin's primary concern is to protect 'his interest' against those of the non-Brahmins and the non-Brahmin's primary concern is to protect their interests against those of the Brahmins. The Hindus, therefore, are not merely an assortment of castes but they are so many warring groups each living for itself and for its selfish ideal. There is another feature of caste, which is deplorable. The ancestors of the present-day English fought on one side or the other in the war of the Roses and the Cromwellian War. But the descendants of those who fought on the one side do not bear any animosity -- any grudge against the descendants of those who fought on the other side. The feud is forgotten. But the present-day non-Brahmins cannot forgive the present-day Brahmins for the insult their ancestors gave to Shivaji. The present-day Kayasthas will not forgive the present-day Brahmins for the infamy cast upon their forefathers by the forefathers of the latter. To what is this difference due? Obviously to the Caste System. The existence of Caste and Caste Consciousness has served to keep the memory of past feuds between castes green and has prevented solidarity."¹⁷

¹⁷ B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 1937

Ambedkar devoted much effort to illustrate this in great detail. This is no surprise. Ambedkar was the chairman of the Drafting Committee of Constituent Assembly that drafted the Indian Constitution, which has lasted up to date with several amendments. He, like other leaders of the independence movement, was aware of the deep division within the Indian society. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India was very much saddened by this historic reality. In the famous book - *The Discovery of India* - which he wrote from prison, where he was confined to by the British Raj, there are several references to this tragic historic reality. Mahatma Gandhi was deeply aware of the problem and knew that future of India would very much depend on this issue. In fact all the great thinkers, poets and writers of India have said something or other strongly on the issue. However, it fell on Ambedkar, the beloved leader of the Untouchables, who also belonged to this group, to analyse this problem in its full details and suggest a path to its solution. Ambedkar's writings have now been brought out in fourteen thick volumes. All his writings directly or indirectly refer to the issue of caste and the nation. Ambedkar demonstrated how the absence of solidarity led to the weakening of a people, making them indifferent and fear-ridden; as a result co-operation becomes impossible.

“Indifferentism is the worst kind of disease that can infect a people. Why is the Hindu so indifferent? In my opinion this indifferentism is the result of Caste System which has made *Sanghatan* and co-operation even for a good cause impossible”¹⁸

The notional foundation of *Sanghatan* and co-operation is at the heart of Ambedkar's views on the concept of the nation. He, as an eminent jurist, realised that this foundation cannot merely be a juridical

¹⁸ *ibid*

one. The juridical conception of the nation are based on the theory of sovereignty which based on the classical legal theory of contract. However, *Sanghatan* and co-operation are social realities, not merely legal or political ones. Their existence or not is a ground reality. Thus the notions of *Sanghatan* and co-operation have to be derived from the ground reality of a given society at a given time. India as a legal entity, a colony under British Raj for most his lifetime and later an independent sovereignty with a constitutional framework, in the formulation of which he participated, was one thing. The ground reality of India as a society was quite another. A democratic constitution however liberal, could not create this ground reality. The ground reality was primarily a social issue and not a political or a juridical issue. Here, the notions must be derived from the ground reality and if different sets of notions were to be introduced it had to be done by a change in the ground reality, which would involves everyone in society. What then was at issue was not the contract, but consensus. The consensus is not an abstraction; it is a social reality.

In fact Ambedkar's thought can be divided into two parts. Why he thought there was a fundamental impediment - caste - which prevented Indian people from reaching a consensus regarding any important aspect of their social life, and the solutions he proposed to get rid of this great impediment.

The concept of power involved in this discourse

The concept of power that Ambedkar had to discuss in dealing with the above mentioned two issues were not juridical notions of sovereignty and of the sovereign individual who passed his power to the state, but the issue of social power as actually found in the existing Indian society. He clearly saw the illusion of political power, when divorced from the social bases of power, when such great leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru were unable to achieve any of the fundamen-

tal ambitions they had set out to achieve, on the use of Indian independence for altering the nature of Indian society.

Ambedkar engaged in many debates with both the Socialists and people who held right wing views, as well as those who held the view that economic development was the solution to the social division of castes.

“One may contend that economic motive is not the only motive by which man is actuated. That economic power is the only kind of power no student of human society can accept. That the social status of an individual by itself often becomes a source of power and authority is made clear by the sway, which the Mahatmas have held over the common man. Why do a millionaire in India obey penniless Sadhus and Fakirs? Why do millions of paupers in India sell their trifling thickets, which constitute their only wealth and go to Benares and Mecca? That, religion is the source of power is illustrated by the history of India where the priest holds a sway over the common man often greater than the magistrate and where everything, even such things as strikes and elections, so easily take a religious turn and can so easily be given a religious twist. Take the case of the Plebeian of Rome as a further illustration of the power of religion over man. It throws great light on this point. The Plebs had fought for a share in the supreme executive under the Roman Republic and had secured the appointment of a Plebeian Consul elected by a separate electorate constituted by the *Comitia Centuriata*, which was an assembly of Plebeian. They wanted a Consul of their own because they felt that the Patrician Consuls used to discriminate against the Plebeian in carrying on the administration. They had apparently obtained a great gain because under the Republican Constitution of Rome one Consul had the power of vetoing an act of the other Consul. But did they in fact gain anything? The answer to this question must be in the negative. The Plebeian never could get a Plebeian Consul who could be said to be a strong man and who could act independently of the Patrician Consul. In the ordinary

course of things the Plebeian should have got a strong Plebeian Consul in view of the fact that his election was to be by a separate electorate of Plebeian. The question is why did they fail in getting a strong Plebeian to officiate as their Consul? The answer to this question reveals the dominion which religion exercises over the minds of men. It was an accepted creed of the whole Roman *populous* that no official could enter upon the duties of big office unless the Oracle of Delphi declared that he was acceptable to the Goddess. The priests who were in-charge of the temple of the Goddess of Delphi were all Patricians. Whenever therefore the Plebeian elected a Consul who was known to be a strong party man opposed to the Patricians or 'communal' to use the term that is current in India, the Oracle invariably declared that he was not acceptable to the Goddess. This is how the Plebeian were cheated out of their rights. But what is worthy of note is that the Plebeian permitted themselves to be thus cheated because they too like the Patricians, held firmly the belief that the approval of the Goddess was a condition precedent to the taking charge by an official of his duties and that election by the people was not enough. If the Plebeian had contended that election was enough and that the approval by the Goddess was not necessary they would have derived the fullest benefit from the political right which they had obtained. But they did not. They agreed to elect another, less suitable to themselves but more suitable to the Goddess which in fact meant more amenable to the Patricians. Rather than give up religion, the Plebeian give up material gain for which they had fought so hard. Does this not show that religion can be a source of power as great as money if not greater?" He goes on to say,

"Religion, social status and property are all sources of power and authority, which one man has, to control the liberty of another. One is predominant at one stage, the other is predominant at another stage. That is the only difference. If liberty is the ideal, if liberty means the destruction

of the dominion which one man holds over another then obviously it cannot be insisted upon that economic reform must be the one kind of reform worthy of pursuit. If the source of power and dominion is at any given time or in any given society social and religious, then social reform and religious reform must be accepted as the necessary sort of reform.

One can thus attack the doctrine of Economic Interpretation of History adopted by the Socialists of India. But I recognise that economic interpretation of history is not necessary for the validity of the Socialist contention that equalisation of property is the only real reform and that it must precede everything else. However, what I like to ask the Socialists is this: Can you have economic reform without first bringing about a reform of the social order?"

In this aspect of economic interpretation of power, Ambedkar's views expressed in the text published in 1937 and many other texts, which are a very integral to his analysis of caste, bear similar perspectives as the views of Foucault expressed in his lectures in 1971, on *Truth and Power*.

"What is at stake in all these genealogies is the nature of this power which has surged into view in all its violence, aggression and absurdity in the course of the last forty years, contemporaneously, that is, with the collapse of Fascism and the decline of Stalinism. What, we must ask, is this power - or rather, since that is to give a formulation to the question that invites the kind of theoretical coronation of the whole which I am so keen to avoid - what are these various contrivances of power, whose operations extend to such differing levels and sectors of society and are possessed of such manifold ramifications? What are their mechanisms, their effects and their relations? The issue here can, I believe, be crystallized essentially in the following question: is the analysis of power or of powers to be deduced in one way or another from the economy? Let me make this

question and my reasons for posing it somewhat clearer. It is not at all my intention to abstract from what are innumerable and enormous differences; yet despite, and even because of these differences, I consider there to be a certain point in common between the juridical, and let us call it, liberal, conception of political power (found in the *philosopher* of the eighteenth century) and the Marxist conception, or at any rate a certain conception currently held to be Marxist. I would call this common point economism in the theory of power. By that I mean that in the case of the classic, juridical theory, power is taken to be a right, which one is able to possess like a commodity, and which one can in consequence transfer or alienate, either wholly or partially, through a legal act or through some act that establishes a right, such as takes place through cession or contract. Power is that concrete power which every individual holds, and whose partial or total cession enables political power or sovereignty to be established. This theoretical construction is essentially based on the idea that the constitution of political power obeys the model of a legal transaction involving a contractual type of exchange (hence the clear analogy that runs through all these theories between power and commodities, power and wealth). In the other case - I am thinking here of the general Marxist conception of power - one finds none of all that. Nonetheless, there is something else inherent in this latter conception, something which one might term an economic functionality of power. This economic functionality is present to the extent that power is conceived primarily in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance simultaneously of the relations of production and of class domination which the development and specific forms of the forces of production have rendered possible. On this view, then, the historical *raison d'être* of political power is to be found in the economy. Broadly speaking, in the first case we have a political power whose formal model is discoverable in the process of exchange, the economic circulation of commodities; in the second case, the historical *raison d'être* of political power and the principle

of its concrete forms and actual functioning, is located in the economy. Well then, the problem involved in the researches to which I refer can, I believe, be broken down in the following manner: in the first place, is power always in a subordinate position relative to the economy? Is it always in the service of, and ultimately answerable to, the economy? Is its essential end and purpose to serve the economy? Is it destined to realize, consolidate, maintain and reproduce the relations appropriate to the economy and essential to its functioning? In the second place, is power modeled upon the commodity? Is it something that one possesses, acquires, cedes through force or contract, that one alienates or recovers, that circulates, that voids this or that region? Or, on the contrary, do we need to employ varying tools in its analysis - even, that is, when we allow that it effectively remains the case that the relations of power do indeed remain profoundly enmeshed in and with economic relations and participate with them in a common circuit? If that is the case, it is not the models of functional subordination or formal isomorphism that will characterize the interconnection between politics and the economy. Their indissolubility will be of a different order, one that it will be our task to determine."¹⁹

In fact the whole study of caste by Ambedkar, which takes many volumes to fully study, falls under what Foucault describes as genealogy. Forced by the need to explain the theory and practice of caste, which could not be explained in terms of the usual economic and social theories, Ambedkar was forced to explain them in other ways. The learned jurist who had obtained many degrees from several western universities, was not able to rely on any of the theories he learned to explain the Indian caste system. What he wrote might fall under what Foucault later called subjugated knowledge.

¹⁹ Foucault - *Power and Knowledge*, Pantheon Books London 1972

“On the other hand, I believe that by subjugated knowledge one should understand something else, something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledge that have been as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledge, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. I also believe that it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledge, these unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledge (such as that of the psychiatric patient, of the ill person, of the nurse, of the doctor - parallel and marginal as they are to the knowledge of medicine - that of the delinquent etc.), and which involve what I would call a popular knowledge (*le savoir des gens*) though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything - surrounding it - that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledge, these disqualified knowledge, that criticism performs its work.”

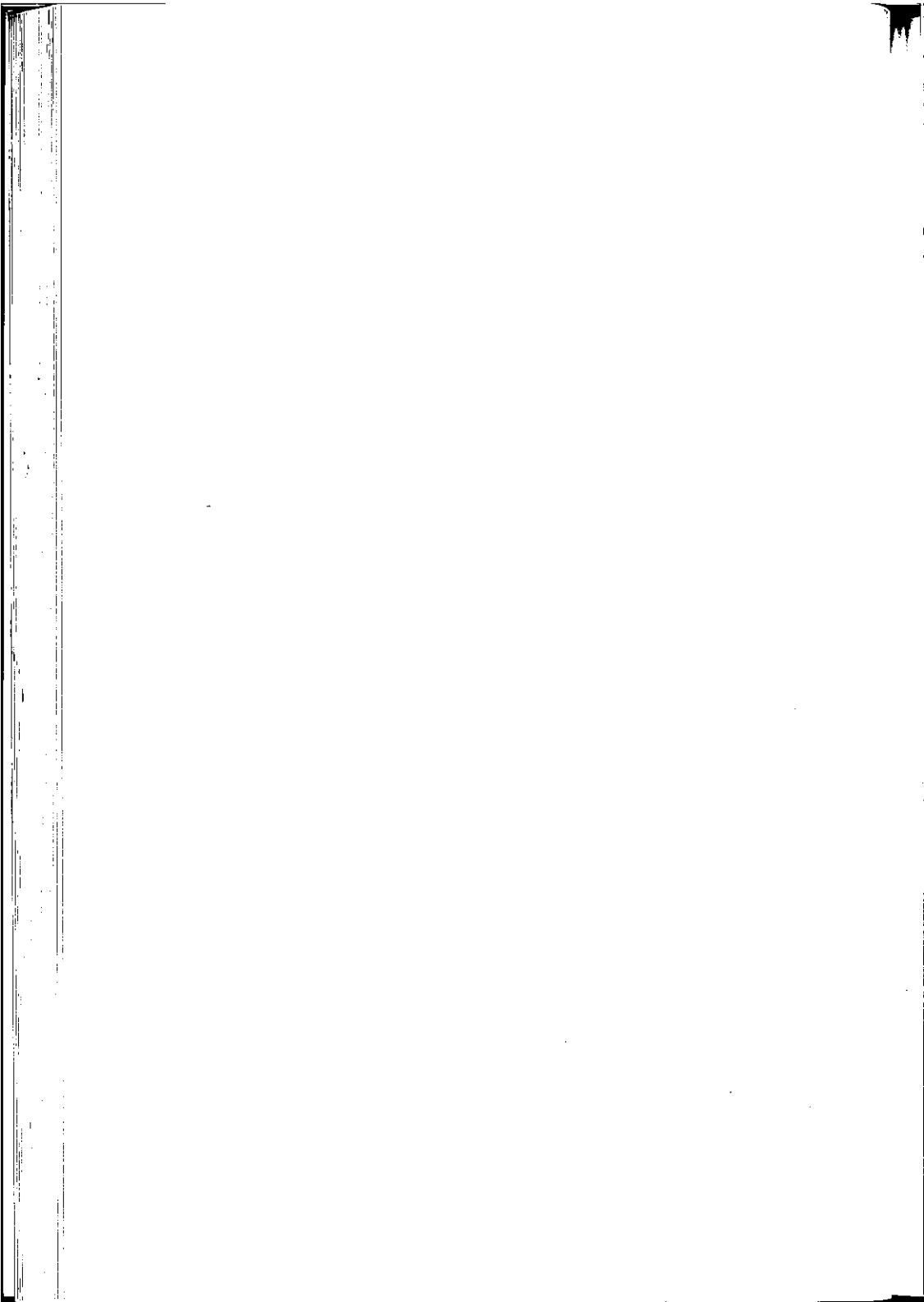
He further goes on to say, “What emerges out of this is something one might call a genealogy, or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts. And these genealogies, that are the combined product of an erudite knowledge and a popular knowledge, were not possible and could not even have been attempted except on one condition, namely that the tyranny of globalising discourses with their hierarchy and all their privileges of a theoretical *avant-garde* was eliminated.

Let us give the term *genealogy* to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories, which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today. This

then will be a provisional definition of the genealogies which I have attempted to compile with you over the last few years."²⁰

In fact, the work of both Ambedkar and Grundtvig, are works that of genealogies, though they did not think of their work in that way. It is important to note this aspect when considering the contributions made to education within the context of discourse on power. Grundtvig beautifully combines erudite knowledge with folk memories. Folk School was a meeting place where erudite knowledge and folk thinking were to mix and merge, where academic and popular forms of thinking were to be fused. That was the living dialogue, and the genuine enlightenment.

²⁰ *ibid*



CHAPTER FIVE

LIVING DIALOGUE BEYOND PARTY POLITICS

The following extract from Grundtvig's writings - as quoted in - *The Land of the Living - by Steven M. Borish expresses Grundtvig's vision of the folk school*

“ Now I have my eye on something that unfortunately would be completely new among us, namely an institution of Enlightenment, where the People could gradually wake to self-awareness, and where the leaders would learn just as much from the youth as the youth from them, a kind of living *Vekselvirkning* and mutual instruction, through which a bridge could be laid over the yawning abyss that hierarchy, aristocracy, *Latineri* and social ambition have built for the people on the one side, and its leaders and teachers, with a handful of so-called educated and enlightened ones on the other side, this yawning abyss, which if it is not bridged, then all of our middle class society and all possibilities for peaceful, historic progressive development must soon fall into its precipice.”

Thus bridging the yawning abyss between those who usually are engaged in exercise of power and the ordinary folk, was not a mere educational exercise but a way of making a new discourse of power possible. This was and remains a radical idea, even in the Western democracies, and one that gives Danish democracy a unique character.

In the democratic models of the United States of America and Britain, the political discourse takes place mainly through the political parties. What this implies is that people with more or less similar backgrounds will debate the vital issues that affects the nation, hopefully from different points of view. People at large watch the debate and support the particular party that they think represents their interests. However, in effect those who conduct the debate are those who have come to be considered the political intelligentsia.

This model is the one that was followed by the Marxist parties too, but with a greater emphasis in fact on the role of the Party, which meant the Party bureaucracy was to lead the masses whose spontaneous reaction needed to be guided by the wisdom of the Party. Political parties remain the main instrument of political and social discourse, though within a Marxist state there is generally only one party. In recent times the one-party-state has attracted many new admirers. Several of the Asian countries are one-party states, for all practical purposes.

Constructed Consensus and Creative Consensus

The formal democratic process tends to create a situation where an appearance of debate and discussion is maintained, while in reality among the people there is no real exchange of views. The parties and media construct this debate; People are onlookers and mere recipients

of the arguments. The ordinary people have no opportunity to make or put forward their own arguments. The concept of the Folk School was based on the idea that it was a place where people discovered their own voice and were provided with an opportunity to participate creatively in the debates of their society. Where public opinion is manipulated, it is only natural that the more powerful sectors of society would manipulate it. The concept of Folk School was to strengthen the voice of ordinary people.

Grundtvig envisaged a living dialogue taking place among people all the time, which would determine the content of social and political discourses that take place in a society through political parties, religious groups, and other organized groups. For this living dialogue to take place, no organized form was required. It was to happen but naturally and spontaneously through a mutual learning process by friends and equals and not between antagonists. This system of discourse was not adversarial, nor primarily political. Thus this discourse in no way was a substitute for party political discourse. However, this "new school discourse," had far more deep and ultimate character than political parties. It had an ultimate character because it implied constant discussion of ethical and moral issues facing the people. Ordinary people's discussions always bring ethical and moral aspects.

This introduced many new possibilities to the social and political discourse of the nation. The political party debate was governed by considerations of elections and the sensitivities of the electorates. For example a political party or all the political parties at a given time may refuse to take up the issues of a minority, as many United States leaders did in regard to the issue of slavery and black people's rights, until recent decades. To do otherwise may be considered electorally suicidal.

However, the social and political discourse taking place in the environment created by the Folk School does not have such an impediment. In fact moral responsibility would demand that debate on sensitive issues be kept alive. Besides, such discussions can create far greater possibilities for solving problems by way of *Sanghatan and co-operation*, to use the phrase from Ambedkar, without depending entirely on the state budget or on bureaucratic red tape. In short, besides increasing sensitivity the Folk School approach can also increase social initiatives.

Thus the Folk School practice when continued for some time has the potential for creating greater social and political sensibilities. Perhaps, this was what in fact happened in Denmark. Writers like Steven M. Borish, have commented on some unique features of Danish society, as, for example, its ability to avoid major social confrontations and violence, the high degree of tolerance even on very sensitive issues like divorce and separation, and women's freedoms. Even on issues like development aid, Danish society seems to have greater understanding of the issues as compared with some of the more powerful countries. In the international debates on human rights, Denmark has shown a greater sensitivity than some the larger and more powerful countries. Thus history seems to have proved Grundtvig's vision correct. If there are some doubts about the present direction of Denmark on some issues, such as globalisation, it is perhaps worthwhile for concerned Danes to examine whether a greater impetus needs to be created to revive the people's voice and take an interest in Grundtvig's original dynamic ideas.

Stevan M. Borish points to five major ideas of Grundtvig, which have influenced the Folk School movement.

1. Living Word

“The first tenet of [N.F.S.] Grundtvig’s new enlightenment can be summarised in the expression “the living word” (*det levende ord*). Down through all the ages of history, it was the words that men actually spoke, the words that came from their lips, that had revealed and constituted the essence of their being. Without this spoken word, there could be no life. He saw himself as having been a “book worshipper” in the past, as having lived too much of his life inside the yellowing and withered pages of a book. Yet books had to be regarded now as secondary. His new revelation demanded an emergence from the frozen darkness of print into the bright sun of the living word. This new doctrine for schooling and education would have profound implications.”

2. Enlightenment of Life

“Another critical tenet of Grundtvig’s new faith was the idea of Enlightenment for Life (*livsoplysning*). What he meant by this was that an understanding of the real and deepest truths that constitute Enlightenment never comes from rote study of classroom texts. One can learn the facts and theories of received tradition in the classroom, and these might prove useful, but they can be no substitute for Life’s Enlightenment, which can only be taught by life itself. Herein lies a paradox for educators: it is and must be the deepest task of our lives to acquire this Enlightenment for Life, for only through its realisation will we be able to distinguish light from darkness, truth from lies and the cause of death from that of life. Yet this liberating insight is something that no schoolroom lesson will ever teach us.”

3. People's Enlightenment

“A third and related concept is that of the People's Enlightenment (*folkeoplysning*). Due to the depth of Grundtvig's commitment to all things Danish, it is easy to see why some foreign authors have mistakenly labeled his views as chauvinistic. Yet his lifelong work as a universal historian, which culminated in an immense three-volume treatise on the history of mankind, was not written from the point of view of a narrow nationalism. He was convinced that each people, each tribe, each nation on earth had a valuable role to play in the unfolding of world history. This unfolding was taking place in its own time and its own way in accordance with God's plan of creation. Grundtvig had a high degree of respect and admiration for the other cultural traditions of the world and never looked down on them. There is love for Denmark in his writings, but nothing at all about Danish superiority to the other peoples of the globe. Nor is there a belief that all grassroots movements were necessarily good or right (a naive position that has been attributed to him by several foreign observers).

“There is thus a dual thrust to his concept of *folkeoplysning*. On the one hand, it argues that all humans everywhere are born into a particular *folkelig* and historical context, and it is within this framework that their own personal drama of Enlightenment must be played out. Hanne Severinsen writes that ‘for Grundtvig it was a fundamental condition of human life, that it unfolds itself in a definite people, who have their own character created through history.’ On the other hand, it suggests that there is a collective as well as an individual aspect to the experience of Enlightenment, and that it must be the goal of a society to create, through wise and farsighted policies, the conditions that will facilitate *folkeoplysning*, the People's Enlightenment.”

4. How to Create preconditions for Enlightenment - The Balance

“A fourth of Grundtvig’s key ideas, the notion of *vekselvirkning*, speaks to the question of how to create the preconditions for this enlightenment within society. After a good deal of thought, I would suggest the following translation: ‘a balance between two things that remain different, but that should fertilise each other in their differentness.’ Grundtvig was only too aware of the tendency for both the people within a society and the different social institutions to attempt to dominate and control each other. Between State and army, church and State, State and school, each is always attempting to take over the other and create a situation where the power flows in only one direction. The same can often be observed in the classroom, where the teacher attempts to dominate the students in order to fill them with his or her knowledge and views.

“Grundtvig was opposed to domination in a way that stands outside of the European emancipation tradition, with its emphasis on liberal individualism. Influenced in particular by his reading of the French Revolution, he was on guard against the idea that the way to obtain freedom is to dissolve the power structure. What you will get, he says, is most often another form of power that is worse than the one just replaced. He wanted to substitute for violent revolution a peaceful transformation of all elements in society based on a mutual recognition that all had the right to exist. Yet his views on *vekselvirkning* went further than the mere tolerance of diversity. He was really insisting upon a mutual recognition that each institution, each power centre and indeed each individual could both teach and learn in a dialogue predicated on mutual respect. Furthermore, such

dialogue²¹ would create in the long run a society with widened social and individual perspectives, constituting the type of fertile soil in which the experience of enlightenment could best grow.”

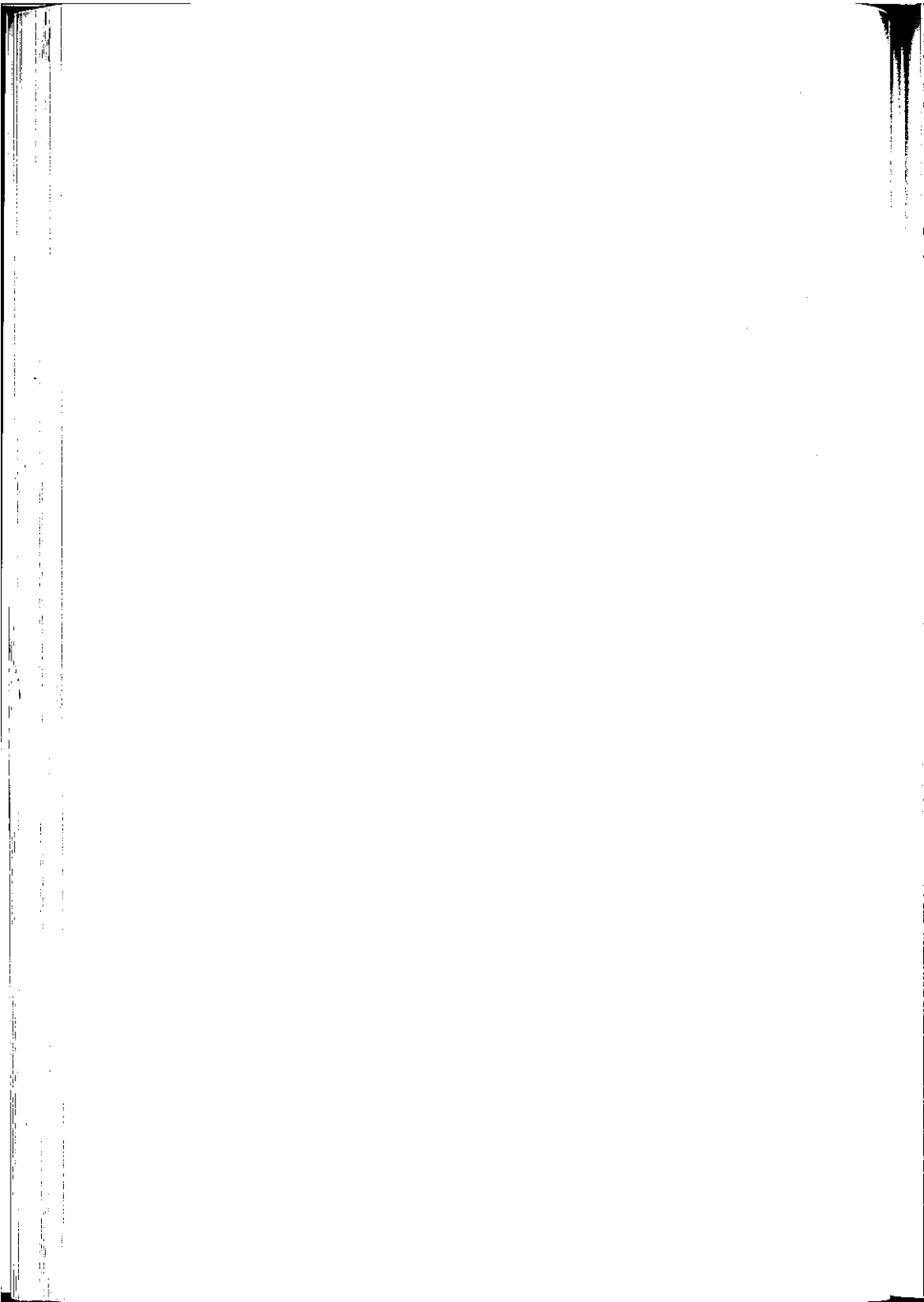
5. Ordinary People - Source of Enlightenment

“A fifth central concept is Grundtvig’s unswerving belief in the wisdom of the ordinary people over and above the educated and the elite (*folket overfor de dannede*). It was the ordinary people, and not those he contemptuously referred to as “the learned ones” (*de lærde*), who would be the source of enlightenment, if only they were given a chance. The theme is one that permeates his writings. An excellent

²¹ On the issue of dialogue, Dr.K.E. Bugge states, “ Dialogue can very well be a static concept in so far as it does not entail any suggestion as it does not entail any suggestion as to what goes before or what comes after the dialogue. The mutuality of the dialogue in itself is often considered to be prime importance.

Dialectics, on the other hand, is a concept involving not only the present, but also past and future in a perspective of development. Dialectics, however, is essentially a logical concept. Applied to human life, every logic - and also dialectical logic -sometime offers excellent interpretations, and sometimes it does not. And if not, then so much the worse for the facts of human life, which must then be shaped and reconstructed in order to fit the Logic! In such instances, logic can easily turn out to be tyrannical with respect to life. On the basis of historical way of thinking, Grundtvig offers another, third, solution. Educational interaction is according to Grundtvig a way in which human beings gradually gain more and more insight into the meaning of life. In this connection he speaks about education contributing to “ the clarification of human life”. Grundtvig’s concept of interaction, therefore offers a challenge, a critical note, to our concepts of dialogue and dialectics. Being embedded in an overall historical perspective, which reaches from the beginning of time to the end of the world, Grundtvig’s concept of educational interaction adds a development perspective to the logic of dialectics. That being so, Grundtvig’s ideas of interaction in education are very relevant to our education debate today.” Heritage and Prophecy-Grundtvig and the English speaking World. Ed. By A.M.Allchin, D .Jasper, J.H. Schjorring and K. Stevenson

statement of it can be found in 1871 when, at the age of 88, he would react to the first violent conflict between labour and capital in Danish society by warning against overvaluing the physical work at the expense of the spiritual work - and the reverse. The two views give rise to a danger, which can only be prevented by a People's Enlightenment, *which in contrast to the Academic arises from the People itself* [italics added].”



CHAPTER SIX

THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE

In this chapter we will examine four of the principles discussed in the earlier chapter in relation to the Indian context. (The principle of balance is discussed in a separate chapter.)

Living Word

The very essence of Ambedkar's call was to give up the words of the Vedda's and the Sastras which were worshipped as sacred words and to abandon them in favour of contemporary interpretation of life. To take this position was the worst heresy that a Hindu could commit. There were several approaches he suggested on this issue. One was to try to reinterpret these texts. However this was not possible as these books prescribed such interpretation as heresy. Thus, such a practice was not to have much success with the masses. Mahatma Gandhi even suggested that the parts of the texts which supported caste practices are later interpolations and therefore not authentic. Ambedkar's reply was whether authentic or not, these texts were what

the people were taught and they believed; therefore what the people were taught was important.

Ambedkar was not alone in seeing the incapacity of the Indian mind to break away from the dead letters to the living word. A very important thinker in that direction was Sri Aurobindo, whose thought is often compared to the Catholic thinker, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Aurobindo who was known to the British as a fierce freedom fighter, retired from active politics and spent his efforts to bring the Indian mind back to the creativity for which it was once known. The difference between the two essentially was that Ambedkar connected resistance to change to as arising from the caste system which was sanctioned by the sacred texts. Ambedkar was himself a Dalit and knew the bitterness of caste. Aurobindo was a Brahmin and was himself deeply rooted in the Brahmin tradition. Sri Aurobindo, while admitting the deadening of the Indian mind and Spirit could not identify its cause as the Hindu theological views imposed through its caste system. Aurobindo tried to bring about a synthesis of Hindu and Western liberal views. However, these two worldviews were contradictory as the caste system implied theoretical rejection of liberty, equality and fraternity, which were basic notions on which liberalism rested. The attempt to revive the creativity of the Indian mind without forcing it to come to terms with causes of its paralysis was an artificial one. For Ambedkar who was existentially too deeply rooted in caste as a victim, it was not possible to separate creativity from oppression and Indian creativity from India's ordinary people. Most writings on the need to recreate Indian creativity deal with the elite rather than the ordinary people. However, the result is that the elite understands creativity in terms of business management rather than anything else. That the insights of ordinary people are the main spring of a nation's creativity is not a position that can be accepted in a society which has

denied human status to a large part of its population.

There was an historic aspect to this also. The written word and written literature came to India quite early. In fact the growth of Sanskrit literature during the early period of India history remains a reason for amazement. Great poets like Kalidasa had produced poetry that has endured the test of time. In fact it is said that this development of the written word in history has no parallel in the world.

However, it was this same written word which was used by the Brahmins to establish their supremacy. Once this supremacy was established they became the owners, the sole owners, of this written word. In their hands the written word did not grow. They kept mastery over the written word by controlling the system of transmission and making it a rule to transfer it to their own caste only. This unwillingness to share culture became a Brahmin tradition.

Ambedkar wrote, "the higher-caste Hindus have deliberately prevented the lower castes who are within the pale of Hinduism from rising to the cultural level of the higher castes. I will give two instances, one of the Sonars and the other of the Pathare Prabhus. Both are communities quite well known in Maharashtra. Like the rest of the communities desiring to raise their status, these two communities were at one time endeavouring to adopt some of the ways and habits of the Brahmins. The Sonars were styling themselves as Daivadnya Brahmins and were wearing their 'dhotis' with folds on and using the word namaskar for salutation. Both, the folded way of wearing the 'dhoti' and the namaskar were special to the Brahmins. The Brahmin, did not like this imitation and this attempt by Sonars to pass off as Brahmins. Under the authority of the Peshwas, the Brahmins successfully put down this attempt on the part of the Sonars to adopt the ways of the Brahmins. They even got the president of the councils

of the East India Company's settlement in Bombay to issue a prohibitory order against the Sonars residing in Bombay. At one time the Pathare Prabhus had widow-remarriage as a custom of their caste. This custom of widow-remarriage was later on looked upon as a mark of social inferiority by some members of the caste especially because it was contrary to the custom prevalent among the Brahmins. With the object of raising the status of their community some Pathare Prabhus sought to stop this practice of widow-remarriage that was prevalent in their caste. The community was divided into two camps, one for and the other against the innovation. The Peshwas took the side of those in favour of widow-remarriage and thus virtually prohibited the Pathare Prabhus from following the ways of the Brahmins. The Hindus criticise the Mohammedans for having spread their religion by the use of the sword. They also ridicule Christianity on the score of the inquisition. But really speaking who is better and more worthy of our respect-the Mohammedans and Christians who attempted to thrust down the throats of unwilling persons what they regarded as necessary for their salvation or the Hindu who would not spread the light, who would endeavour to keep others in darkness, who would not consent to share his intellectual and social inheritance with those who are ready and willing to make it a part of their own make-up?"²²

Buddha who inspired Ambedkar, had told his followers not even to follow his teaching simply because he taught them. Each had to learn and to discover the truth in their own living. Ambedkar more than any other Indian writer linked the Indian path to democracy with the respect for primacy of the living word.

²² B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 1937

Enlightenment of Life

A close look at Ambedkar's work for eradication of caste would show it was no mere political activity that he was advocating. He called the Indians to abandon living a life by fixed rules to living one with real meaning. He expressed his own life mission thus.

"My Personal Philosophy"

"Every man should have a philosophy of life, for everyone must have a standard by which to measure his conduct. And philosophy is nothing but a standard by which to measure.

"Negatively, I reject the Hindu social philosophy propounded in the Bhagvat Geeta based as it is, on the Triguna of the Sankhya philosophy which is in my judgment a cruel perversion of the philosophy of Kapila, and which had made the caste system and the system of graded inequality the law of Hindu social life.

"Positively, my social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. Let no one, however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha. In his philosophy, liberty and equality had a place: but he added that unlimited liberty destroyed equality, and absolute equality leaves no room for liberty. In his philosophy, law had a place only as a safeguard against the breaches of liberty and equality; but he did not believe that law could be a guarantee for breaches of liberty or equality. He gave the highest place to fraternity as the only real safeguard against the denial of liberty or equality or fraternity which was another name for brotherhood or humanity, which was again another name for religion.

“Law is secular, which anybody may break while fraternity or religion is sacred which everybody must respect. My philosophy has a mission. I have to do the work of conversion: for, I have to make the followers of Triguna theory to give it up and accept mine. Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideal set out in the preamble to the Constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality and fraternity. Their social ideal embodied in their religion, denies them.”

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

(All-India Radio broadcast of speech on Oct. 3, 1954)

Buddhism makes enlightenment the sole aim of life. This was the philosophy that Ambedkar accepted and tried to revive.

People's Enlightenment

From the latter part of 19th century there grew in India many movements to bring enlightenment for the people. The impact of these movements on the rise of the Dalit movement must not be underestimated. There were movements to revive local languages, which had become neglected due to non-recognition. English was the all-important language and the local languages had no status-value. The imitation of ‘the White man’ was eating into the Indian culture. There were many that began to perceive that and tried to regain the use of these languages. There was also a revival of local traditions of dance and music. Above all there were movements for spreading education to the rural masses and this included adult education. Without background support, which came from the development of these movements, the Dalit movement may not have had the momentum it did.

Ambedkar's specific contribution in this regard is that when he talked of the people he meant the lowest castes. He was not speaking of people in general but of the people who were at the very bottom of society. In South Asia this word -people - was corrupted when the elite began appropriating the word. The elite began to dress like peasants and use the customs of peasants. This was not for the purpose of subordination of their interest to those of the people. Their purpose was the very opposite. The real people, the neglected people, still remained neglected. There was a great deal of hypocrisy in the process.

Ambedkar's movement was a genuine people's movement trying represent the people's interest by enlightening the people themselves. Answering the question as to why he was loved so much by these people while others who wanted to work for them were not, Ambedkar replied it was a relationship like that of a mother and a step mother. He was their own and he had no other interest except their own. To give them the light was the aim of his movements.

Ordinary People - Source of Enlightenment

Perhaps the low caste people did not come under the ordinary people as the term is usually used in India. They were the worst of the oppressed in the Indian society. Yet Ambedkar pinned his hopes for the future of India on them. This again was no surprise. There was no other section of society that he could trust. The Brahmins who were in charge of India had shown no capacity for enlightenment. The middle layers were subordinate to the Brahmins. For Ambedkar only source of new life was from those who stood at the bottom.

Besides this there was another reason. Buddha, whose life and movement Ambedkar had studied, was a believer of the educatability and the creativity of the people. Under the influence of those teachings, the most rejected peoples of India has once risen and uplifted their life

as well as that of the whole society. If that was once possible in India, it must be possible again. He had a solid historical basis to trust India's ordinary folk as India's future democrats.

Enlightenment and Withdrawal

The caste practices create the deepest forms of withdrawal of people from society. In fact there was nothing that was recognized as the common society. One's own caste community was all that each person recognized. The members of one caste were totally withdrawn from the rest of the caste groups. As the reasons for withdrawal were religious notions, such a withdrawal was not considered as anything bad but rather as necessary and as an ideal. Is it an accident that Indian forms of religiosity often imply complete individual withdrawal from society?

What is more relevant is that this withdrawal is the greatest challenge the modern Indian State has faced from its inception. The state cannot draw legitimization when people withdraw into their groups. To draw this legitimacy the state must break this withdrawal. However, the Indian state is incapable of doing so as it is the religious notions themselves that create the conditions for such withdrawal.

Here again we can see that there is much more to Folk Schools created in the 19th century than meets the eye. It was a medium through which such withdrawal was broken creatively and constructively. However, it must be noted that such a break is possible only when a genuine consensus has room to grow and is respected. If due to whatever reason people begin to withdraw into themselves, this would be shown in places like folk schools. If objective conditions create a crisis of legitimisation, people's withdrawal becomes inevitable. There is much to learn from Indian history about this aspect of the social and political behaviour of the people.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOCIAL DEMORALIZATION

How does the living dialogue become a religious issue or a theological issue? It is because a breakdown of this dialogue results in the spread of demoralization within society. Ambedkar's work is a great study of the colossal effects or the tremendous ill effects that flow from the absence of a living dialogue within a given society.

Ambedkar saw the widespread poverty in India as linked to the lack of a spiritual framework capable of generating enthusiasm among the people to attempt to better themselves. Thus, like Hayek, who saw the possibility of a movement within society as a necessary component of its life and growth²³ Ambedkar saw that the presence of enthusiasm in the population as a necessary condition of growth, including economic growth. Ambedkar attributed the reason for the lack of enthusiasm as the realization that the possibilities for movement within society did not in fact exist. The caste system of India was in fact a system that outlawed such movement. It was not just a question of lack of

²³ A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago

opportunity that the caste system had created but the lack of any possibility for hope. The ideologies of inequality and injustice leave no room for the development of enthusiasm,²⁴ he said. He demonstrated this view with an example. "As soon as a Brahmin women conceives, she thinks of the High Court whether any post of Judge has fallen vacant but when a Dalit woman becomes pregnant she cannot think of any thing better than a sweeper's post under the municipal committee."²⁵

He spoke of such lack of enthusiasm as a disease.

"Now, what saps the enthusiasm in man? If there is no enthusiasm, life becomes a drudgery - a mere burden to be dragged. Nothing can be achieved if there is no enthusiasm. Why does one lose enthusiasm? Main reason for this lack of enthusiasm on the part of a man is that an individual loses hope to get an opportunity to elevate oneself. Hopelessness leads to lack of enthusiasm.

The mind in such cases becomes diseased."²⁶

In fact, in all his writings and work, Ambedkar treated Indian society as a diseased society (he often used the word sick), due to thousands of years of the practice of the caste system.

This astute politician who held the Law Minister's post in Nehru's Cabinet and contributed a great deal to the discussion of all vital political issues of his time did not hesitate to state that India's loss of freedom time and again which resulted in India being subject to foreign

²⁴ One Eve of Great Conversion- a Speech explaining his Conversion to Buddhism - the date of the speech is 15 October, 1956- Reproduced in Thus Spoke Ambedkar - Vol.2 Edited by Bhagwan Das

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *ibid*

domination was caused by this diseased condition of the Indian mind, and due to the operation of the caste system:

“It is because our country as a whole never stood against the enemy. It was always a small section of the society and whoever overpowered it became the victor. This was mainly due to the pernicious caste system of the Hindus.”²⁷

This analysis differs greatly from the analysis of many nationalists in India, and outside of the causes of the paralysis of the Indian mind. No one really argues seriously that there is no such paralysis. The differences of opinion relate to the reasons causing this paralysis. The nationalists argue that the paralysis was due to foreign invasion and foreign domination. Ambedkar's position is that the foreign domination itself became possible due to the deep division among the people who are humanly divided, without any hope of coming together. There was no source to draw from when fighting a foreign element. Caste, notionally accepted as the foundation of society nullified the possibility of a common front to fight against outsiders' invasions and domination.

The invaders once in power used this deep internal division to maintain their power and to exploit India's resources. The group that had the natural leadership of the country was the Brahmins and they could not call the low castes to a common fight. Any physical act of solidarity would require holding common meetings and discourses. However, such physical contact would pollute the higher caste and make them impure. How could any strategy be developed or carried out without physical contact? Castes distanced groups of people physically. In this, caste was worse than slavery.²⁸ The slaves often lived

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Ambedkar - Dr. Babashaheb Ambedkar Writing and Speeches Volume 5

in the houses of their masters and helped in the household work. Slaves were sometimes even allowed to get some education, so that they could be more useful to the master. This is not so within the caste system. Low caste persons were to be kept in their low positions and not allowed to participate in any social activity. The low castes had to be avoided and not be touched in any way. That is how the terms such as touchable and untouchable came into use.

Ambedkar demonstrated the depth of this physical aspect of caste:

“I would like to tell you some of the reminiscence of my childhood. There was a Maratha women employed in my school. She was herself quite illiterate but observed untouchability and avoided touching me. One day, I remember, I was very thirsty. I was not allowed to touch the water tap. I told my master that I wanted to drink water. He called the peon and asked him to turn on the tap and I drank water. Whenever the peon was absent I had to go without water. Thirsty, I had to return home and then only I could quench my thirst.”²⁹

Ambedkar thus provided a tremendous study of how a society and the individuals within it go through a fundamental metamorphosis when it become organically incapable of what Grundtvig would have called a living dialogue. Ambedkar did not see caste as the only source from which such a negative change can take

place; The same result can happen when the concentration in society is making wealth or getting enriched.

He wrote:

“You know the proprietors of mills. They appoint managers in the mills who extract work from labour. The proprietors remain so much

²⁹ *ibid*

engrossed in their work that they have little time to develop their minds. While they accumulate wealth and become economic giants they remain mental dwarfs."³⁰ Perhaps this aspect may apply to the situation of the West in present times. Perhaps, the West too needs to wake up from decadence of this type and address its own spiritual crisis."

It is also a well known fact of the contemporary situation in most Third World countries that the impact of international relationships combined with internal factors have created a situation of destitution, which in turn has increased demoralization within many societies. Such demoralization often leads to internal warfare or ethnic, tribal and local conflicts. In fact, the area of conflict has now shifted from the international arena to local theaters of horror. Can these be resolved purely by physical rebuilding only? Are not the issues relating to internal inspiration irrelevant, when objective conditions prevent internal communication?

The related matter is about debt renunciation. Should not the first world countries consult their own internal sources of inspiration when considering these matters? Are policies that are followed on these matters based on the traditions of enlightenment of their countries or are they based on narrow considerations unworthy of great peoples? Should these matters be left purely to bureaucrats or must they become matters of living dialogue based on the inspirational sources of the Western traditions? Grundtvig's writings on the issues relating to neighbouring countries of his time showed enlightened views.³¹ He often opposed actions which would lead to loss of freedom or enslavement of

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ *Tradition and Renewal*- Edited by Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen, published by Det danske Selskab- The Danish Institute

peoples. Such deprivation of freedom and enslavement contradicted the Christian "*Anskuelse*." If the Economic policies pursued by the West create conditions of deep poverty and demoralization among the Third World countries is that not a matter of fundamental importance to the peoples of First World Countries?

It is in this context that Grundtvig's theology of the human as the precondition for the Christian needs to be looked at. Hinduism has created a conception of gods and a conception of holy life at the cost of destroying the human foundation of their society. This destruction was not only seen as irrelevant but also as necessary for Brahmins to achieve oneness with god. It was a conception of holiness and perfection which demanded deprivation of the humanity of most of the human beings living in Indian society.

It was the inhumanity that was implied in adherence to caste that made Ambedkar look for outside inspiration. This he found in Buddhism. Buddha, Ambedkar said, was the only person who had the courage not only to condemn caste but also to espouse a promote new religious principles on the basis of the common humanity of everyone. Ambedkar wrote "The fundamental principle of Buddhism is equality. Of all Bhikkhus who joined the order in the time of Lord Buddha, about 75% of the Bhikkhus belonged to the Brahmin caste and the remaining 25% were Shudra. Even then Buddhism was called the religion of the Shudra."

Here Ambedkar quotes from Buddha..

"O Bhikkhus, you belong to different castes and have come from various lands. Just as the great rivers when they have fallen into the great ocean lose their identity, just so brethren, O, brethren, do these four castes, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudra when they begin to follow the doctrine and discipline as propounded by the Tathagatta,

they renounce different names of castes and rank and become members of one and same society."³²

To have a common identity it was necessary to lose caste identity, which was an identity based on the superiority of some and the inferiority of others. Ambedkar's attempt to rediscover a basis to end the disease of the Indian mind led him to Buddhism which was once a powerful tradition in India. Grundtvig found the source of inspiration for democratic ideals in a reinterpretation of the local Lutheran tradition and bringing in the radical idea that the human, or the folk life was the precondition for spirituality. If the precondition was absent, the other had no ground to grow. Ambedkar was pointing to an historical example where the precondition had been killed. His was an attempt to indicate a way to re-create a similar precondition.

Grundtvig's conceptions about Nordic mythology and Christian "*Anskuelse*"³³ may be compared with Ambedkar's views on the original tradition of Buddhism as a source of inspiration.

In describing the work on Buddhism he said, "We have started this movement to develop and educate our minds."³⁴

Explaining the need for religion among the poor as a need arising for hope, Ambedkar referred to a German professor of his, Professor Winternitz.

"*The Watergang Rabelan Depth*, was the book which he recommended and by which I was much inspired. 'It is only the poor, he said who need religion.' Hope is the spring of action in life. Religion

³² Buddha and his Damma

³³ Selected Writings - N.F.S. Grundtvig Edited by Johannes Knudsen, pgs. 22-26

³⁴ *ibid*

affords hope. Therefore, mankind finds solace in the religion, and that is why the poor cling to religion.”

Here it must be noted that Buddhism is not a religion but the reference here is to Dhamma. The term poor is more to the term ordinary people used by Grundtvig and religion more to “*Anskuelse*,” used by Grundtvig.

To those who had not turned to Buddhism, but remained within Hinduism but wanted Hinduism to change, Ambedkar made the following suggestion:

“You must give a new doctrinal basis to your Religion—a basis that will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, in short, with Democracy.”

Though he said this to a group of Hindus who considered themselves to be enlightened and wanted a fundamental change, he himself did not seem to have believed in this option. A few months before this meeting he had announced that though he was born a Hindu he would not die a Hindu. In this very text of the prepared speech- *Annihilation of Caste*- for this meeting where the above mentioned words were to be spoken, he mentioned, “I shall not be in your fold for long.” He spent the subsequent 20 years, the last years of his life, in a very extensive historical studies of India’s past and preparing his people to look in a different direction for inspiration.³⁵

³⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 1937

CHAPER EIGHT

HOPE AND THE SPIRIT OF THE NATION

A nation is primarily the people. And people primarily are a fellowship established through long years of living together. Despite differences of origin - for people may come from multiple origins - languages and other habits, people who were living together develop human fellowship. This fellowship gets written into their psyche and feeling. People's humour towards each other, their

happiness and sadness about each other get written into their inner being. What makes the nation is this inner fellowship often written in invisible ink. It becomes visible only through actions, which in themselves many not manifest outwardly, the history of the inner development

The inner humour that a people develops towards each other is the essence of the nation. This humour is the charitable amusement that people have of each other. The capacity to enjoy the differing characteristic of each other is what is meant by good humour. This inner humour is built over centuries and is recorded within the individuals of the nation.

Totems of a nation such as a national flag, anthem or even political symbols are of secondary importance compared with the inner habits formed among ordinary people by normal living for a long time. There is, sometimes, the attempt to make people internalize the outer political dialogue and to treat such internalising as the national consciousness. And sometimes there is an attempt to consider a nation's expressed ideals as the most important aspect of the nation. Such approaches ignore the natural essence of the nation, which is comprised of the inner habits formed among the people over long periods of living together.

However, what is more important to the nation is the basic inner enjoyment of each other, which happens almost unconsciously or semiconsciously in day to day routine behaviour.

This inner character is the best manifestation as to whether there is hope in a particular society that constitutes a nation. If there is hope, then there will be good humour among the people. Good humour is thus a product of hopeful living.

If there is hopelessness within society and if there is demoralization, then this too will be manifested as scornfulness, bitter cynicism and a cruel sense of irony. The inner habits formed in living for a long time in a situation of hopelessness are the opposite of good humour. This loss of humour affects both the members of ruling classes and the ordinary people, though the ways in which each is affected may differ.

To those engaged in ruling, hopelessness can create terrible results. They could become limitlessly avaricious as if to take revenge for the loss of their inner humanity. They can become cruel. They can become careless of the consequences of what they do.

The people, by common practice, learn that nature of their ruling class and form their own inner habits as to how to minimise the ill effects of what their rulers do, due to their bad state of the spirit. They become defensive, evasive and internally fearful. Thus, one may argue that no positive national spirit can emerge out of this despair. It was what Ambedkar pointed out regarding the Indian spirit ruined by hopelessness created by many years of practice of caste. He wrote:

“Men constitute a society because they have things which they possess in common. To have a similar things is totally different from possessing things in common. And the only way by which men can come to possess things in common with one another is by being in communication with one another. This is merely another way of saying that Society continues to exist by communication, indeed in communication. To make it concrete, it is not enough if men act in a way which agrees with the acts of others. Parallel activity, even if similar, is not sufficient to bind men into a society. This is proved by the fact that the festivals observed by the different Castes amongst the Hindus are the same. Yet these parallel performances of similar festivals by the different castes have not bound them into one integral whole. For that purpose what is necessary is for a man to share and participate in a common activity, so that the same emotions are aroused in him that animate the others. Making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity, so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure is the real thing that binds men and makes a society of them. The Caste System prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being.”

In contrast to this, Grundtvig, who lived his life during times of great European revolutions, both during his childhood at the end of the 18th century and the 1848 period, saw an emergence of a new spirit of co-operation between the peoples who succeeded in these revolutions and who therefore began a period of greater hopefulness. It is this inner spirit that Grundtvig reflected and tried to influence further. In place of the grim puritan morality of the early Lutheran movement, he preached happy and joyful Christianity. He spoke of the primacy of folk life and of the human. He worked towards enlightened participation of people in all aspects of life.

In Ambedkar's search for the dynamic early movements in India, what he sought was for a new spirit of animation to break the darkness of the Indian psyche, which was shackled by thousands of years of the practice of caste.

CHAPTER NINE

THE INNER BALANCE

*"A balance between two things that remain different, but that should fertilize each other in their differentness."*³⁶

This conception of balance can be an explanation of anarchy as well as of violence, when such a balance is absent. It provides the basis for *sanghatan and co-operation* within a society. It provides a basis for understanding what a dictatorship does to a society, whether the dictatorship is based on right-wing claims or left-wing claims. It helps to understand some of the worst experiences of humanity in recent times, both in the West as well as in the East. It also helps to understand the modern forms of social disorganisation through the use of sophisticated media on the one hand and the great potential that exists in modern communication systems to create this balance.

³⁶ This is a translation by Stephen M. Borish - Land of the Living- He has made an attempt to interpret the word. *vekselvirkning*. This interpretation is used it for the purpose of explaining some of the ideas discussed in this chapter.

The principle of balance consists of two parts: the recognition of difference and the need for cross-fertilisation while remaining different. Out of these two, it is the first that is neglected most. Once the differentness is denied or ignored, the need for fertilisation by each other does not arise. On the other hand when at a given time, cross-fertilisation stops due to whatever reason, it results soon in denial of the principle of differentness. This results in one of the different components taking dominion over the other and no longer running into each other, thus making it impossible for the other to participate in the process of fertilisation of the social process. To put this another way, denial of differentness makes social discourse unnecessary. Disappearance of discourse buries differentness. To this one more aspect can be added. The denial of differentness and discourse destroys not just one, but the whole. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* is a classic exposition of this principle of balance relied on by Grundtvig, by presenting an historical example of how this inner balance was lost in Indian society through the development of the caste system, which virtually denied the human existence of a vast sections of society and punished them by keeping them out of the social discourse. The result was the inner destruction of the whole society and the collapse of a great civilization. Since this theme is discussed in relation to India throughout this paper, we may now look into a few other examples by way of examination of this principle.

It may be useful here to discuss some of the ways by which this principle of a balance has been denied in the political theories practiced in some countries. One such theory has been the need for authoritarianism in order to promote rapid economic growth. Another is the concept of a "people's" take over of the state and using it for their benefit. Under these two broad principles several recent experiences can be discussed.

One of the best expositions of the denial of the differentness and therefore also of the need or even the possibility of fertilization found in the political theories of Lee Kuan Yew, on the basis on which the Singaporean State was built.³⁷ These theories are practised still. The right of a hard core of people to make all decisions is at the heart of this political theory. An often-quoted Lee Kuan Yew maxim is "The pope elects the cardinals and the cardinals elect the next Pope." Every form of discourse is regarded as harmful and having the potential of provoking ethnic disputes. Every form of education including religious instructions at schools is controlled by the state. Theoretically, differentness between State and the people is denied. The people are what they are because of the State. It is this oneness that people are encouraged to profess all the time. What is unique in Singapore is that this theory has been thoroughly and genuinely put into practice. The State is the organizer of everything. Thus people's organizations are not only suppressed but also made unnecessary. We see here the very opposite of the principle of the primacy of folk life. Folk life is pushed underneath. There is no idea of enlightenment. In its place, there is a concept of sophistication, meaning, learning the use of software, hardware and technology. A good citizen is a good tool operator and nothing more. The study of social sciences and culture is positively discouraged by not making many possibilities for them available. Thus the *Singapore Story* become the 'Lee Kuan Yew Story'. In a small city, without bloodshed, the Stalinist idea of State has been completely realized, not with a left-wing ideology, but with the ideology of the market economy.

However, the central component of the ideology is the same as under Stalinism, namely, rapid economic progress is not possible

³⁷ Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, Prentice Hall, Singapore and Singapore 21 - a publication by the Singapore

without complete authoritarianism. This same political theory provided the foundation for a political perspective in Southeast Asian countries, during the period that was known at the time as the "Asian Miracle." It gave rise to many forms of authoritarian rule, most of which have collapsed during the last few years. However, the result of the collapse has not only affected the dictatorships but also one society as a whole. The reason is that different aspects of society have not been recognized and therefore, the means of cross-fertilisation has been lost. The reformers, who wish to rebuild society and to prevent anarchy, get bewildered by the massive destruction as for example is evidenced by the statements of many new leaders of Indonesia. There, thus, emerges a huge abyss between the social goals proposed by new democrats and the near absence of natural channels of social discourse.

In fact, in places where grave abuses of people have taken place by way of massive violence and gross violations of human rights, one can easily see the collapse of the balance paving the way to such a situation. A few examples are taken from Asia. Where the State has failed to recognize the differentness of ethnic groups, there have been massive forms of violence between the State and minority groups in Asia, South Asia in particular. At a certain point in these conflicts, channels of cross-fertilisation break due to such lack of recognition of the differentness. This has given rise to armed conflicts. In the process of such armed conflicts minority groups themselves contribute to the continuity of the conflict by stressing only the differentness and denying the need for constant fertilisation. From this emerges the demand for separate states. In this way differentness becomes absolutized and the possibility of fertilisation becomes conceptually outlawed. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict provides a glaring example of the consequences of abandoning the balance, by refusal to accept differentness of different groups. There cannot be creative cross-fertilisation, unless the differentness of State and people, who are

themselves differentiated by being spread into different groups, is accepted as a fundamental reality, both by the State as well as by the people.

Another example of the loss of balance is the experience of Thailand under the Three Seal Law, which is also known as Sakdina system.³⁸ Three Seal Law was a legal code consisting of 1200 articles, which was codified 200 years ago. It gathered into a single code rules that had existed for hundreds of years. By assigning a value to each, it recognized differentness of each person.

However, this assigning of value prevented the possibility of fertilisation, by binding interactions among different "units" to strict limits prescribed by the code, deviation of which was punishable. Even the way a person with one kind of value speaks, or even looks, at a person having another value, higher or lower, was prescribed. Much of what Ambedkar speaks of about the caste system equally applies to the Sakdina system. The fundamental difference however, was that differentness was not determined by birth but by a classification. It was possible to change one's place in the system. Though this code was abolished in 1932, the social and psychological effects of the system remain. Particularly with regard to the abuse of women's rights, preventing the participation of people and preventing the possibility of fertilizing the social and political system, much can be learned from the study of the effects created by this system in the rulers as well as on the people of Thailand. Ultimately an understanding of the limits created on social discourse through the operation of the Sakdina system may help to enrich the democratic reform movement in Thailand.

³⁸ Mark Tamthai, Sakdina System and Promotion of Human Rights, *Human Rights SOLIDARITY*, Vol.9 No.6 June 1999, Asian Human Rights Commission

This same denial of differentness and fertilisation is implied in many activities of international cooperation, where thought flow originates from international centres to the Third World countries which are merely treated as passive partners. Here the States as well as the people are ignored and therefore discourses with them are confined only to implementation and accountability. The result is to destroy the inner balance of society, which loss is then manifested in various forms of violence and anarchy.

Some of the international peace efforts can also be examined from this point of view. Is a given attempt to help in reestablishing an inner balance often a consideration in these efforts? The experiences of international efforts like those in Cambodia, Bosnia and Kosovo may be looked at from this point of view.

The history of the twentieth century provides numerous examples of the destruction that takes place when the people on their part fail to recognize the differentness of the state. The experience of the Soviet Union and the entire Eastern Europe under Stalinism will remain an important experience to grasp in terms of any type of democratic reforms that may be tried. In the original theory of the Russian State based on Lenin's thesis envisioned in *What Is To Be Done*, the Communist Party was assigned the role of the vanguard of the proletariat. When the Party took power, the differentness of the people and the State was thus not recognized. Therefore, the issue of fertilisation of each by the other did not arise at all. Though the early debates led by Leon Trostsky³⁹ reflected some distinctions between the revolutionary organisations of the workers and the Party, the basic principle of identity of the State and Party was taken as a basic dogma by all. This absence of the differentness was brought to an absolute

³⁹ Leon Trostsky, *Revolution Betrayed*.

position under Stalin, who was also treated with the title of the Father of the People. The State and people thus became one as a family. The destruction that this has caused on Russia and other countries took not only the form of millions of deaths, but also the devastation to the internal processes of interaction and exchange among the peoples.

It has for some time been argued that Russia has always had tyranny and therefore, this experience under communism, particularly under Stalinism was nothing new. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two experiences. Monarchies, however strong, cannot create a feeling of oneness of the people with the State. In fact such rule by the Russian rulers did help to create the understanding of differentness among the people. The revolutionary movements have benefited from the deep sense of differentness people have felt against such strong rulers. And this feeling of differentness has been a creative power used to achieve change. When the identification of the people with the State became so complete as to treat any perception of differentness as a treachery, Russia lost its creative capacity. Maxim Gorky had earlier said the will to resist is the most important aspect of a human being. When the very forces of resistance then allowed themselves to be so totally identified with the State and ceased to think as distinct, they lost the very creative power that had made their resistance possible. Much of the social and psychological process which took place due to caste as described by Ambedkar, also took place in Russia during this period for different reasons. Ambedkar commenting on the loss of the power of resistance under a Hindu community organized under the caste system, confessed that he could not understand how when there was such enormous oppression, a social revolution did not take place in India. Perhaps the answer lies in the understanding of the principle of balance as expressed by Grundtvig. The erasing of recognition of differentness by way of treating the danger

of interacting with different group destroyed the feeling of fellowship among the different castes in India. Each group became capable of thinking only as a single unit.

This makes it impossible to consider any one else as, "your own, living in their midst, and cultivating fellow-feeling, in short loving them,"⁴⁰ (though this remark was made particularly with regard to the relationship of upper caste Hindus to tribal groups in India, it applied equally to the general treatment of any one outside one's caste. Caste creates an isolation of an absolute kind, as it neither recognizes the differentness nor the possibility of fertilisation of one by the other. Each caste is an island.

A quite sad but striking example of denial of differentness took place in Cambodia, resulting in the loss of over one million people (according to conservative estimates) out of a population of about seven million, during a period of less than four years. The denial of differentness was so complete that any type of intellectual activity, which included reading, writing, or the use of any technology was punished with death. Young children were taken from their parents and separated so that they would not be different and would grow up into a standard type of persons.. The common kitchens were introduced so as to abolish private kitchens where, with differentiation of tastes begins the absence of uniformity. It is usually said that the purpose of these activities was to abolish private property. However, a closer look at the history of these four years shows that it was an attempt to put into practice a theory of total uniformity that brought the devastation, as without centres affirming differentness there was no force to stop the destruction. It has been established that most people

⁴⁰ B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 1937

interrogated and killed in detention centres were party cadres themselves,⁴¹ who due to their own negative experiences had begun to have different thoughts. Doubts are a way and an expression of differentiation. A political regime that does not accept the creative role of differentiation must punish all who have doubts. In Cambodia, the punishment was death. While the details of Cambodian cruelties have been collected, the basic theoretical bases of this experience has not yet been exposed. Is it because of the affinity that these basic philosophical principles have to other ideologies, which still exist elsewhere? The Cambodian tragedy was not a result of the absence of principles but the result of denying the differentness as a matter of principle.

The refusal to accept that two things must remain different, also leads to anarchy. In Asia many examples can be found to illustrate this. Perhaps, one of the saddest is the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Often romanticized some time ago as an experiment as a process creating a new man, it was in fact a horrible experience claiming many million lives and bringing China to a point of collapse. Subsequent Chinese experiments began with the realization of the causes of this disaster and attempts to create a balance. Wei Jingsheng in his book *Courage to Stand Alone*, described the Cultural Revolution as a coup, carried out with mass mobilization.

Often, the minority programmes too are formulated in a way to deny acceptance of the State which needs to remain in its differentness if cross-fertilization is to become possible. This often begins because the State itself does not recognize the differentness of minorities. Ambedkar, who was the leader of the largest minority in the world and one of the most oppressed, consistently fought for a change of the situation

⁴¹ David Chandler, *Brother Number One*

of the minority, with a democratic framework of recognition of the State. Despite the bitter criticism of Indian society and the State he made throughout his life (in fact he is the greatest critic of social institutions that India ever produced in recent times) he worked for creating balance on a principled basis. He often warned the Indian upper castes of the disaster that would fall on them if they continued to ignore the caste issue.

CHAPTER TEN

SHUDRAS - UNTOUCHABLES - DALITS

These three terms are usually used interchangeably. Basically they refer to a common phenomenon. However, there are some differences. Historically they refer to three phases in the history of those who have been classified as the lowest castes of India.

The Shudras.

This category comes from the Vedas, the sacred texts of the Hindus. This word "Hindu" also needs an explanation.

"The name Hindu is itself a foreign name. It was given by the Mohammedans to the natives for the purpose of distinguishing themselves. It does not occur in any Sanskrit work prior to the Mohammedan invasion. They did not feel the necessity of a common name because they had no conception of their having constituted a community. Hindu society as such does not exist.⁴² It is only a collection

⁴² This explanation of the word Hindu given by Ambedkar differs from the usual explanations, which is sometimes found in dictionaries; according to the usual explanation the word Hindu comes from Sindhu a river today known as Indus

of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence. Its survival is the be all and end all of its existence. Castes do not even form a federation. A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes except when there is a Hindu -Muslim riot. On all other occasions each caste endeavours to segregate itself and to distinguish itself from other castes. Each caste not only dines among itself and marries among itself but each caste prescribes its own distinctive dress.⁴³

The Vedas classified every one into four castes. Ambedkar explained this thus;

1. According to the Brahmins, the Vedas have defined what is an ideal society and the Vedas being infallible, that is the only ideal society which man can accept.
2. The ideal society prescribed by the Vedas is known by the name Chaturvarna.
3. Such a society, according to the Vedas, must satisfy three conditions.
4. It must be composed of four classes, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.
5. The interrelations of these classes must be regulated by the principle of graded inequality. In other words, all these classes are not to be on equal level but to be one above the other, in point of status, rights and privileges.
6. The Brahmins were placed at the top; the Kshatriyas were placed below the Brahmins but above the Vaishyas; the Vaishyas were placed below the Kshatriyas but above the Shudras and the Shudras were placed the lowest of all.

⁴³ B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 1937

7. The third feature of Chaturvarna was that each class must engage itself in an occupation assigned to it. The Brahmins' occupation was to learn, teach and officiate at religious ceremonies. The Kshatriyas' occupation was to bear arms and to fight. The occupation of the Vaishyas was trade and business. The Shudras' occupation was to do menial service for all the three superior classes.
8. No class is to transgress and trench upon the occupation of the other classes.⁴⁴

At this stage Shudras still enjoyed some rights. The right to collect food from villagers, the right to collect corn from each villager at the harvest seasons and the right to appropriate the dead animals belonging to the villagers.⁴⁵

The Buddha's Challenge to Caste

This period of Shudras came to a serious crisis, when Buddha began to reject the entire doctrine of the Veda's and preached equality as against caste. It is one of the great events of human history when the people of most parts of India were converted to the preaching of Buddha, in his own lifetime. Later his teaching spread to most other neighbouring countries.

Ambedkar gives the following as a summary of Buddha's teachings on caste:

⁴⁴ *Buddha and His Dhamma* - This book was published 1957 one year after Ambedkar's death. It is a long exposition in which Ambedkar attempted to give "a clear and consistent statement of the life and teachings of the Buddha" as he said in the introduction to the book.

⁴⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, Bheem Patrika Publications-India-First edition - 1948

“The Buddha opposed it root and branch. He was strongest opponent of caste and the earliest and staunchest upholder of equality. There is no argument in favour of caste and inequality which he did not refute. There were many Brahmins who challenged Buddha on this issue. But he silenced them completely. The story is told in the Assalayana-Sutta that once the Brahmins persuaded one of them, by name Assalayana, to go to the Buddha and controvert his views against caste and inequality. Assalayana went to the Buddha and placed before him the case in favour of the superiority of the Brahmins. He said, “Brahmins maintain, Gautama, that only Brahmins form the superior class, all other classes being inferior; that only Brahmins form the white class, all other classes being black fellows; that purity resides in Brahmins alone and not in non Brahmins; and that only Brahmins are Brahma’s legitimate sons, born from his mouth, offspring of his, creations of his, and his heirs. What does Gautama say hereon?” The Buddha’s answer simply pulverised Assalayana. The Buddha said: “Assalayana, are not the Brahmin wives of Brahmins known to have their periods, and to conceive, and to lie and give birth? Notwithstanding this do Brahmins really maintain all what you have said though they are themselves born of women like everybody else?” Assalayana gave no answer. The Buddha went further and asked Assalayana another question. “Suppose, Assalayana, a young noble consorts with a Brahmin maiden, what would be the issue? Will it be an animal or human being?” Again Assalayana gave no answer. “As to the possibility of moral development, is it only a Brahmin and not a man of the other three classes, who in this country, can develop in his heart the love that knows no hate or ill-will?” “No. All four classes can do it,” replied Assalayana. “Assalayana! Have you ever heard,” asked the Buddha, “that in the Yona and Kamboja countries and in other adjacent countries, there are only two classes, namely, masters and slaves, and that a master can become a slave and vice versa?”

“Yes, I have heard so,” replied Assalayana. “If your Chaturvarna is an ideal society, why is it not universal?” On none of these points was Assalayana able to defend his theory of caste and inequality. He was completely silenced. He ended by becoming a disciple of the Buddha. A Brahmin by name Vasettha had embraced the religion of the Blessed Lord. The Brahmins used to abuse him for his conversion. One day he went to Buddha and disclosed to him what the Brahmins said of him. Then Vasettha said: “The Brahmins, Lord, say thus: ‘Only a Brahmin is of the best social grade; other grades are low. Only a Brahmin is of a clear complexion; other complexions are swarthy. Only Brahmins are of pure breed; not they that are not of the Brahmins. Only Brahmins are genuine children of Brahma, born of his mouth, offspring of Brahma, created by Brahma, heirs of Brahma. As for you, you have renounced the best rank and have gone over to that low class, to the shaven recluses, to vulgar rich, to them of swarthy skins, to the foot-born descendants. Such a course is not good, such a course is not proper, even this, that you, having forsaken that upper class, should associate with an inferior class, to wit, with shaveling, fair folks, menials, swarthy of skin, the offspring of our kinsmen’s heels. In these terms, Lord, do the Brahmins blame and revile me with characteristic abuse, copious, not at all stinted.’” “Surely, Vasettha,” said the Buddha, “the Brahmins have quite forgotten the ancient lore when they say so. On the contrary, the wives of Brahmins, like all women of other classes, are seen to be with child, bringing forth and nursing children. And yet it is these very womb-born Brahmins who say that Brahmins are genuine children of Brahma, born from his mouth; his offspring; his creation; and his heirs! By this they make a travesty of the nature of Brahma.” Once the Brahmin Esukari went to the Buddha to argue with him three questions. The first question he raised related to the permanent division of occupations. In defense of the system he began by saying: “I have come to ask you a question.

The Brahmins say they shall serve nobody because they stand above all. Everyone else is born to serve them. "Service, Gautama, is divided into four - service of Brahmin, service of noble, service of a middle-class man, or by a peasant; while a peasant may be served only by a peasant, - for who else could?" What does the reverend Gautama say hereon?" The Buddha answered him by asking a question: "Is the whole world in accord with Brahmins in their fourfold division of service?" asked the Lord. "For myself, I neither assert that all service is to be rendered nor that all service is to be refused. If the service makes a man bad and not good, it should not be rendered; but if it makes him better and not bad, then it should be rendered. This is the guiding consideration which should decide the conduct alike of nobles, of Brahmins, of middle-class men and of peasants; each individual should refuse service which makes him bad and should accept only the service which makes him a better man." The next question raised was by Esukari. "Why should ancestry and lineage not have a place in determining the status of a man?" To this question the Buddha replied thus: "As against pride of ancestry, the station into which a man happens to be born determines only his designation be it noble or Brahmin or middle-class or peasant. Even as a fire is called after the material out of which it is kindled, and may thus be called either a wood-fire, or a chip-fire, or a bracken-fire, or a cow dung fire, just in the same way the noble, transcendent doctrine, I aver, is the source of true wealth for every man, birth merely determining his designation in one of the four classes. Lineage does not enter into a man's being either good or bad: nor do good looks or wealth. For, you will find a man of noble birth who is a murderer, a thief, a fornicator, a liar, a slanderer, a man of bitter tongue, a tattler, a covetous person, a man of rancour or of wrong views, and therefore I assert that noble birth does not make a good man. Or again you will find a man of noble birth who is innocent of all these vices; and, therefore, I assert that it is not lineage which makes a man bad." The third question which Esukari raised was with regard to the

ways of earning a living assigned to each class. The Brahmin Esukari said to the Lord: "Brahmins give a fourfold assignment of income, from alms, for Brahmins; from his bow and arrows, for the noble; from ploughing and tending cattle, for the middle-class man; and for the peasant, by the carriage of crops on the pole slung over his shoulder. If anyone of these deserts his vocation for something else, he does what he should not do, not less than a guardian who appropriates what is not his. What does the reverend Gautama say on this?" "Is the whole world in accord with this Brahmin classification?" asked the Lord. "No," replied Esukari. To Vasettha he said: "What is important is high ideals and not noble birth. "No caste; no inequality; no superiority; no inferiority; all are equal. This is what he stood for. "Identify yourself with others. As they, so I. As I, so they," so said the Buddha."⁴⁶

The Untouchables

This period of Buddhism in India, which was also one of the richest in India and in world history, came to an end with the collapse of Buddhism in India and the rebuilding of Hinduism. The reason for the collapse Ambedkar says was the Mohammedan invasions and the killing of Buddhist monks by the Mohammedans.⁴⁷

The period of revivalism of Hinduism was marked by great tensions between the low castes and Brahammins. The Brahammins tried to establish their hegemony as the superior caste and to have their position accepted by all. The Low Castes rejected this. This internal struggle had determined the characterisation of untouchables even by the colonial officers of the British Empire. The distinguishing features of untouchables, according to

⁴⁶ *Buddha and His Dhamma*

⁴⁷ B.R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, Bheem Patrika Publications-India-First edition-1948

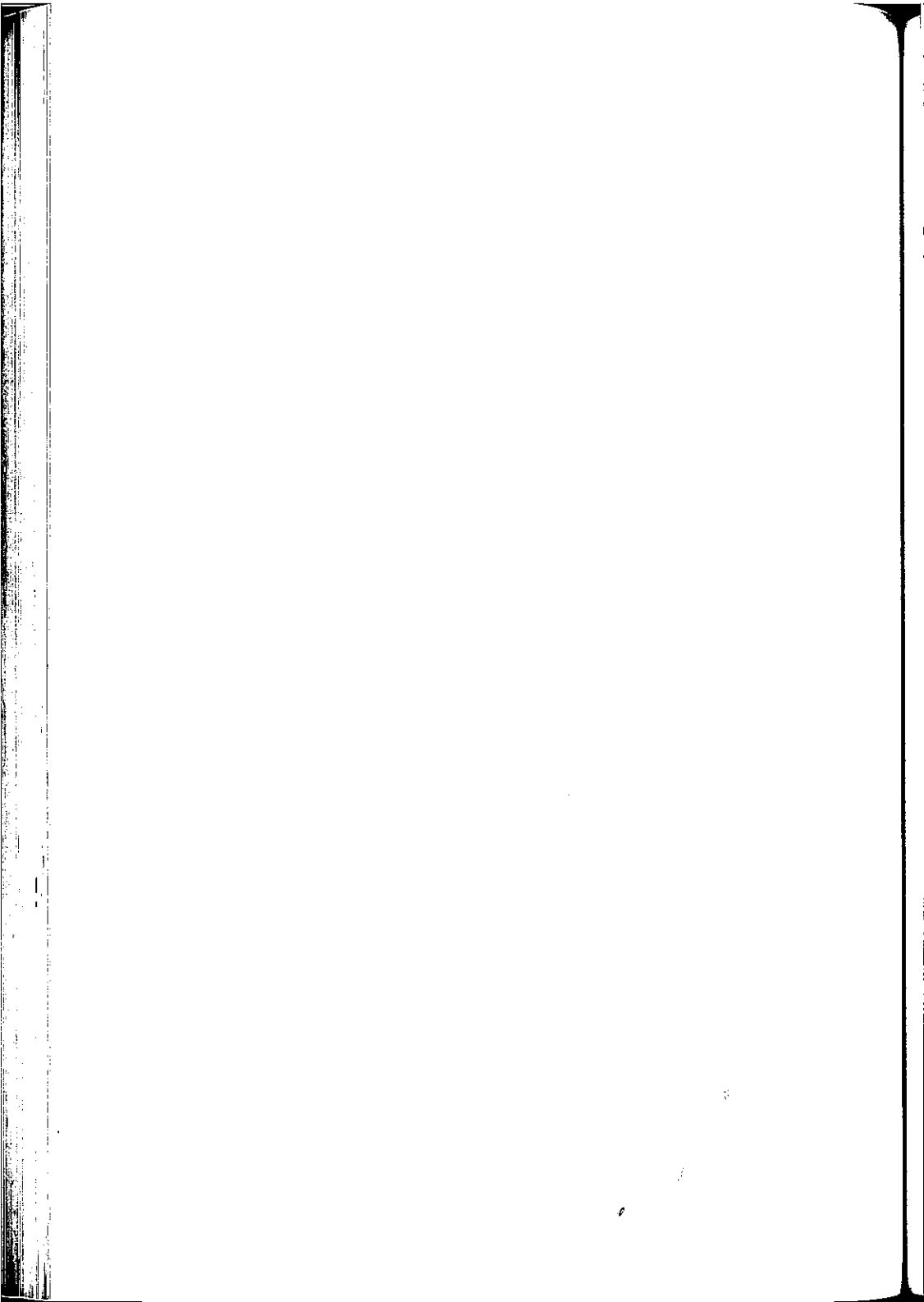
a census circular issued by Census Commissioner in 1911, are these: "they deny the supremacy of Bhramins, do not receive Mantra from a Bhramin or otherwise recognise Hindu Guru, deny the authority of Vedas, do not worship Hindu Gods, are not served by good Bhrahmins as family priests, have no Bhrahmin priests at all, are denied access to interior of Hindu temples, cause pollution (a) by touch, or (b) within a certain distance, bury their dead and eat beef and not reverence the cow."

Thus while the Shudras period was marked by the imposition of Veda's doctrine and at least considering Shudras as lower in the ladder of Hindu caste structure, the untouchability resulted in creating the total outcasts. Physically this meant ousting the untouchables even from their habitats and pushing them into a ghetto. Ambedkar called them, people of the Indian ghetto. All forms of contact were forbidden by the use of rules of untouchability.

The Dalits

The name Dalit means the oppressed. It is a term used by the Dalits themselves to denote their protest. This was a quite a new term as it has come into use only after the 1950's. The movements that fought for the rights of the untouchables achieved much during the twentieth century, though the fundamental place for Dalits as a whole has not yet significantly changed. The struggle however has intensified and has been contested severely. The Dalits are today a formidable force. The resolving of this problem by a final and complete abandonment of the caste ideal of society is very much on the agenda. It can easily be said that the greatest enduring achievement of India in the twentieth century is the progress, though small, that has been made in liberating the Dalits. The primary contributors to this process are the Dalits themselves. The opposition to this change has been strong and continues to be so. As many Dalits became more confident and defiant,

the violence used against them has become more severe. Such use of violence is itself evidence of the upper caste realisation that the contest is not going in their favour. It is beyond dispute that Ambedkar had contributed more than any other single individual to bring about this situation. It is quite obvious that Dalits have selected him as their symbol.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE INTELLECTUALS AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

Though it is quite usual in liberal discourse to present intellectuals as promoters of democracy, in the particular historic contexts of their lives Ambedkar and Grundtvig found that intellectuals as a group resisted social equality. In the case of Denmark during Grundtvig's time it was the Latin-educated elite, the people of "the school of death." In the case of India, for many centuries it was the Bhramins. Ambedkar thought that it was this intellectual caste that posed the largest single threat to democracy in India. He wrote:

"Whether you accept the theory of the great man as the maker of history or whether you do not, this much you will have to concede that in every country the intellectual class is the most influential class, if not the governing class. The intellectual class is the class which can foresee, it is the class which can advise and give lead. In no country does the mass of the people live the life of intelligent thought and action. It is largely imitative and follows the intellectual class. There is no exaggeration in saying that the entire destiny of a country depends upon its intellectual class. If the intellectual class is honest, independent and disinterested it can be trusted to take the initiative and give a

proper lead when a crisis arises. It is true that intellect by itself is no virtue. It is only a means and the use of means depends upon the ends, which an intellectual person pursues. An intellectual man can be a good man but he can easily be a rogue. Similarly an intellectual class may be a band of high-souled persons, ready to help, ready to emancipate erring humanity or it may easily be a gang of crooks or a body of advocates of a narrow clique from which it draws its support. You may think it a pity that the intellectual class in India is simply another name for the Brahmin caste. You may regret that the two are one; that the existence of the intellectual class should be bound with one single caste, that this intellectual class should share the interest and the aspirations of that Brahmin caste, which has regarded itself the custodian of the interest of that caste, rather than of the interests of the country. All this may be very regrettable. But the fact remains that the Brahmins form the intellectual class of the Hindus. It is not only an intellectual class but it is a class, which is held in great reverence by the rest of the Hindus. The Hindus are taught that the Brahmins are *Bhudevas* (Gods on earth) ... The Hindus are taught that Brahmins alone can be their teachers. Manu says, 'If it be asked how it should be with respect to points of the Dharma which have not been specially mentioned, the answer is that which Brahmins who are Shishthas propound shall doubtless have legal force': ... When such an intellectual class, which holds the rest of the community in its grip, is opposed to the reform of Caste, the chances of success in a movement for the break-up of the Caste System appear to me very, very remote."

Having found that the intellectual class in India was uncreative and unable to provide intellectual leadership, Ambedkar's concentration was to educate the people of India's ghetto and to get them to be articulate and to speak for themselves. An often quoted slogan of his was, "educate, organize and agitate." Through massive educational

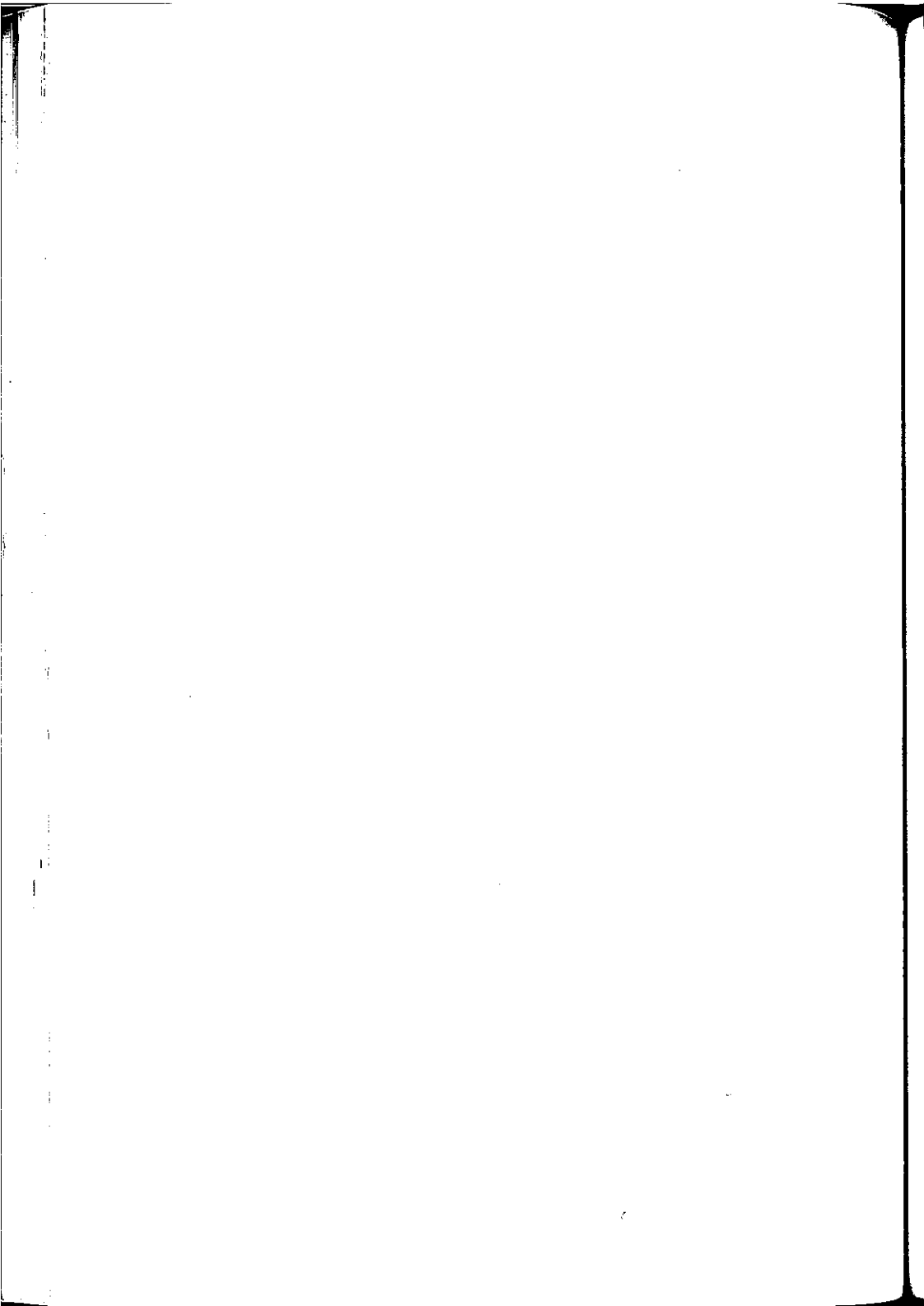
reforms the monopoly of the Bhrahmins as the sole spokesman of Hindu India has been broken. Today there is a multitude of voices and there are conditions for creating a new balance, which is the most important need for survival of India as a nation.

There seems to be some difference in the ideas of Grundtvig and Ambedkar on this issue, though in practical term their approaches to the resolution of the problem was the same: let people speak for themselves. Grundtvig coming from the Lutheran tradition has inherited a memory of how a well-established intellectual class can breakdown and how people can become vocal in terms of the break down of the Catholic clericalism and spread of Protestantism. In fact Grundtvig as a theologian has further developed this idea of the people. He thought of the church not as a Bible-reading circle but as a fellowship of believers⁴⁸. The concept of fellowship was well established. Besides, the idea of our common humanity was also central in Grundtvig's thinking. In Ambedkar's society both the concept of fellowship and common humanity did not exist. In fact, the very opposite was considered ideal: the separation of each caste and denial of the humanity of lower castes, in theory and in practice.

Despite this enormous difference of the situation, in the practices that both adopted the main instrument for establishing social equality was the genuine enlightenment of the people themselves and their actual participation. Folk Schools were thought of as a means of preparing and enabling ordinary people for participation in Denmark's destiny.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ N.F.S Grundtvig- *Selected Educational Writings*- Compiled by Max Lawson published by The International Peoples Colloege and The association of Folk

⁴⁹ *ibid*



An Afterword

It is quite common in *Folkehojskole* tradition now to speak about promoting international understanding. Peter Manniche (1889-1981), brought this aspect forcefully to the movement in the 1920's. Since then the movement has gathered great experience in this field. Meanwhile, there have also been many attempts in this direction all over the world. Today, promoting international understanding is a commonly accepted ideal, though there are varying interpretations of this ideal.

What I have been attempted to promote in this paper may be termed - *inner international understanding*. What this means is to promote an understanding of the aspects of the life of societies which are not visible at first glance, but are fundamental to the understanding of a particular society. Caste, which is studied in this paper, is one such example. Without an understanding of Caste there can be no understanding of India. In fact, the same can be said of two of India's neighbours Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Caste is the inner basis of the social organisation in these societies. (Though there are particularities specific to each of these countries, the fundamental nature of the caste system in each is the same and they have originated from the same source.) Caste is the inner Indian culture. The struggle for the establishment of

a basic democracy in India has been linked to dealing with this issue. However, India has not always been caste dominated. There was a time when India freed itself from this oppression and created a culture that was called, 'the wonder that was India.'

The inner culture of Denmark is one of democracy, influenced by its religious and secular traditions. Its formation and development had taken many generations. One of the marked features of Danish democracy is the place acquired by ordinary people. This place has been so established through an historical process, which created a culture where living dialogue with different sectors of society is accepted as normal. Liberating the voice of the ordinary folk has come about through the hard work of many people. Today, new generations receive this as a gift. Were it to be threatened it is quite likely that there would be a battle to defend it.

How can these two inner aspects of these societies meet? If they do not, can there be any real international understanding between the two peoples? How can such an understanding be established? These are the questions that will naturally arise.

Examples of two persons who have contributed to this inner and deeper culture has been presented here. This may provide an example of how a living dialogue (it is presumed that international understanding cannot be brought about by a dead discourse) which touches each other very dynamically can be brought about. Such a dialogue can establish beautiful friendships - *Kalyana Mitatta*.

It is not difficult to establish such international understanding these days. In this study it was possible to obtain books on Grundtvig without much difficulty. The Selected Writings - N.F.S. Grundtvig - edited by Johannes Knudsen; Tradition and Renewal - Edited by Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidam Thyssen; The Land of

the Living by Stevan M. Borish; Selected Educational Writings Compiled by Max Lawson; books on Danish hymns, materials on Danish Folk High Schools and research papers left by some, for example the Doctoral thesis of Theophilus Tafe (Ghana), which considered Grundtvig's Educational ideas as a challenge to his country's colonial legacy, a part of which I had the opportunity to read, provided a rich variety of information. Of course the best sources were the comments of Danish people with whom I was able to speak and to hear their impressions of their heritage. In particular I wish to mention Dr. K.E. Bugge, an authority on Grundtvig for his lively and clear explanations.

I also express my gratitude to the Danish Institute for Human Rights which made this research Partnership possible and to the friends in the project department of the Centre who quite often went out of their way to help me. I must also mention the help I received from friends in the Asia division of Danish Church Aid.

As for Ambedkar, for me, it was a much easier task. As a Sri Lankan and a person who is supposed to belong to a low caste, I have my own personal experience to rely on. As India is Sri Lanka's closest neighbour our histories are merged and as a result a lot of the reality I described have become my memories. The Education Department of Maharashtra Government in India has published the collected works of B.R. Ambedkar in fourteen volumes most of which are in English. There are many publications about him and about the Dalit movement. There are publications criticizing him too, as he is undoubtedly one of the most hated figures among one section of India.

I have used all these materials and whenever possible I have acknowledged them. I take this opportunity to acknowledge my debt and to express my gratitude to the contributors and producers of these publications which has made a greater understanding possible.

About both Grundtvig and Ambedkar there are materials already available in some web-sites and such information facilities are bound to increase. Thus resources are not only available but conditions are becoming increasingly supportive to develop an *inner international understanding*.

Basil Fernando

Copenhagen

July 1999

APPENDIX 1

Ambedkar: A Nightmare to Caste-Minded Indians?*

*"Unless They [Untouchables] Are Raised
This Motherland of Ours Will Never Awake"*
- Swami Vivekananda

For the purpose of non- Indian readers we need to clarify some terms; A Chinese lady asks, "What is Caste? Is it some thing like class?" No. Caste is a definition of your position in society, your identity, your rights and your relationships in terms your birth. You may be deserving of respect or not deserving of respect depending on your birth. "Who decided that?" she asks. Culture and religion. "You can't be serious, this is stupid," she says.

Like Caste, the word Untouchable too, is something outsiders cannot understand. If A looks at B, who is an untouchable, A becomes polluted or impure. A will have to undertake religious rituals to

* An article written by Basil Fernando published in *Human Rights SOLIDARITY*, Vol. 9, No. 11, November 1999, a publication of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), as a comment on Arun Shourie's book, *Worshipping False Gods - Ambedkar and facts which have been erased*, HarperCollins Publishers, India.

become pure again. As for B, S/he can associate only with those of her or his birth status. People of A's status can "touch" meaning "come into contact through any of their senses" only those persons born into some castes those born and not into others. Believe it or not, that is how people have been expected to behave in India, for centuries now.

This book is tedious reading as it is full of repetition. To those familiar with the writings of important Indian leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and B.R Ambedkar, the book offers nothing new by way of facts except half truths about well known incidents. As a history book it has only nuisance value. The author tries to interpret these well-known facts to suit an argument that is repeated many times. Ambedkar's work only benefited the British and the Muslims who are the enemies of the Indian independence. The author's main thesis is that. The book is also full of insults to anyone who may agree with Ambedkar or who knows about the reality called untouchability.

We thought it best to answer the author by putting forward a set of facts in question-and-answer format, for benefit of our readers.

Who killed Mahatma Gandhi?

It was a man called Nathuram Vinayak Godse.

Were his views closer to B.R. Ambedkar or to Arun Shourie?

Godse was a Hindu fundamentalist. Ambedkar is one of the best-known if not the most well-known opponent of Hindu fundamentalism. Judging by the views expressed in this book, Arun Shourie is a Hindu fundamentalist.

Did Ambedkar and Gandhi have differences of views?

Yes, very intense differences. They centred on one issue. Gan-

dhi refused to recognize Untouchables as a minority, while he recognized Muslims and Sikhs as minorities. Further Gandhi held that untouchability was not linked to Hinduism. Ambedkar held that it was linked and he fought for the recognition of Untouchables as a minority. This was the essence of the indifference of opinion.

Why did Gandhi not recognise Untouchables as a minority?

It was a matter of numbers. As compared to Muslims, Hindus would have had much less numerical strength if they could not add Untouchables to their midst.

Did Gandhi not recognise Untouchability?

He did. He said that it is a hideous practice. He used lots of strong words.

How did he want Untouchability removed?

He wanted the Touchable Hindus to change their ways. To do something for untouchables. In another words he left the fate of the Untouchables in the hands of Touchable Hindus. Ambedkar and others who were themselves from among the Untouchables demanded a political position, in which Untouchables themselves could speak for themselves. This is not a new position at all. All minorities want this. Ambedkar demanded this by constitutional means, while in most other places these days people demand it by violent means.

Would this position of demanding recognition as a minority have been useful to British as against Touchable Hindus?

Yes. All minority struggles face that problem. But, if it were to be argued that because of this, the minority should remain subordinate to the majority, it amounts to saying accept inhuman treatment of yourself in order to defend the interests of the majority.

Did Untouchables benefit from the British?

Yes. They were able to get jobs which Touchable Hindu's would not give them due to their low ranks or absence of rank under the Hindu caste system. The Untouchables were recruited to the army and the police. This was the first break the Untouchables had expended their history for many centuries. This paved the way for other possibilities, such as education. In other words, if British or any other power did not come to India, the Untouchables' position would have remained unchanged and would have become even worse.

Were there other prominent Indian leaders who spoke against Untouchability?

Many. Here is what Swami Vivekananda, the most prominent spokesman for Hindus, said. "Just see, for want of sympathy from the Hindus, thousands of pariahs in Madras are turning Christians. Don't think this is due simply to pinch of hunger; it is because they do not get any sympathy from us. We are day and night calling out to them. 'Don't touch us, don't touch us' ... Unless they are raised this motherland of ours will never awake! ... Let us open our eyes - I see as clear as day-light that the same Brahman, the same Shakti that is in me is in them as well; only here is a difference in the degree of manifestation - that is all. In the whole history of the world, have you ever seen a country rise without a free circulation of national blood throughout its entire body?". [*The Hindu*, dt. January 14, 1989].

And again

"They talk of patriotism. I believe in patriotism and I also have my own ideal of patriotism. Three things are necessary for great achievements. First, feel from the Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have

become next door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming constant with your heart-beats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step". [*Socio-Political Views of Vivekananda*, Peoples Publishing House, Pages 54-55].

Did Gandhi say anything in a similar vein?

Yes. On many occasions. Here is one.

"After all, one can only judge a system or an institution by the conduct of its representatives. What is more, Dr. Ambedkar found that the vast majority of Savarana Hindus had not only conducted themselves inhumanly against those of their fellow religionists, whom they classed as untouchables, but they had based their conduct on the authority of their scriptures, and when he began to search them he had found ample warrant for their beliefs in untouchability and all its implications. The author of the address [Ambedkar] has quoted chapter and verse in proof of his three-fold indictment-inhuman conduct itself, the unabashed justification for it on the part of the perpetrators, and the subsequent discovery that the justification was warranted by their scriptures. No Hindu who prizes his faith above life itself can afford to underrate the importance of this indictment. Dr. Ambedkar is not alone in his disgust." Gandhi did not dispute the facts relating to ill treatment of untouchables. He instead called on the Hindus to change their ways. "The Savarnas have to correct their belief and their con-

duct. Above all those who are by their learning and influence among the Savarnas have to give an authoritative interpretation of the scriptures." [*Harijan*, July 11, 1936]

Having said all that why did he not recognise Untouchables as a minority?

Gandhi's constituency was the touchable Hindus. While he could plead with the Touchables to be nice to Untouchables, he could not take any drastic action against them. The Hindu fundamentalists killed him for doing much less.

What is the essence of the argument that Shourie has put forward in his book?

The essence of Shourie's argument is that all Hindu leaders were engaged in a mighty effort to roll back debilitating effects of the calumnies about our culture and religion which Christian missionaries and British rulers had implanted in our minds. While they were exerting with their very lives to restore in us a sense of self-worth and there by stand us on our feet, every single thing that Ambedkar wrote was a continuation of calumnies - it was as if a painters assistant been put to add some even more garish colours to a caricature that missionaries and rulers put out. That is the nature of the book Shourie has written.

How true is that?

The existence of Untouchability is a historical fact. All Hindu leaders of the time including Swami Vivekananda and Gandhi recognised that and agonised over the fact. To say missionaries invented the talk about Untouchability is a subtle way of trying to get over this fact. This is like saying, a man is dead only because his enemy tells him he is dead. To treat the fact of Untouchability as a fiction, is the

foundation on which this book is based. To accept Shourie's ideas we must believe that there was and is no such thing called Untouchability, affecting millions of people (in Ambedkar's time, 60 million people) in India. Missionaries made it all up. (This is the type of propaganda that is used against Christians these days in India)

How about self-worth?

The author is right in this aspect but perhaps not in the way he meant it. If the Touchables want to get self worth, they must give up this distinction and save these vast millions from their inhuman condition. How can people who consider it their right and duty to maintain untouchability, have self-respect? To use a phrase from psychology, they must mourn their evil doings and give these things up. They must accept social equality. Now, social equality is the main slogan of Ambedkar. Shourie had forgotten that slogan.

When Untouchables gain self-worth, despite obstacles created by Touchables, there is a diminishment of self-worth of Touchables. Just like what happened during French Revolution, when the rise of the unrecognised people did diminish the self-worth of the Nobles, Lords etc, the only way they can regain self-worth is by repudiating their inhumane past. Social equality is the path through which Caste oppression will come to an end and every one can become human.

Why was Ambedkar recognised as Baratha Ratna (A Jewel of India), the highest recognition in India?

Due to the recognition of the rise of Untouchables who now call themselves Dalits (a term Ambedkar gave them, which means the oppressed) they are now a force to be reckoned with. In the same way, the speeches and writings of Ambedkar have been published in 14 volumes, according to Shourie going into 9996 pages. Many of

these books are published about him and his work.. And now, there is a world wide interest in Caste-based oppression. That is why, though Shourie laments, these books have been published "officially by the government of Mahrastra and sold at a subsidized price!"

Why is Shourie particularly angry about this publication? Because Ambedkar minutely recorded his position and left it to the posterity. He knew that high caste historians, writing the history of the times would distort reality. Ambedkar, as Gandhi said was not a man who would allow himself to be forgotten. Ambedkar was a clear thinker. He was precise and always accurate. Shourie's book is full of repetition, inaccurate from the very first sentence of the book. Factually, this book can be challenged, beginning from the very first sentence, "Ambedkar's public life begins in a sense from a public meeting held at Damodar Hall Bombay on March 1924." In fact Ambedkar was already writing in 1913. Ambedkar was invited to join the Indian HomeRule League and he wrote, "If you are going to keep Untouchables as your slaves, while fighting for independence, I cannot join hands with you." This is the public position he held all his life. He wrote his paper *Castes In India* in 1916 and it was published in Indian Antiquity in 1917. In 1920 Ambedkar started the weekly journal Mook-Nayak to champion the cause of depressed classes in India. In one leading article of this journal he wrote, "It is not enough to have just a politically independent India. What is also needed is to have an Indian nation where every citizen will have religious and political rights, so that every person will have equal opportunity to develop." By 1924, Ambedkar was well known for his position regarding eradication. The meeting referred to by Shourie is a meeting organised by Ambedkar to launch a movement for uplifting of depressed classes. Thus, Shourie begins his first sentence wrong. As for the title of the first chapter, "The Freedom Fighter", this itself is wrong

as it should have been either, "Freedom Fighter for Untouchables" or "The Freedom Fighter for The Full Independence of All Indians."

Who are the real enemies of Gandhi?

Those who killed him of course. The Hindu fundamentalists. They have undone even the little that was gained by way of independence. And tried to undo whatever Untouchables (Dalits) have gained due to their own struggles. Shourie often talks of gratitude. That is the Caste attitude. It is as if others exist by their benevolence. The Caste attitudes and arrogance contained in the book make it very distasteful.

Is it true as Shourie says that when Ambedkar talks of Untouchable he meant himself and his followers?

A claim of Shourie's is that by "untouchables" Ambedkar always meant himself and his band of associates. Either Shourie has not read at least a part of the 9996 pages he has counted or he has not understood any.

Annihilation of Caste, Who are Untouchables, The Buddha and his Dhamma, are a few publications by Ambedkar and his associates. Is this sentence, which sums up Ambedkar's position on the Hindu theological basis of untouchability, about himself?

"The Hindus hold to the sacredness of the social order. Caste has a divine basis. You must therefore destroy the sacredness and divinity with which caste has become invested. In the last analysis, this means you must destroy the authority of Sastras and the Vedas."

This is what Jawaharlal Nehru wrote of the commitment of Ambedkar to the untouchables: "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar would be remembered mostly as the symbol of revolt against all the oppressing features of Hindu society. In a way he symbolised the hopes and aspi-

rations of the oppressed and the untouchables.”

What were the main trends of thought on the issue of untouchability during Ambedkar's time?

There were three positions; The most conservative touchables maintained their position as right and did not want change. A second group called enlightened Hindus wanted a fundamental change in caste practices. Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, and many persons belonged to that group. They advocated intermarriages and dining together and things like that. They believed that they could convince the Touchable Hindus to change. The third position, maintained by Ambedkar and many others, was that the initiative for change must come from Untouchables themselves - they should defy caste rules and enter temples, women should dare to dress like Brahmin women and in fact break all the rules related to Caste. However, this third group said that since Caste is based on religious teachings contained in Hindu sacred texts, they must reject the authority of these books. Shourie, judging by his book, belongs to the first group mentioned above.

What is the theory of history contained in Shourie's book?

His book is based on conspiracy theory. Everything that happened during the British times is a British conspiracy. Leaders of Muslims, the Sikhs and Untouchables were all in this conspiracy. [The leftist followers of this conspiracy theory put also Gandhi in that category. Perhaps, Godse too did the same]

Every act that Ambedkar did played into this conspiracy, if you go by Shourie's book. Shourie, who is said to be a former World Bank employee, cannot understand that there are many social groups in a society and there are conflicts of interests. Political leaders are but representative of these social groups; a nation is only Nation when

there are real arrangements for flow of blood between various groups that constitute it. This Hindu society, due to the caste system had ceased to be such a Nation to deny the existence of separate groups as Shourie does, is to be ignorant of the most important fact of any society.

Is it wrong to Criticise Gandhi?

It is strange that Shourie does not condemn Hindu fundamentalism, which is responsible for Gandhi's death, nor does he talk about the way Gandhi is totally disregarded in Modern Indian politics. But he is offended because Ambedkar criticised Gandhi on the issue of Untouchables. Gandhi himself was different. He once said, "Even if he [Ambedkar] spits on my face, I have no right to fight back, because of what we Hindus have done to his people." He knew that Ambedkar, much against his will, signed the Poona pact just to save Gandhi's life. The Untouchables, who had suffered all through history, are no murderers. The murderer of Gandhi came from the touchables. Will Shourie in his next book examine the forces and persons behind the Murder of Gandhi? He will then be able to tell the world how much of the political forces of India today are linked not to Gandhi, but rather to the same forces that were responsible for the murder of Gandhi.

What is Shourie's method of writing?

It is to select quotes, mostly out of context and almost always small part out of lengthy writings, and then fit them into a conspiracy theory. It is shameless misrepresentation most of the time. Take for example the issue "What Gandhi and the Congress did for Untouchables". Nothing of the lengthy factual narration is cited, only a few manipulatable quotes taken out of context. Shourie is angry about the publication of the book. No surprise. Any one who reads the "What Gandhi and the Congress did for Untouchables" will see

what a distortion Shourie has made and how much he has suppressed.

Are Shourie's ideas original?

Nothing is original. He borrowed his basic thesis from Rai Bahadur Mehrchand. Here is the thesis, the type of man who spread it and the comment of Ambedkar. It is taken from Ambedkar's book "What Gandhi and the Congress did for Untouchables"

As an illustration of such propoganda I refer to what one Rai Bahadur Mehrchand Khanna is reported to have said at a meeting of the Untouchables held at Peshawar on April 12, 1945 under the auspices of the Depressed Classes League:

"Your best friend is Mahatma Gandhi who even resorted to a fast for your sake and brought about the Poona Pact under which you have been enfranchised and given representation on local bodies and legislatures. Some of you, I know, have been running after Dr. Ambedkar, who is just a creation of the British Imperialists and who uses you to strengthen the hands of the British Government in order that India may be divided and the Britishers continue to retain power. I appeal to you in your interests, to distinguish between self-styled leaders and your real friends."

"If I refer to the statement of Rai Bahadur Mehrchand Khanna it is not because he is worth taking notice of. For there cannot be anyone guilty of bigger blackguardism in Indian politics than this man. In the course of one year - not in very remote time but in 1944 - he successfully played three different roles. He started as Secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha, turned agent of British Imperialism, went abroad to explain India's war effort to the British and American people and is now agent of the Congress in N.W.F. Province. The opinion of a man like Rai Bahadur Khanna, who, to use Dryden language, is so vari-

ous as to be everything by starts, and nothing long, and who in the course of one revolving moon, can be a chemist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon', must be beneath contempt. If I refer to him it is only because I wish to illustrate what sort of propaganda friends of Gandhi are carrying on in order to beguile the Untouchables."

"I do not know how many Untouchables will be found prepared to swallow such a lie. But this much I think has been proved by the Nazis that if a lie is a big lie - too big for the common man's intelligence to scrutinize - and if it is repeated continuously, the lie has all the chances of being accepted as truth and if not accepted as truth has all the chances of growing upon the victims of propaganda and win their acquiescence. It is, therefore, necessary for me to expose the part played by Gandhi in the movement of the Untouchables and to warn the Untouchables against succumbing to this propaganda."

What is the purpose of trying to diminish the importance of Ambedkar?

In the contemporary political debate as reflected in recent elections the political observers have noted the attempt to exclude the Dalits and suppress the Dalit discourse in Indian politics. The upper and intermediary castes turns away from any of the major political parties if they articulate Dalit demands. The major parties are said to be afraid of even trying to attract Dalit votes for the fear they may lose the votes of the other castes.

Fifty years after independence, caste prejudices in India have not erased very much. And now there is a deliberate attempt to revive these prejudices to their former position.

Who was more fortunate- Gandhi or Ambedkar?

The destiny of leaders is circumscribed by the people they represent. The people they represent are the people from whom they emerge and the people they serve. Those called "one's own", or "the brothers and the sisters." Gandhi was a Banya, that from traders castes. Banyas were touchable to Bhramins, Soldiers and related sub-castes. From the time Ghandi came back from South Africa, his main supporters and benefactors came from among these castes. By his own admission, he began to be aware of untouchability only when he was about twelve.

"I was hardly yet twelve when this idea had dawned on me. A scavenger named Ukha, an Untouchable, used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him, why I was forbidden to touch him. If I accidentally touched Ukha, I was asked to perform ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion, that it was impossible that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents. I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Ukha as sinful."

By the time he got to do something about it he was almost fifty.

He could never feel what it meant to be an Untouchable. He could not be a part of the history of Untouchables. He could therefore define his own identity in terms of his link to untouchables. A leader's vision depends on what he or she deeply identifies his or her self with. At best he could think of himself as an outsider who wanted to help the Untouchables. In that role, those who obstructed him most were his own people, the brethren who held caste alliance to him.

From the point of view of historic destiny Ambedkar was much more blessed. He was an Untouchable. His people, his brethren were Untouchables. The birth marks written in his consciousness and the unconscious self were the marks of the untouchables. For his people, every little step towards freedom meant a great deal. When they got their first employment outside their outcast status in the British army it was an enormous step towards freedom for them, something deprived from them for many centuries. Then, when they were able to send their children to school out of their little savings, it too was an unthinkable advance for them. Ambedkar's father attached a great importance to the education of his children. When he found some school did not pay attention to the children of the Untouchables, he changed schools. For an Untouchable going abroad for education was also a great boon. Going abroad meant not only getting an opportunity for education, but also getting exposed to a world where caste discrimination did not exist. This made it easy to realise that caste definitions exists only in India and the rest of the world were able to relate to human beings purely as human beings. Birth did not define every aspect of life and social mobility was a fact. This helped those who were exposed to the world outside to realise that caste was not a universal and permanent factor.

Everything that Ambedkar fought for meant a great deal for these people, however small each achievement may have looked to others, who were unable to comprehend the extent of the discrimination Untouchables have suffered. He had a constituency which wanted change, while Gandhi's constituency did not want any change as far as social relationships with in India was concerned. Ambedkar's constituency aspired for the same ideals he aspired for, while Gandhi's constituency rejected the basic ideals of Ghandi regarding social relationships in India. Ambedkar was his peoples emancipator. Gandhi

was a prisoner of his own people. Every page that Ambedkar wrote regarding their history, their struggles and their future remain a great treasure among his people.

From the point of historic destiny, Gandhi was a tragic figure. His very fame points only to the weaknesses of his own people. Ambedkar whose life was less spectacular, does have the last laugh. His birth into a social group of persons who have suffered the worst treatment of history ironically is the greatest advantage he had in a moment of history when the changes became possible.

Now, more than 50 years after the Indian independence, more or less a similar time after their deaths, how have the most basic ideas of the two leaders stood the test of time?

For Gandhi, there was but one ambition, to get the British to quit India. For Ambedkar, the two goals were combined in his ambition, quitting of the British must be accompanied by the introduction of a system of governance that will guarantee basic justice to all Indians.

Gandhi was willing to risk India receding into anarchy in order to achieve his ambition. His Satyagrahas had within them the seeds of liberation and the seeds of anarchy. He made no attempt to address those possibilities of anarchy. Perhaps he neither had the knowledge nor the inclination to consider the issues of governance. He saw the possibility of anarchy arising from the use of violence. So, his mass mobilisation was based on Ahimsa, non-violence. But non-violent civil disobedience too contains liberative as well as anarchical aspects. Anarchy is inherent when clear alternatives are absent. The liberation from the British came with anarchy and this continues till today. (In this, the Civil Disobedience Movement of South Africa led by Mandela and others was far more advanced, as the alternative to Apartheid was discussed and agreed upon, including the rights of the minorities.)

Ambedkar, more knowledgeable and inclined towards addressing constitutional matters, clearly predicted this situation and tried to work towards its elimination. His attitude regarding anarchy was summed up in the following words; "*Had my mind been seized with hatred and revenge, I would have brought disaster upon this land in less than five years.*" Even in his bitter opposition to Hinduism, the alternative he suggested was Buddhism, an Indian philosophy, which advocated middle path.

As against Gandhi, Ambedkar's hero was Ranade. We have this from one of the biographers of Ambedkar, Dananjay Keer (who also wrote biographies of Gandhi and several other Indian leaders. He was awarded the honour of Padma Bhushan by the government of India in 1971, in recognition of his writings).

"In the course of his speech Ambedkar compared the age of Ranade with the age of Gandhi. The age of Ranade was honest and more enlightened. In the age of Ranade the leaders struggled to modernise India. The leaders took care to be well-clad. A politician who was not a student was treated as an intolerable nuisance. In that age people engaged themselves in studying and examining the facts of life, and moulded their lives and character in accordance with the light they found as a result of their research. In the age of Gandhi leaders took pride in being half-clad and were making India a living specimen of antiquity. Learning was not deemed to be a necessary qualification for a politician, and people ceased to read and examine the facts of life. So his verdict was that Gandhi age was the dark age of India." (*Ambedkar, Life and Mission*, First printed in 1954 and reprinted 12 times up to 1997).

In Ambedkar's writing and speeches there is a deep concern for how things are going to be in future. For him, mass mobilisation alone

was not enough. The masses needed to be transformed, educated and given opportunities to better their status, economically, socially and intellectually. For this there had to be acceptance of principles and practices of good governance, with due safe-guards for the participation of minorities on the basis of social equality.

Gandhi was one of the greatest mobilisers of masses the world has seen. His fasts and Satyagrahas had the same capacity to mobilize masses as Mao Tsetung's Long March and Stalin's mobilising of masses to fight against the Fascists. They all won their battles. They bowed out of the theatre recognised as victors. The anarchy that followed in each of these instances was inherent in the belief that mass mobilisation alone was the solution.

APPENDIX 2

Can Asians Think?*

A Critique of the book by Kishore Mahbubani

Though the book merely repeats the common views expressed from the point of view of "Asian Values", still the author's call for a debate on the question posed by the title of the book, is worth pursuing.

The author is a Singaporean diplomat and his views are couched within the framework of Lee Kuan-yew's dogmas. However, if the Singaporeans were posed the question, Can you think? Three answers are likely to emerge. The hard-core group who according Lee Kuan-yew rules Singapore will answer, "Yes we can and further we must." The supporters of the ruling PAP is likely to answer, "No, we do not need to. Our leaders are supposed to do that." The rest are likely to answer, "No. We should not. It is very dangerous to think."

* An article by Basil Fernando, published in *Human Rights SOLIDARITY*, Volume 9, No. 10, October 1999 issue, a publication of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), as a review of *CAN ASIANS THINK?* by Kishore Mahbubani, published by Times Book International-1998. The author criticises the so-called Asian Values upheld by leaders of authoritarian regimes as the major obstacles of independent thinking.

So long as Suharto ruled, Indonesians may have answered in the same way. The same can be said of South Koreans during the military regimes, with the exception that a considerable number said, "it is dangerous to think but still we shall do so." That thinking finally brought the two South Korean presidents to trial. In Burma (Myanmar) thinking is regarded as dangerous and leading to serious trouble. Look at the trouble Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters are having!

Dalits and Asian Values

Regarding India, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar tried to answer this question already in 1937 in a speech that was published as a booklet titled *Annihilation of Caste*. Ambedkar took for granted a negative answer to the question under consideration as far as Hindu India was concerned and concentrated in answering as to why there was paralysis in the Indian mind. He found it in the system of internal division of the society on the basis of caste which made it impossible for the Indian mind to accept equality of all. Without acceptance of equality as a concept, thinking only increased the divisions. Thus, the issue was not whether Asians can think, but whether it was possible for them to think through negative attitudes implanted in them by their own cultures and turn them into positive ones. In other words, can they think out of the system of authority which they have inherited?

This is the very question Mahbubani tries to avoid. According to him, like to all spokespersons of Asian values, respect for authority is a great Asian value. The history of freedom of thought is one against the systems of authority. Asians who had broken with systems of authority at some periods of history, once again fell back before new systems of even harsher forms of authority and thus lost the capacity for creative thought.

The Makings of the Western Mind

Mahbubani sees the change in the Western mind during last five hundred years as magical. However, history shows it was not magic, but a fight against faith and magic with sweat and sacrifice that made the change in the Western mind. It was not magicians but heretics who helped to form the Western mind. The western mind is a mind that rebels against every form of authority, except those forms which are mutually agreed, including the agreed limits of authority. If one can speak of the Western mind in general terms, the most common aspect of that mind is the rebellion against every form of super-imposed authority. If Western people can think, it means, they can think for themselves and do not have to depend on some authorities to do the thinking for them. If the Asian mind cannot think, it can only mean it still depends on some authorities. Friedrich Nietzsche might have said that even the Western mind cannot yet fully think, as it has not yet fully broken away from the need for authority.

Mahbubani's plea for Asians to think and his defence of authority as an Asian value are two contradictory positions. This contradiction may be the explanation for the question he has raised. If Asian uniqueness depends on their respect of authority, then to give up that would be to give up the uniqueness; this may be seen as imitation of the West.

Obviously an absurdity is involved in this. The western mind thinks; the Asian mind also now thinks; Therefore the Asian mind is imitating the Western one! So, if the Asian mind wants to think in a unique way, it must think with respect to authority, which means it must not think at all. The uniqueness of various different groups within humanity does not get obliterated when people think. Though Mahbubani has put all Western people as one, among each nation and group there are many peculiarities. The way Scandinavian countries

think of many questions is different to others; and the French everyone knows are not like the English.

Thus, the respect for authority need not be a great unique feature of the Asians. It is only a unique feature of the mentally paralyzed. Buddha, the best-known Asian personality opposed authority as much as any rationalist in the West. Yet, the uniqueness of Buddha's teachings will not be denied by anyone. No one will say, he is an imitator of the West or the West has imitated him. The question of uniqueness does not lie in unique values, but in the way those values are formed and expressed. Uniqueness is not the way we differentiate ourselves from others, but how we show our commonness in our own different ways. A Danish person's Western mind shows as different to other Western people not by how it is different from the rest, but how it shares a commonness while still been very Danish.

People's Respect of Authority and Authority's Respect of the People - Which is Better?

Mahbubani, like other spokespersons for Asian values, speaks of respect of authority as an Asian value. In the West, Ever since Luther's attack on Papacy and the French revolution, what is held as a value is the obligation of the rulers to respect the people. Which is the better value? What is special about Asian rulers that they deserve more respect? What is wrong with Asian people that they do not deserve the respect of their rulers? Is it exaggeration to suggest that basically the rhetoric in favour of Asian values is hypocritical?

During the last Thousand years or so, Extreme Forms of Repression Made Asians Into a Demoralised People: How Can A Demoralized People Think Creatively?

That Asia, particularly India and China once had great civilizations in the past and that they have lost it is common ground. The

question really is how. Was it not the internal authoritarian systems that killed these civilizations but created demoralisation among the people? The process of internal repression, when it loses all control, kills the very soul and the spirit of the people. It is the spirit of the people that gives rise to creative thoughts and ideas. If the Asians cannot think, it is these internal systems of repression that have strangled them. The depth of internal repression has turned Asians into demoralised people; that made it easy for them to be subjugated by foreign powers. The subjugation by foreign powers further increased the repression and made them even more demoralised. The rulers who have succeeded the colonial masters have tried to benefit from this demoralisation and established their own authoritarian systems. They have created ideologies to justify such authoritarianism and the promotion of so-called "Asian Values" is part of this ideology. Under the pretext of respect for authority, it upgrades willing subjugation to authoritarianism into a value. Such subjugation, which should be treated as a vice, is made a virtue.

Was the "Asian Miracle" a Unique Historical Experience? Where Is It Any Way?

Mahbubani's arguments rest mostly on the "Asian Miracle", the sudden economic output of East Asian economies which he thinks has been a unique historical experience. However, this is not historically accurate. Russia, in the twenties and early thirties saw such an unprecedented growth. It also was even able to show itself as a super-power. Its space programmes showed better results initially than those of others. Was it due to some uniqueness of the Russian mind or the Socialist mind? The truth is that authoritarianism can produce remarkable results in the short run. However, it does so at the risk of great disasters in the long run. Asian value arguments are not new. Such arguments have been in favour of other forms of authoritarianism

before.

Modern Asian disasters come from the submission of Asian minds to various forms of authoritarianism, which took over different countries in different times of history. It was the paralysis of minds and subsequent divisions that made it easy for colonial powers to subjugate Asia. It was the grip of the caste system that made it possible for the British to take over and rule India. Other forms of status systems gripped other countries. It is these very status systems that are upheld by the so-called Asian value of respect for authority. The cause of paralysis of the Asian mind is upheld as its cure. That, surely, is absurd.

Mahbubani gives reasons in favour of three possible answers to the question, Can Asians Think? - They Cannot, They Can and MayBe. We can give different reasons for each of these answers.

The Reasons for a "Cannot" Answer:

The fact that quite a lot of Asian intellectuals slavishly accept the deeper processes of internal repression in their societies show that they cannot still think. They are mere ideologues with a new rhetoric, defending systems having age old traits of brutal repression similar to those which existed in medieval Europe or in 20th Century Stalinism; whether the system of repression is National Security Laws as in Malaysia or Singapore, or the Caste System of India and other South Asian Countries, The Sakdina system of Thailand, other status based systems in other countries or the Communist systems in several others, these are all deep systems of repression.

A further reason for a negative answer is that creative and positive thought requires genuine ability on the part of intellectuals, including those who work for government in genuine cooperation with

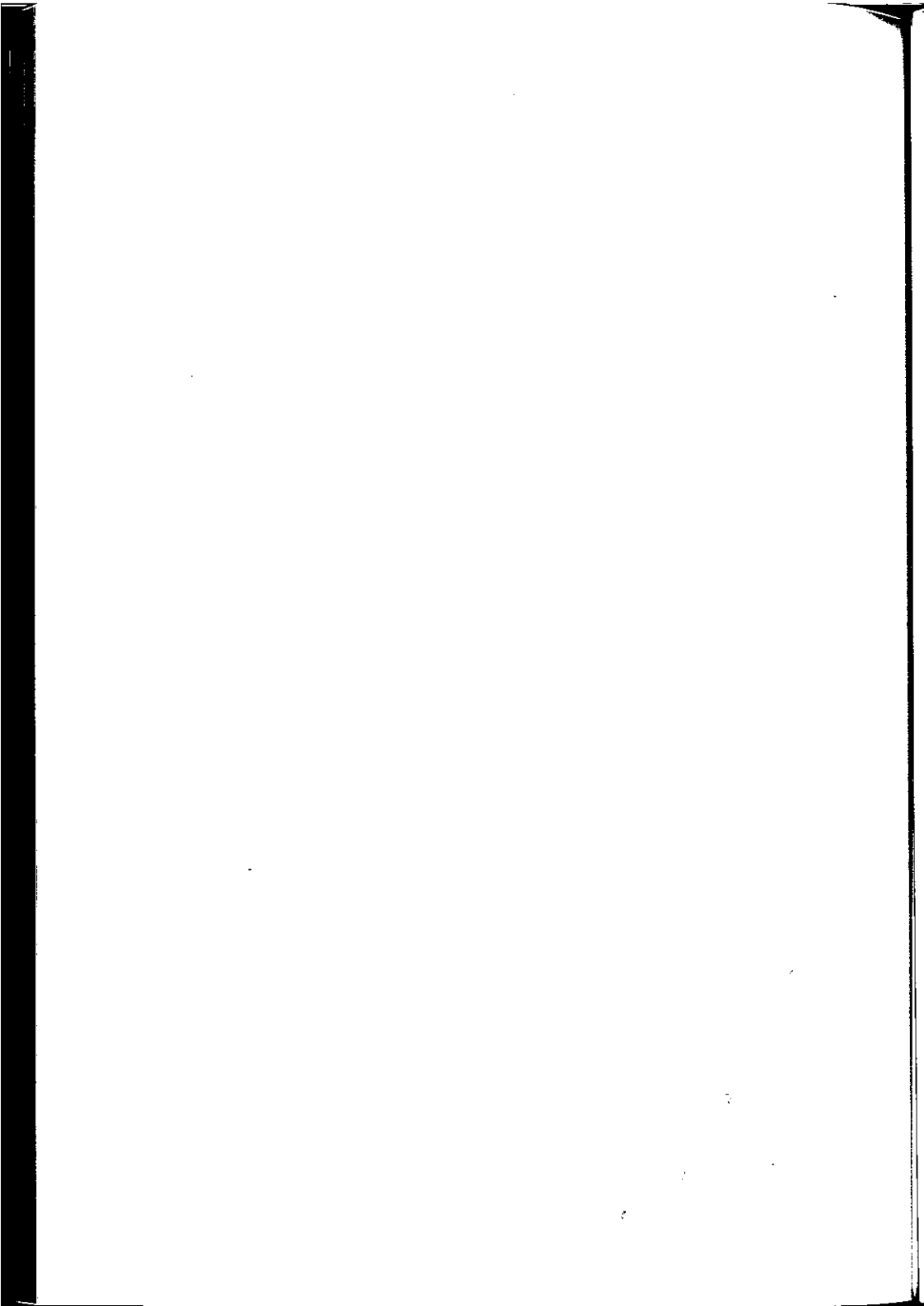
ordinary people. To do so, they need to undergo change of values and understand the value of respecting people. However, most are incapable of psychological and spiritual transformation. A paralysis of a civilization cannot be cured without the participation of everyone, for civilisation belongs to every one. The concept of the rule by core-group as it exists in Singapore is an anti-civilisation mode of thought.

The Reasons for a “Can” Answer:

In all countries in Asia, there is a rebellion against authoritarian systems: Ambedkar and Dalit movement in India, Democratic movements in Thailand, Anwar and the democratic protests in Malaysia, struggle for reform in China are some examples. The end of the Cold War has created the possibility of mobilising protest for democratic change instead of taking destructive paths such as the Cambodian one under Khmer Rouge. The most hopeful factor is that because the newly educated people in Asia come from the “Bottom”, from generations that have been subjected to internal repression, they can also show the way out of it. However, there is a long way to go.

The Reasons for a “Maybe” Answer:

The Singapore government publication “Singapore-21”, shows the realisation that old ways may have to be given way for the future. The East Asian crisis has opened the eyes of many as to the sustainability of some of the models of developments pursued in recent decades. A whole young generation exposed to better communication is likely also to challenge the old ways. Maybe the very survival will push the Asians to recreate their society in a less repressive manner.



APPENDIX 3

The First Great Revolt Against Chaturvarna*

That there would have been much opposition to Chaturvarna philosophy and practices is natural, for it imposed barbarous conditions upon many. In fact, literature provides many examples of such resistance. However, one great revolt made history and for quite some time kept Indian society open, defeating forces supporting the enclosed Caste units. This was the social revolution led by Siddhartha Gottama Buddha. Buddha refused to recognize Caste distinction. He attacked the Chaturvarna philosophy both theoretically and practically, by creating a new type of a religious leadership, the *Sangha*. This movement, with begging bowl in hand, entered into communion with all sectors of society, including the lowest Castes.

Himself a born follower of *Sanatana Dharma*, Buddha tested its every tenet and found it false. In his later teaching he repudiated each of these tenets. He refused to recognize the belief in God or soul as a precondition for leading a good life¹; he rejected the authority of Vedas;

* An extract from a paper by Basil Fernando presented at an International Conference on Discrimination & Toleration, held at Copenhagen sponsored by Copenhagen University and Danish Centre for Human Rights, May 2000.

¹ This position is very similar to Gruntdivig's position on the primacy of folk life noted above.

he refused to recognize superiority based on birth; he opposed *Vedic* sacrifices. He repudiated the Caste system.

Buddha recognized the right of everyone to learn. He admitted persons belonging to any Caste into his following, admonishing all who became his disciples to abandon Caste. He allowed women into the Sangha, whereas the Brahmins forbade women even to read the Vedas, considering them as "impure as falsehood itself".² His fundamentalist position was an all-round attack on enclosed social units and a call for more open social interactions. From rejection of the Vedas and Vedic sacrifices also grew his position on non-violence.³ Rejection of violence against all beings, insects, animals and others naturally implied opposition to the use of violence against human beings. The Caste system rested on the threat of violence by a higher Caste against a lower Caste. Without this threat, Caste enclosures could not last.

While all these positions can be considered radical, in my view Buddha's most fundamental attack on the Caste system was the creation of the Sangha. In it, Buddha created a substitute for the Bhramin.⁴ Yet these religious leaders differed from Bhramins in every aspect. The most extreme difference between the two was the begging bowl.⁵ It is interesting to note that the begging bowl was called *bhiksha patra*, which literally meant 'sharing bowl'. Likewise, the word *bhikkhu*, meaning "member of the Sangha", is derived from *bhik*, of the root

² According to the Law of Manu.

³ Buddha's contemporary, Mahavira, the best-known exponent of *Jainism*, preached non-violence with even greater completeness.

⁴ In the western context this was very much like Luther's reforms to Catholicism of his time.

⁵ Before Bhraminism had turned into Caste, Bhramins too begged for food; later donations to them had to be given in money or chattel.

bhaj, meaning "the wish to share".⁶ Thus, one religious leadership sought enclosure, the other acted on a desire to share. To beg for food from anyone, including a Sudra, was indeed the very annihilation of Caste. One Indian scholar notes: "What this means is difficult to explain to anyone who does not know that most Indians would rather go hungry, and many have preferred death by starvation to eating soiled food or that prepared by a person of a lower Caste."⁷ The Sangha moved among all persons. Their position was not hereditary but one of choice. The choice was not for power but for sharing. The following poem by an early monk reflects the radical change of lifestyle that came as result of joining the Sangha:

*I made a hut
From three palm leaves by the Ganges
Took a crematory pot
For an eating bowl,
Lifted my rope off a trash bin
Two rainy seasons passed and I
Spoke only one word
Clouds came again
But this time the darkness
Tore open⁸*

⁶ Nalin Swaris, *Buddha's Way to Human Liberation- A Sociological Approach*, Sridevi Printers, Dehiwala, 1999, pg.399.

⁷ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India*, Vikas Publishers, New Delhi, 1977 [1970] p.103. Quoted in Swaris.

⁸ *Songs of the Sons and Daughters of Buddha*, Translated by Andrew Schellining and Anne Waldman, Shambhala Publications, Inc, Boston, Massachusetts, 1996, pg. 4. Original texts were from *Thragarha* and *Theirigarha*, two books preserved in Pali scriptures, the earliest written documents known to Buddhism.

Taking a crematory pot as a food bowl, taking a robe off a trash bin; these were marks of renunciation, from the prestigious position of the highest Caste to identify with the lowest, the Sudras.

Like the Lutheran Reformation, Buddha's renaissance spread fast. The sheer frustration people would have had under the Chaturwarna system may have been the main reason for its advancement. Human nature inevitably revolts against enclosed systems and Folk Life makes use of every opportunity to rise again when it appears crushed.

Soon, it influenced even kings, among whom Emperor Ashoka remains the best known. Ashoka had been shaken by the violence of war. After more than two and a half years due consideration, he converted to Buddhism and helped to propagate it beyond the borders of India. It has been written of his era that "Buddhism of [Emperor Ashoka's] age was not merely a religious belief; it was in addition a social and intellectual movement at many levels, influencing many aspects of society. Obviously, any statesman worth the name would have had to come to terms with it."⁹ Ashoka transformed Buddhist teaching into a philosophy explaining the responsibilities people owe to each other. Ashoka spread this system by edicts:

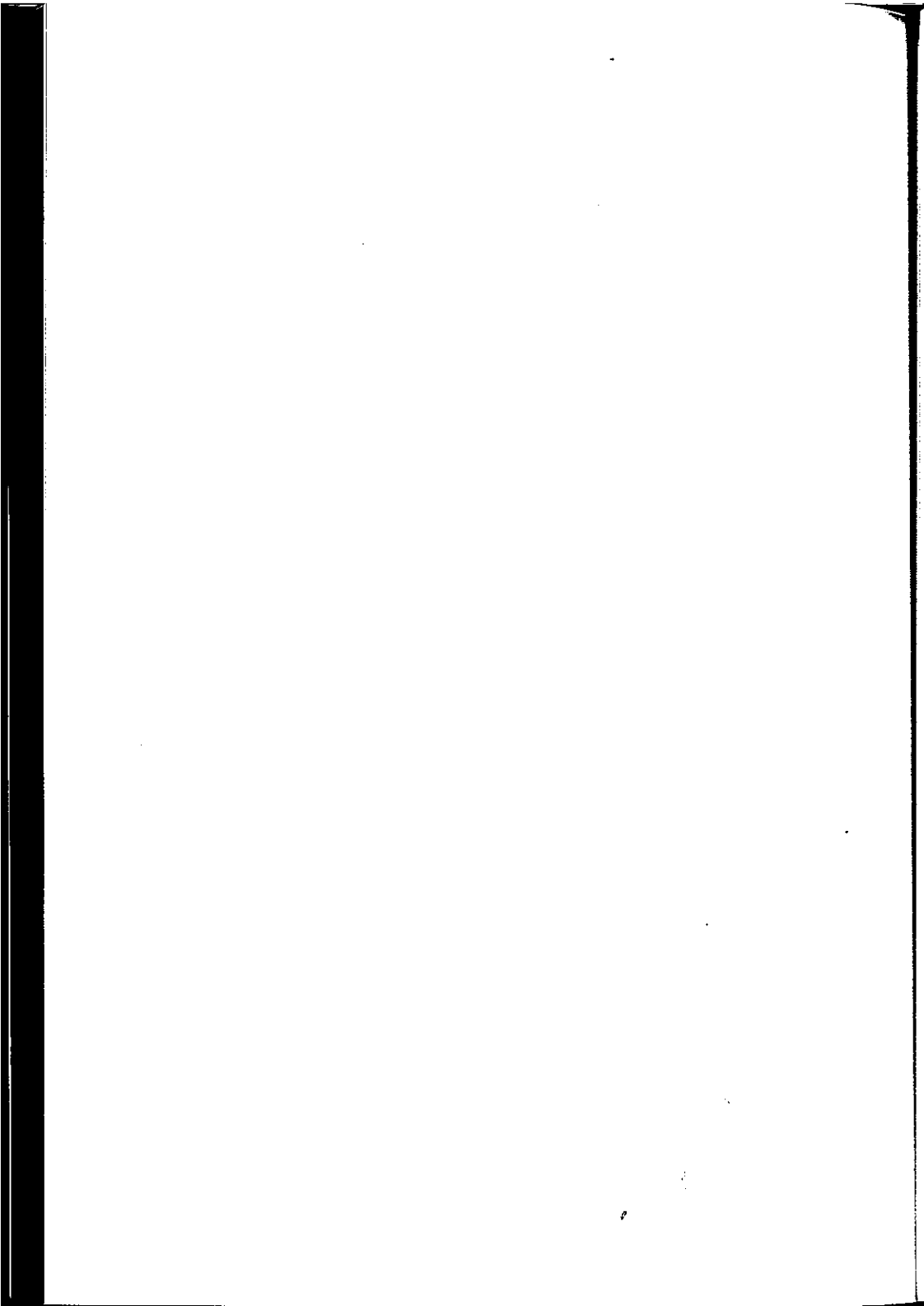
"These may be described as proclamations to the public at large. They explain the idea of Dhamma [Universal Law]. It was in this concept in the context of Mauryan India that the true achievement of Ashoka lay. He did not see Dhamma as piety resulting from good deeds inspired by formal religious beliefs, but as an attitude of social responsibility. In the past, historians have generally interpreted Ashoka's Dhamma almost as a synonym for Buddhism, suggesting thereby that Ashoka was concerned with making Buddhism the state religion. It is doubtful if this was his

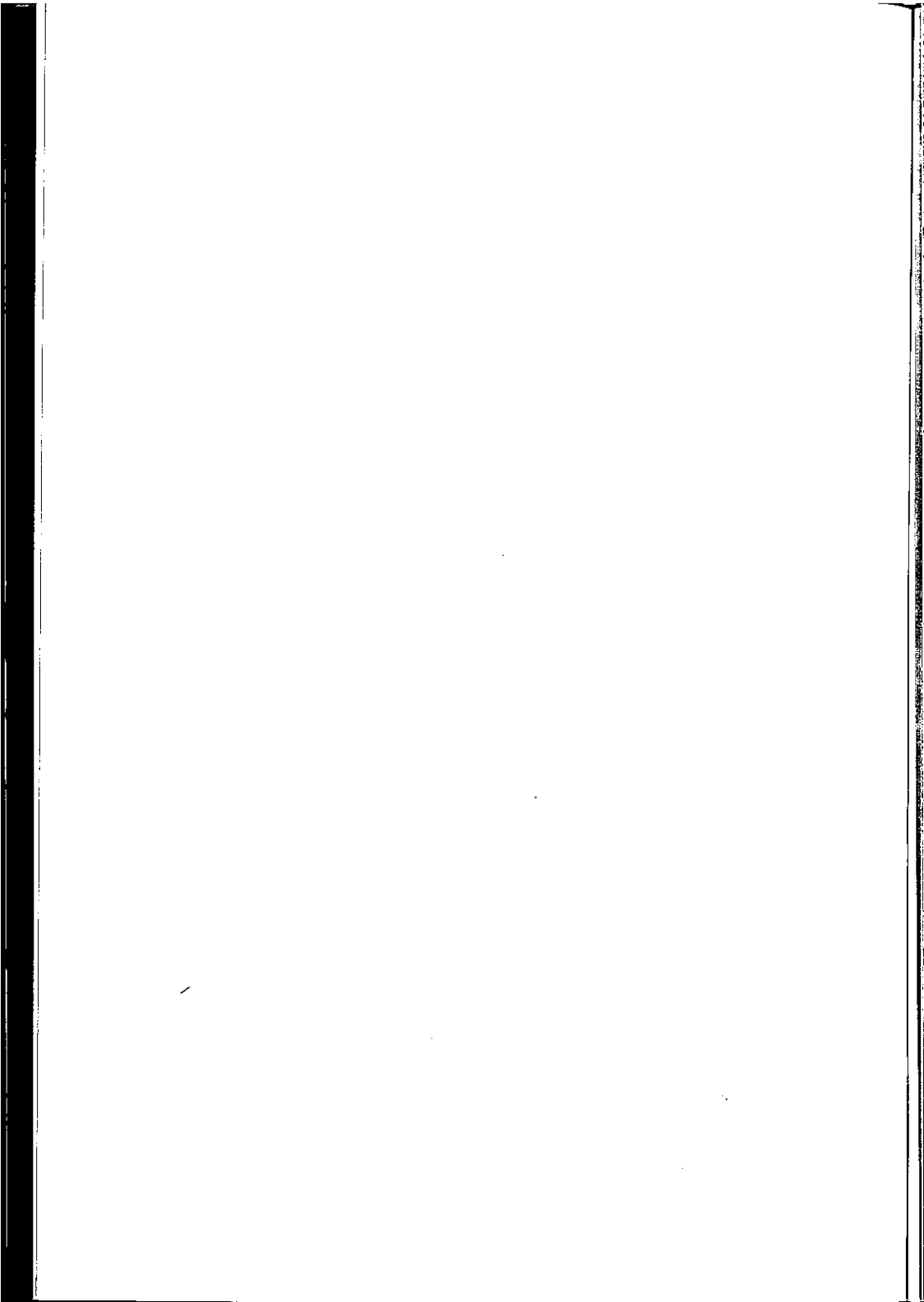
⁹ Thapar, pg.85

intention. Dhamma was aimed at building up an attitude of mind in which social responsibility, the behaviour of one person towards another, was considered of great relevance. It was a plea for the recognition of the dignity of man, and for a humanistic spirit in the activities of society."¹⁰ (My emphasis)

During this time, as the Caste system declined, ideas of common humanity, human dignity and responsibilities towards each other flourished in its place. As a result, the Caste situation changed dramatically. The dominant Caste, the Bhramins, became marginalized. During at least 140 years of the Mauryan Empire the Bhramins lost the state patronage they had held. As Ahsoka forbade animal sacrifices, Bhramins also lost their main occupation as priests offering the sacrifices.

¹⁰ Thapar, pg 87. In passing one may note that in the 20th Century there are many writing on Buddhism and there are many people professing to be Buddhists. However, among these it is difficult find this Ashokan attitude to social responsibility.





Implied in the concepts of Ambedkar and Grundtvig about the people is their views on the nature of political culture which sustain an active democracy on a constant basis. The achievements of the Folk School movement are part of the heritage of Denmark. This was put to me by a 13-year-old Danish boy: "Our teachers encourage us to discuss. There is a belief that if we discuss we become better persons." How different to the usual idea that silence is the sign of a good student! And how vastly different to the idea in the caste system that the breaking of silence by those who are considered low caste should be punished violently. Even today murders and rapes take place simply because such people dared to speak. What Ambedkar sought was a complete change. In fact, much has already been achieved on this basis; by and large, the Dalits of today are much more articulate than their forefathers and are actively asserting their presence. India's political troubles of today come from these awakened and active people who are breaking the draconian control of caste. India looks forward to a crucial change where the ideas of Ambedkar will become a reality in the way that Grundtvig's ideas did come to realisation in Danish life.



Asian Human Rights Commission

Unit D, 7 Floor, 16 Argyle Street

Mongkok Commercial Centre

Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR

Tel : (852) 2698 6339

Fax : (852) 2698 6367

E-mail: ahrchk@ahrchk.org

Website: www.ahrchk.net