

The Indian Nation in Its Egalitarian Conception

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The public imagination in India seems to be increasingly gripped with Dalit issues and concerns. This is evident in the writings of both Dalits and non-Dalits, who have focused on a variety of Dalit issues ranging from theory to poetry. Books on Dalit themes now find nominal accommodation in some of the leading publishing houses in India. Dalit issues previously did not receive much recognition from those who had complete control over the sphere of critical public inquiry, but that group has now found the issues worthy of scholarly attention.¹ Prior to the 1990s, continuous marginalization and ghettoization implicitly suggested that the so-called Dalit question failed to attract any serious attention from the intellectual mainstream. Thus it is rather gratifying to note that Dalit studies, though previously present at various levels, are now ending this silence and have begun receiving far more serious intellectual attention from the national and international scholarly communities. However, one of the distinguishing characteristics of such writings is that they claim to have found for Dalits a clear intellectual vision and efficacious political framework within which Dalits can realize their emancipatory aspirations.² According to the writings of these scholars, Indian nationalism, electoral politics, and globalization are the three sequential spaces that provide the necessary framework for the realization of a Dalit vision. Moreover, in these spaces Dalits are represented as budding nationalists with sterling

qualities and triumphant modernists. The scholars who claim to have found this vision for Dalits unquestioningly accept the validity of these claims. The faith and force in their assertions leave no room for any ambiguity or confusion that Dalits may have in understanding nationalism, electoral politics, or globalization. That is, these writers suggest that nationalism, electoral politics, and globalization are the spaces that tend to clarify the Dalit vision of any kind of confusion. These are the spheres, so the writers would argue, that provide an opportunity for Dalits to acquire a generic identity as Indian nationalists. This would mean that Dalits could appear in different spheres with secular but national identities. For example, someone might argue that in the sphere of nationalism a Dalit could change from an untouchable to a citizen; or in the realm of electoral politics a Dalit could shed the culturally attributed identity of *dhed* and, through the dynamics of electoral power, acquire a secular identity, possibly even as head of a political institution.³ However, at the other end of the spectrum, there are scholars among the Dalit community who seem to have developed a new set of aspirations for their social constituency. According to these scholars, Dalits need to aspire to become consumers of commodities.⁴ In the context of globalization, such scholars would further argue, Dalits have a unique opportunity to become part of a more homogeneous social space of global consumers. Constructing Dalits in terms of enlightened consumers in the global cultural sphere pushes them beyond the boundaries of nationalism. Imagining Dalits as global consumers also contests the intellectual claim that there is a particular construction of Dalits as nationalists.

In fact, scholars tend to claim that they have discovered a space for Dalits in Indian nationalism (Badri Narayan and Charu Gupta), electoral democracy (Kanchan Chandra), and globalization (Gail Omvedt). It is interesting to note that writers who are looking for nationalists among the Dalits are taking a nonlinear route that exists outside B. R. Ambedkar's conception of nationalism and its implication for Dalits.⁵ Claiming radical intellectual agency by writing on Dalits and attesting to the presence of a nationalist space for them, the nationalist scholars' claim is at odds with the Dalit articulation of these agendas, which contests whether Dalits have any space in nationalism, electoral democracy, and globalization.⁶

These writers, claiming originality for their discovery of Dalits as nationalists, seem to be arguing that scholarship on Indian nationalism has neglected the role played by the Dalits in India's struggle for independence. It is fine if they criticize mainstream writing about the history of nationalism for its failure to recognize the contribution that the Dalits have made to In-

dia's freedom. One might even see some merit in writings that can claim to have led to recognition for Dalits as nationalist. However, in claiming to have recovered the Dalits as nationalist subjects, they seem to be suggesting that nationalism is the only sphere that can help Dalits gain some importance in the life of the nation. The writers also suggest that it is this historical recovery of the Dalits as nationalist subjects that give them a good reason to feel associated with Indian nationalism. Indeed, the claim to have delivered justice to Dalits by writing about their contribution to nationalist history also speaks of an ideological distance between the scholars and the passive objects of their historical narrative. Furthermore, such efforts end up insulating the idea of nationalism from the point of view of its Dalit critique. It seems that these scholars fail to detect the obvious contradiction associated with this recovery: that it makes nationalism a discursive space containing intersecting purposes and tendencies. For example, nationalism becomes available to different social forces for mutually exclusive purposes. The industrial classes had an interest in nationalism because it was expected to help them acquire benefits without any colonial constraints. On the one hand, workers put faith in nationalism for the reason that it would help them to gain a better deal from the industrialists. On the other hand, the Hindutva forces (right-wing Hindu organizations) had a stake in nationalism because it was expected to help Hinduize India. Naturally, the minorities and the "lower castes" were skeptical about nationalism because they rightly assumed that it would bring back the dominance of the upper-caste Hindus. Finally, I would like to argue that these scholars fail to subject the normative strength of concepts like nationalism to rigorous epistemological and methodological scrutiny. As a result, they end up producing the kind of writing that they sought to critique in the first place. To use the category of exclusion or silence as a rhetorical device or tool for critiquing mainstream historical writing is one thing, but interpreting people's perceptions and using them to uphold the value of a concept (in the present case, nationalism) is quite another thing.

But I believe that there exists a fundamental contradiction between Dalits' existential place, their segregated dwellings and obnoxious occupations like rag picking and scavenging, and nationalist spaces both symbolic (the national flag) and material (parliament buildings and big dams). The Indian state that gives concrete meaning to nationalism by transforming the existential conditions of the people on the margins has not been able to effectively resolve this contradiction. Similarly, electoral democracy and globalization have not been able to address it. For example, electoral democracy has not been able to create a positive sense of citizenship among the Dalits. In fact,

they feel as if they are the passive recipients of fringe benefits that trickle down from this kind of democracy. Globalization also has not led to any structural transformation in the lives of the Dalits, many of whom continue to lead degraded lives in the villages and urban slums. According to Ambedkar, India as a modern nation no doubt attempts to organize society based on egalitarian principles, but it is helpless to enforce these principles as a part of social practice.⁷ The modern nation vehemently asserts its geographical boundaries without dissolving the pernicious boundaries that exist between, for example, the main village and the Dalit *vadas* (quarters or neighborhoods). National boundaries invoke respect and pride, while the boundaries that divide society perpetuate a deep sense of contempt for the Dalit *vadas*. Ambedkar argued that in India there are two nations: Puruskrut Bharat (ideal, pure India) and Bahiskrut Bharat (actual, polluting India). Ambedkar articulated many of his ideas relating to the two Indias in the fortnightly newspaper, *Bahiskrut Bharat* which he started in 1924. According to Ambedkar, the Puruskrut Bharat represents the twice-born castes who are spatially, socially, and culturally different from the Bahiskrut Bharat, the untouchables who occupy separate spatial and cultural spaces. He proposed an alternative idea of the nation, which he called Prabuddha Bharat (enlightened and inclusive India).⁸ Jotirao Phule, the nineteenth-century non-Brahman thinker, imagines the Indian nation in terms of the mythical King Bali who was the most egalitarian peasant ruler but was portrayed as a demon in Brahmanical narratives.⁹ These portrayals suggest that any subjective imagination of the nation that does not talk of the existence of two nations—the Puruskrut and the Bahiskrut Bharats—necessarily involves an acceptance of nationalist rhetoric of equality and unity. In the context of this reading of nationalism by both Phule and Ambedkar, it is important to examine whether the scholarship on nationalism shows any sensitivity to, or sense of urgency about recognizing and interrogating, this spatial and ideological contradiction between Puruskrut and Bahiskrut Bharats.

Ambedkar's conception of the Indian nation consisting of Puruskrut and Bahiskrut Bharats helps us comprehend the riddle of nationalism and its ideological framework—which makes a rhetorical claim for social equality but sustains the spatial practices of exclusion. It also helps us question the recent efforts by radical Indian scholars to include Dalits into the nationalist narrative of the 1857 rebellion.¹⁰ In addition, this ideological formulation provides us with a valuable resource to explain why some Dalit writers find the idea of nation deeply problematic, while others do not. This is one of the main issues that I would like to address in the first half of this essay. In the second half

I would like to draw on a set of writers—both Dalit and non-Dalit—who, I would like to argue, knowingly or unknowingly gloss over the Ambedkarite critique of the dominant conception of India that is internal to Dalit politics, including politics in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It is democratic politics that provides a necessary foundation for the concrete realization of nationalism. A sense of belonging to the nation emerges from the thick socially interactive and democratically associational life of the different classes that inhabit the nation. Democratic politics is supposed to forge these bonds and overcome internal divisions. It is also expected to generate equal self-worth among the citizens, who can then participate in all the issues that are nationally important. It is supposed to help Dalits gain value because they are not passive recipients of the dominant classes' commands, but possess the moral as well as the political capacity to force others to take them seriously on matters that have a bearing on the national interests. Indian scholars sense that the Dalits matter in the national life due to their participation in the deliberative processes of the democracy. If they are not considered—or do not consider themselves—to be part of these processes, then they do not feel that they are part of the nation. The nation can forget them, and they can forget the nation.

How much do the Dalits matter in terms of the nationalist questions that are debated in the deliberative processes? Dalits should participate because of their capacity to contribute, and in the process they could develop further democratic practices. Through associational life they could also demonstrate their moral ability to produce normative values like friendship, love, and equality that would help the nation acquire a decent reputation. *Sarvajan*—the ideal model of inclusion referring to the equality of all individuals without caste barriers, used by the Dalit political party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)—must be evaluated against the normative need to engage in honest conversations about the intention to use this concept. Founded in 1984, the BSP fashioned itself as exclusively a party of Dalit-Bahujan—literally, “the oppressed majority,” or the Dalits, tribal people, members of “lower castes,” and Muslims—which had enabled the party to acquire political power, but only through coalitions with other parties. Ideological commitment to Dalit-Bahujan necessarily limited the BSP's electoral base and political possibilities. The party became more ambitious in the electoral and political arena, seeking to represent all Indians, which led it to become more national in its character. In 2007 the BSP consciously shifted its ideological agenda from Dalit-Bahujan to *sarvajan*, to build political and electoral alliances. Diluting its ethical commitment to fighting on behalf of Dalit-Bahujan, the BSP's

appropriation of the sarvajan model enabled ideologically opposed groups to form political alliances. The ideal of sarvajan should be separated from its instrumental value. The Brahmans in Uttar Pradesh have supported the BSP not because of their commitment to equality or opposition to untouchability but purely out of self-interest—to oust a “lower-caste” political party, the Samajwadi Party, from political power because it was viewed as anti-Brahman. Furthermore, as longtime supporters of the right-wing Hindu political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, they were acutely aware that it is no longer capable of winning elections in Uttar Pradesh. Hence, the Brahmans who provided electoral backing to the Dalits found the ideal of sarvajan useful.

One needs to develop the critique of the BSP’s sarvajan model of politics which disregards caste domination and oppression. As a Dalit political party, the BSP relies on the moral legitimacy of Dalit struggles but also ignores it for the sake of caste Hindus votes. The sarvajan model will only produce unethical norms and support hierarchical societal norms. The Dalit politicians focus their attention only on the existential question, seeking to win elections to remain relevant in the narrow sphere of state politics. Therefore I intend to look at Dalit politics in general and the BSP’s politics in Uttar Pradesh in particular to detect the contradictions within two formations. In this sense, identifying the paradoxes between the two can be a useful and enabling resource for Dalit politics, offering possibilities of emancipation.

As I said above, I will begin by discussing to what extent the element of paradox is inherent in the idea of India. The privileging of Puruskrit and Bahiskrut Bharat is built around the notion of hierarchy that is spatially and socially regulated. The exclusionary nature of nationalism is rooted in the simultaneous hypothetical elevation of people and their real reduction to insignificance. That is, the discourse of nationalism constructs the people as an abstract category. It demands the people’s complete allegiance to nationalist interests, which in turn seek to subordinate people’s existential questions to nationalist questions. Even the question of social emancipation for Dalits through the annihilation of caste has to wait for the resolution of the nationalist concerns like the fight against colonialism. This totalizing reason makes nation a god, and people are expected to worship this nation. This devotional mode suggests that the nation is something that is not the embodiment of the people; rather, it stands outside them as a godlike entity. Thus, it is through the nation that people are expected to feel elevated; however symbolic this elevation may be. “Mera bharat mahan” (my India is great)—this slogan, which

has become popular in India and is frequently used in the mass media, indicates the elevation of people in the devotional mode to the nation, but only at the abstract level. Through their devotion and nationalist rhetoric, people virtually write the hagiography of the nation. In this regard, it is interesting to note that several nationalist leaders and thinkers have actually written hagiographies of India. The foremost among them is that of Jawaharlal Nehru. This idealization of India is clearly evident in his seminal work, *The Discovery of India*.¹¹ The idealization of nationalism was justified because of the normative promises of democracy, freedom, fraternity, and dignity that it held out to people during the struggle for freedom. But these promises came to fruition only for the members of Puruskrut Bharat. For the members of Bahiskrut Bharat, the vast majority of the Indian population, the promises remained unfulfilled. This glorified concept of the nation was deployed to attract the devotion—and thus the political support—of those who remained marginalized with respect to access to the promised rights and freedoms.

In contrast, it is interesting to note that Gandhi's approach to nationalism was quite cautious, even though Gandhian hagiography elevates it to the sacred status by comparing it with Gandhi's notion of Ram Rajya (Lord Rama's perfect rule). Sarker has argued that the Gandhian-initiated nationalist program incorporated promises regarding democracy only with great reluctance.¹² A leading scholar in Gandhian studies, Bhiku Parekh, has convincingly demonstrated Gandhi's deep skepticism of nationalism. According to Parekh, Gandhi saw in Indian nationalism an element that sought to frighten Muslims, other minorities, and even the "lower castes."¹³ The minorities were frightened because of the Brahman and caste Hindus' domination in the Congress Party. Arguably Gandhi's notion of India as Ram Rajya would not be intimidating to either minorities or the "lower castes." Ultimately Gandhi does provide a vision for India. In that vision, the independent Indian nation is imagined as a Rama Rajya, promising to flatten social hierarchies and enabling equality.¹⁴ In the Gandhian vision of India, villages would dissolve all forms of hierarchy as they expanded outward. Ashish Nandy calls this a "shudraization of India," or the entry of "lower-caste" and Dalit groups into mainstream politics.¹⁵

The Gandhian hagiography expressed a new perception of the Indian nation, but it also undermined the more substantive aspects of daily interaction and social practices that produce the sense of belonging to a nation. Hagiography does not provide space for concrete expressions of nationhood through processes of interaction and dissolution of cultural boundaries. The democratic dimension of the nation provides a much-needed interactive

element for social groups belonging to Bahiskrut Bharat, and it has the capacity to overcome their sense of alienation, produced through civilizational violence by the twice born. Civilizational violence in the Indian context renders the untouchable also as unseeable, unapproachable, and incapable of communicating.

Freedom to engage in social and cultural communication in everyday life plays an important role in the realization of the nation as concrete entity. To put this differently, the everydayness of nationalism has to be interactive rather than celebrated as an abstract form that is accessible only through devotion. In India, a large portion of civil society (or Puruskrut Bharat) arouses sentiments of patriotism by deploying rhetoric and cultural symbols. Yet, these sections of civil society actively refuse to promote interaction with the untouchables or adopt measures to extricate Dalits' wretched levels of human existence. The upper-caste imposition of a social boycott on the untouchables bears out this antinational and illiberal tendency. Caste Hindu groups belonging to Puruskrut Bharat even permit the social diminution of Dalits and members of "lower castes" who take part in wars to defend the nation. For example, many Dalit soldiers fight for the nation on the front line, but after retirement they find themselves pushed to the ghettos. Many Dalit soldiers who return to their hometown after retiring from the defense services cannot live in upper-caste areas even if they can afford to buy houses there. Dalit soldiers had to buy houses in the Dalit vadas in the village of Mundgaon, in the *taluka* (administrative district) of Akot, Akola District, Maharashtra. Similarly, villagers might put portraits of Dalit soldiers in little hotels in semi-urban towns but would hesitate to accommodate Dalits in an upper-caste area. This was the experience of Dalit soldiers from Gadhinglaj, in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. Civil society ridden with caste consciousness continues to ostracize them and continuously push them to the Bahiskrut Bharat. The articulation of this pernicious caste consciousness was evident in the wall of separation that was erected by members of the upper caste of Tamil Nadu so they did not have to look at Dalits.¹⁶ Thus, the upper-caste conception of nation is constitutive of social practices regulated by the ideology of purity and pollution, and this ideology—as Ambedkar very rightly pointed out—characterized Indian villages as the den of ignorance and the sink of casteism.¹⁷ Thus for a Dalit or an outcaste, the Indian nation is based on fragmentation, which is not only physical but ethically repulsive. The majority of the population defines the nation through war and opposition, but they simultaneously articulate its fragmentation by practicing segregation based on untouchability. The caste Hindus can easily relate to the nation even

from the sphere of civil society without necessarily participating in war. The hagiographic efforts to create an ideal nation rely on rather than resolving the issue of India's existence as Puruskrut Bharat and Bahiskrut Bharat. This paradoxical nature of the conception of nation mediated through its hagiography has been overlooked both by mainstream nationalist writers and those who claim to be the historians of the Dalits.

In India the writing of history and intellectual practice have failed to interrogate the persistence of hierarchical practices that endow the world of Bahiskrut Bharat. This is evident from the caste Hindus' differential vision of their demand from those of the minorities and the Dalits. For example, they pursued a clear vision of self-rule in the colonial period, assuming that the realization of self-rule was contingent on the clarity of their vision. The primacy of political concerns (independence or patriotism) in the upper-caste nationalist agenda obscures the existence of any underlying contradiction. They see everything very clearly. What they do not see, however, is their own contradictory role in violating the principle of self-respect in the local configuration of power. This configuration consists of two social forces, capitalism and Brahmanism. Dalits saw in capitalism a source of material exploitation, while in Brahmanism they saw the source of what would destroy their dignity and self-respect. The nationalists' failure to apply the logic of their broad political agendas to local situations by addressing the concerns of Bahiskrut Bharat illustrates their exclusive attitude. The contradiction in the nationalist goal of self-rule has been rightly detected by Ambedkar, who saw this particularly in Gandhism. For him, "Gandhism is a paradox, because it stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of existing political structure of the country. At the same time it seeks to maintain the social structure which permits the domination of one class over another."¹⁸

Mainstream scholars of history direct their acrimony toward colonial racism but refuse to contribute any criticism on the question of caste outside of a rhetorical accommodation in the nationalist agenda. This approach seeks to subordinate the caste question to the more abstract question of national freedom. Similarly, the hagiography of the nation subordinates the normative question of self-respect to self-rule. Those who defend the idea that hagiography has contributed to the development of the nation tend to overlook this dichotomy, which plays a key role in forming a strong basis for both the imagination of nation and the politics of nationalism. Taking their cue from this hagiographic construction of the Indian nation and the contribution made by Dalits from northern India, some scholars and commentators argue that Dalits, particularly women heroes who also participated in the

1857 rebellion, have been exemplars in contemporary Dalit politics, at least in northern India. How radical is postcolonial theory? These scholars argue that the common Dalit women in contemporary Uttar Pradesh would like to conceptualize the state's Dalit leaders in the form of Dalit heroes of 1857.¹⁹ This naïve perspective on Dalits' relationship with the 1857 rebellion aims to demonstrate their role in contributing to the hagiography of Indian nation and of self-rule but ignores the key question of self-respect. Recent writings demonstrating Dalits' stellar role in the 1857 rebellion outline a new nationalist position for them. The writings seemingly suggest that a nationalist resolution of the caste question is possible without resolving the paradox inherent in nationalism—that is, that Indian nationalists deliberately ignored questions about and struggles against caste inequality.

Indeed, the rhetorical accommodation of the question of social hierarchy can be extended to examine the sarvajan model of casteless and inclusive politics introduced in Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s by the Dalit political party, the BSP. Sarvajan, a Sanskrit and Hindi term and literally, “all people,” seeks to highlight the unmarked, universal identity of all Hindus and actively denies the caste hierarchies that continue to subjugate Dalits and “lower castes.” The BSP is the only Dalit political party that has formed a state government in independent India, which it did three times (in 1993, 1997, and 2002) with allied parties and then on its own in 2007. In fact, the sarvajan idea is an inversion of the nationalist resolution of caste. Sarvajan literally means “all individuals,” but in the context of Uttar Pradesh politics it is used to suggest those who are beyond the pale of caste identity or casteless, and it is used in this way by the BSP to mobilize all sections of Indian society in contrast to its earlier slogan of Dalit-Bahujan. Indeed, this shift is considered as a major ideological shift in the long history of the Dalit movement. Let us see how the politics of sarvajan, instead of dissolving the social hierarchies, tends to accommodate them.

INDEED, THE concept of sarvajan makes it possible to gloss over the differences between Puruskrit and Bahiskrit Bharat, central to the politics of nationalism, electoral politics, and globalization. Because the nationalist framework allows for the rhetorical accommodation of the critique of social hierarchy, it enables us to recognize that sarvajan politics obscures the essentialist character of both Dalits and members of upper castes. Sarvajan's projected political persona must be somewhat vague and ambiguous to provide space for erasure. My aim in this essay is to foreground this intentional ambiguity and explain the durability of the concept of sarvajan in the

context of Uttar Pradesh politics. This reading is contrary to mainstream understandings—that is, many commentators on Uttar Pradesh politics do not see any inherent contradiction in the politics of sarvajan. In fact, some of the writings on Dalit politics in Uttar Pradesh suggest that the politics of sarvajan there has given Dalits the perfect vision to use in pursuing their emancipatory project.²⁰ In their enthusiasm, they suggest that this is the perfect vision of empowerment that needs to be adopted by people in other parts of the country. These writings characterize Dalit politics in Uttar Pradesh as a model to be replicated elsewhere. This also holds out the promise that Dalits in other parts of the country might also be able to avoid the inherent flaw in the philosophies of other dominant parties. Now the BSP is on the move to disseminate the clear vision of emancipation to Dalits in other states, and among these scholars there is more celebration than skepticism about this sarvajan model. It is interesting to note that even the Marxists find no contradiction in the sarvajan model politics of the BSP. This is evident from their readiness to support the BSP's president for prime minister of India. In other words, it is being claimed that sarvajan propositions are free of any kind of paradox. The question that needs to be answered is, to what extent could the claims of sarvajan politics be defended? But before we address this question, it is necessary to offer some clarification here.

Dalit politics is not the source of the sarvajan model because the model has already been produced for Dalits. First, there are objective conditions such as the failure on the part of the main political parties, like the Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress, to accommodate the material aspiration of the upper castes that provide the necessary context for this model to become a possibility. The sarvajan model emerges primarily in the post facto situation. It is a product of an imperfect world; such a situation can exist only when structures of inequality and asymmetry are firmly established. Its success also suggests the self-reflective capacity of the establishment. It is the existing structures of Indian politics that have produced this model through the efficient use of ideology. Dalits carry secondary responsibility for producing this model through ideological interpellation. Thus Dalits play a far greater role than caste Hindus in terms of performing an ideological function and looking for this supposedly clear, egalitarian vision where it does not exist. In fact, Dalit politics provides the formative context. Dalits and their power politics become the medium through which the sarvajan model and hagiography of Indian nationalism becomes rooted in society, as well as in the minds of succeeding generations of Dalits. As I mentioned in the opening pages of this essay, rhetorical accommodation of a critique of social hierarchy is endemic

to the concept of Indian nation and nationalism; it is also endemic to Dalit politics as well. Ironically, in the changing configuration of power, those who get to the top need egalitarian rhetoric to remain in power. The Dalit political leaders therefore need to produce the necessary conditions to reproduce the nationalist rhetoric of social equality.

The sarvajan model is a product of conditions that are produced and reproduced through the dynamic configuration of power. That is, social groups like Dalits, especially in Uttar Pradesh, who acquire political power through elections to enter the power structure, ironically rely substantially on Indian nationalist rhetoric, reproducing it for their own advantage even though their ancestors fought against it. The BSP's critique of Congress Party politics may be justified because the latter sought to trap the Dalits in the nationalist rhetoric of social inequality. It is justified on the ground that Congress politics denied Dalit autonomy and agency. Congress, through its control of the structures that provide opportunities and its readiness to dole out fringe benefits, produced an enduring nationalist rhetoric of social equality among the Dalits. The reproduction of this situation becomes necessary for the survival of those who control the strings of power and those who benefit from the power seepage. The seepage is deliberate in the sense that it releases the pressure that would otherwise accumulate to the point of becoming dangerous. This element of deliberateness suggests that those who have the capacity to detect the nationalist doublespeak avoid articulating it, since they are enmeshed in the system. Deliberate design plays an important role in giving the marginalized a feeling of ownership and a sense that they too are stakeholders in the system. The marginalized groups as stakeholders begin to see the seepage of fringe benefits as reassurance of a continued systemic resource.²¹ Thus, a symbiotic relationship is formed between nationalist rhetoric and power, and even in the changing configurations of power, the latter becomes almost endemic in the system, as we see in the case of Uttar Pradesh through the BSP's articulation of the sarvajan model.

I would like to argue that the egalitarian claims of social inclusion in the sarvajan model have enabled caste Hindus to perpetuate the separate worlds of Puruskrut and Bahiskrut Bharat and that it has also enabled them, Brahmans in particular in Uttar Pradesh, to support the sarvajan politics of the BSP. Since 2007 the politics of sarvajan has promised the Brahmans of Uttar Pradesh some kind of a respite—at least for the moment—from the possible humiliation that would have seemed imminent except for the model of sarvajan. The fear of being humiliated at the hands of Dalits was felt to be imminent during the first phase of BSP rule in Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s. Dur-

ing this phase many upper-caste officers and politicians did face a threat of possible humiliation. The goal of Brahman politics, among other things, was to eliminate the possibility of such humiliation from the Dalit power structure, and the sarvajan model provided a politically valuable tool for the Brahmans to use in enaging with the BSP. Given the new political configurations after the 1990s marked by the rise of Dalit politics, the caste Hindus in India today have found a way to deflect the irresolvable tension between rhetorical and substantial recognition of Dalits and their cultural symbols. For example, at the rhetorical level, the caste Hindus assign so much respect to Ambedkar's *pratima* (image) that they may carry it on their heads, but at the substantive level of recognition they would trample under their feet his *pratibha* (genius)—his intellectual and philosophical writings and his role in drafting India's constitution (1947–50). Let me further explain the irresolvable tension in the cultural practices of orthodox Hindus or in the Hindutva politics. The right-wing National Democratic Alliance government in India (1999–2004) had established a commission in 2000 to review the Indian constitution. This move was seen as an attempt on the part of right-wing Hindutva groups to violate the secular and democratic norms and provisions of the constitution written by Ambedkar, the Dalit thinker and activist who fought for the rights of minorities. Similarly, the caste Hindus would show respect to the larger-than-life size images of Dalit leaders such as Ambedkar, or respectfully address the president of the BSP and three-time Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Mayawati as *bahenji* (elder sister), but they have little or no respect for ordinary Dalits.²² The politics of sarvajan, I further argue, provides the background condition for a paradox to successfully sustain itself in the public imagination of Dalits by seemingly resolving the irresolvable tension between rhetorical and substantial recognition of Dalits.

It is impossible to resolve the tension between the Puruskrut and the Bahiskrut Bharat, but the nationalist rhetoric of social equality and the sarvajan model mask the contradiction and become a source of power in two major senses. First, through making promises, an essential element of the sarvajan model, the model provides an initial condition in which people begin to offer allegiance to the most powerful. Simply put, if no promises are made to the people, there is no sarvajan model. Not all promises generate people's allegiance, particularly since only less spectacular promises could be partially realized. Second, to make such promises, one has to possess political power. That is, no one would take seriously promises made, for example, by a pauper. One has to make promises that are not completely

empty but at least partially realizable. Thus, these promises assume a donor. Those who are a part of power structures (whether at the center or on the margins) can make false promises only if they look realistic in the beginning to the potential recipients. However, over time, promises lose their hold on the public imagination, thus paving way for the articulation of the sarvajan model, which begins to surface due to a growing sense of discontent, while inability or a sense of incapacity grows among those who made the promises. The more one aspires to remain in power, the more the sarvajan model accelerates the degeneration of promises into vacuity. As mentioned above, the sarvajan model looks almost endemic in the structures, irrespective of its social base in power, which makes it increasingly difficult to contain the growing frustration among social groups such as Dalits or even Brahmans. Thus, public articulation of the sarvajan model depends on the widening gap between hope and despair. However, it has to be mentioned that the sarvajan model does not choose the condition of its own articulation. This insight into the sarvajan model can be vitiated by several factors.

First, the expression of the sarvajan model depends on those who have acquired moral power to not only resist but also to critique the paradox. Moral power becomes important in contexts where many political observers and scholars recognize the limits of the sarvajan model but for some reason choose not to expose it. On moral and ethical grounds, it is the middle-class Dalits who are supposed to develop an insight into Dalit politics and expose the limits of the sarvajan model of BSP politics in Uttar Pradesh. But the Dalit middle class does not seem to take the moral lead in developing an internal critique of the sarvajan politics of the BSP. Why? There may be two interrelated reasons. First, upwardly mobile middle-class Dalits aspire to benefit from the structures of opportunities and patronage that flow from the Dalit leaders who control state institutions. Second, middle-class Dalits view the ascendance of Dalit leaders to political power as a weapon, with which they can avoid upper-caste domination and discrimination at the work place. These twin factors prevent them from criticizing the Dalit leaders' paradoxical politics of sarvajan. The middle class is only a tiny part of the Dalit community, but it plays an important role in making this model salient. This is done through deploying certain pedagogical devices. This class would thus argue that the existing structures are full of opportunity and that it is possible to convert these opportunities into an asset. Individual efforts are warranted to acquire this asset. This pedagogy also entails the moral message that those who do not take risk (both by making material efforts and by losing their

dignity) can expect to gain entry into the system in the future. Thus, the message is conveyed that it is natural that structures do not solve the problem of everybody all at once, but gradually. Thus, these beneficiaries of state patronage keep advocating the virtue of patience, repeating the popular refrain, “today it is somebody else’s chance, tomorrow it will be yours.” This suggests that those who are missing out today have something to lose tomorrow if they step out of line. This effectively prevents the widespread expression of discontent. This rhetoric succeeds in naturalizing the sarvajan model, a fact that continues to escape the critical attention of those who have been legitimately ambitious in their life plans.

Second, the sarvajan model becomes durable precisely because those who took the lead in detecting the contradiction tend to reproduce it depending on where the middle class fall in the power structure. Progressive accommodation into opportunity structure, which emerges as a part of the self-reflectivity as mentioned above, makes the middle class part of the system. Thus, those who originally stood outside the contradiction ironically now become complicit in its reproduction.

Third, the sarvajan model provides a constitutive condition. When the state fails to provide opportunities, those who might withhold their allegiance to the state do not, as they still think that there is a possibility that the state will offer them some opportunity. If the state has provided accommodations to people whose sociological background is similar to those to whom it has made promises, this decreases the possibility that the latter group will criticize the state. In the case of Uttar Pradesh, having a Dalit government replaces the need for detecting the paradox that defines only the rhetoric of truth, not the truth itself. The elimination of the possibility for subversive action happens through what could be termed ethical relativism. Ethical relativism tends to make morally objectionable practices appear acceptable to those under their sway, which becomes evident as the paradox loses its ideological potency. In the act to produce a balanced impact on all people, the supporters of particular leaders (such as Mayawati) then would ask, why single out only the Dalit leaders when leaders of other political parties are on this moral slippery slope? The supporters of such Dalit leaders tend to defuse criticism by spreading the position of ethical relativism within their organization and affiliated groups who form the core of the morally depleted society. In addition to this ethical relativism, Dalits use caste identity as a powerful defense mechanism to disarm any legitimate criticism that seeks to expose the paradox that lies at the heart of their politics. Ethical relativism

used in this way acts to perpetuate this sarvajan model. Ethical relativism acts against those who seek to criticize the moral practice or cultural lifestyle of some of the contemporary Dalit leaders. In fact, Dalit leaders often use this language of relativism to consolidate support for their paradoxical past and present as well as to propose that they know the truth. In contrast, our exemplar (Ambedkar) is produced through a continuous process of moral editing, or examining oneself for paradoxical behavior. Ambedkar followed this form of moral editing, which is why he could see the contradiction in the rhetoric of social equality in nationalist and electoral politics and why he offered a conceptual framework to understand the audience of this message, the people belonging to Puruskrut Bharat but not those who belong to Bahiskrut Bharat. His famous speech in the Constituent Assembly is a testimony to his creative capacity and moral ability to detect the paradox in the system.²³

Fourth, developing an insight into the sarvajan model depends on the moral ability to militate against what could be called the designated power structure. The power structure adversely affects the cognitive capacity of Dalits, and they refuse to detect the paradox. For example, several Dalit women tend to celebrate the expensive clothes of their leader while they themselves are in rags or tattered clothing. Similarly, Dalits celebrate the palatial mansions of their leaders while they continue to live in wretched huts. Those who are caught in the framework of designated power somehow refuse to recognize the contradiction or articulate their critique of the sarvajan model. With the help of a common saying, let me explain this statement. In Marathi, the seductive quality of this designated power structure is very well captured in the saying “patalache ghode, maharala bhusahn,” which means “taking care of Patil’s (the landlord’s) horse, is a privilege and an honor for the Mahar (Dalit) family.” The Mahar family is responsible for maintaining the landlord’s horse in the village. Those who see the irony in this situation would say that there cannot be any pride for the Mahar family in feeding Patil’s horse; rather it should create a sense of moral anger at their predicament. Dalits should re-discover worth in themselves rather than basking in the glory of the master. They should develop critical consciousness about the hegemonic power of the master and restrain from participating in it. It is in this sense they should use anger as a moral resource to sustain the critical consciousness against upper caste hegemony.

These four factors should help us to understand the BSP’s appropriation of the sarvajan model but also the support it has received among Dalit and non-Dalit groups. Its popularity has also tempered the radical potential of Dalit politics and making it subservient to the nationalist rhetoric of caste equality.

Instead of embracing the sarvajan model of inclusion, it is incumbent on the Dalit middle-class intelligentsia to expose the limits of this model.

IN CONCLUSION, I must say that whether or not one recognizes the nationalist rhetoric of social equality that actually perpetuates social hierarchy by actively ignoring the spatial contradiction between those who belong to the Puruskrut and the Bahiskrut Bharats depends on one's location in time and space. Those who are continuously on the margin or outside the opportunity structures and belong to the Bahiskrut Bharat are potentially ready to develop this insight. However, that insight is not automatically apparent—in fact, it is much more difficult to sustain continuous and critical opposition to nationalist rhetoric. As has happened with the Dalit consciousness in India, those who raised their voices against the rhetoric of nationalism were pacified and drawn into these structures. The Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra are a case in point. These Dalit leaders, who used their social vigilance to publicly reveal the paradoxical political relationship between the Republican Party of India (established by Ambedkar in Maharashtra) and the dominant Congress Party in Maharashtra, at some point began to see promise in the Congress Party. This shift in approach happened after their incorporation into power hierarchies, though they were not given a central place of power. Ruling parties belonging to the Puruskrut Bharat in Maharashtra carried out this co-option with a remarkable degree of success. Today one does not require non-Dalit ruling parties to perpetuate nationalist rhetoric because Dalits have their own parties that can do this job. Members and groups belonging to the Puruskrut Bharat now argue that Dalit political parties have the potential to win the highest political position. What they often ignore, however, is that this desirable shift in power will actively sustain the nationalist rhetoric, reducing adversity in the political realm without necessarily diminishing the hardship that many Dalits face in the social realm. For example, the upper caste in the BSP may be politically subservient to the BSP's supreme leader, but in their social interactions they may be overtly anti-Dalit. Yet the BSP's sarvajan model serves to diminish the historical political adversity of Dalit groups and exclusionary practices experienced by people who live in the Puruskrut Bharat.

Indeed, as mentioned in the last section, challenging the sarvajan model depends on people who have the necessary moral power to expose it but choose to ignore for personal benefits. Whether a person understands the contradiction depends on his or her capacity to develop insights into such

matters. As discussed above, the Dalit self has to take the moral responsibility to detect the contradiction. The moral stamina alone, however, is not sufficient for detecting the contradiction in the sarvajan model. In addition, one must have a background characterized by deprivation or underprivilege; this creates the potential for state intervention and the manipulation of disproportionate populism by the state. If the state starts acting honestly and accepts its limitations in terms of the needs it is able to satisfy, there will no longer be a need for the sarvajan model or rhetoric of social equality. In a liberal framework, it is impossible to imagine this kind of a moral state. Hence, this leads to positive conditions in which those who are part of the counterpublic must take the lead in exposing the contradictions.

NOTES

1. The best example is D. R. Nagaraj's book, *The Flaming Feet*. The first edition was published by a small press in Bangalore and was not even reviewed in most journals, but the second revised edition was published by Permanent Black in 2011.
2. Bose, *Bahenji*; Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*; C. Gupta, "Dalit Virangana and Reinvention of 1875"; Narayan, "Reactivating the Past, Memories of 1857"; Omvedt, "The Great Globalization Debate."
3. The Dalit caste name, "dhed," has been used only in a derogatory sense for the Dalits of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
4. Omvedt, "Capitalism and Globalization, and Dalits and Adivasi." See also Chandrabhan Prasad's numerous articles on this subject in the Delhi *Sunday Pioneer*.
5. Khairmode, *Babasaheb Ambedkaranche Charitra*, 89.
6. Bagul, *Dalit Sahitya ajache Kranti Vidynana*, 70; Teltumbde, "Reverting to the Original Vision of Reservation" and "State Market and Development of Dalits"; S. Thorat, *Givan Marge*, a Marathi language monthly, Mumbai, May 2008.
7. More, *The Social Context for an Ideology*, 314.
8. The concept of *Prabhudha Bharat* was developed by Ambedkar through a fortnightly newspaper started by Ambedkar in the 1950s.
9. Wangmay, *Mahatma Jotirao Phule*, 190.
10. See C. Gupta, "Dalit Virangana and Reinvention of 1875"; Narayan, "Reactivating the Past, Memories of 1857."
11. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*.
12. Sarkar, "Indian Democracy," 30.
13. Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, 193.
14. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, 6:67.
15. Personal conversation with the author.
16. There are several examples of caste walls, separating Dalits from caste Hindu (or, at times, from "lower-caste") neighborhoods, in the districts of Salem, Coimbatore, and Madurai in Tamil Nadu. See "Uthapuram Wall Is No Berlin Wall," *Hindu*, March 21, 2012; "Caste Fence Pulled Down in Tamil Nadu," *Times of India*, October 18, 2010.

17. Ambedkar, *Babasaheb Ambedkar*, 6:290.
18. Ibid.
19. C. Gupta, "Dalit Virangana and Reinvention of 1875"; Narayan, "Reactivating the Past, Memories of 1857."
20. This and other points developed in this section of the essay are a response to the normative understanding of Dalit politics by the mainstream India establishment, and this is best represented in Bose, *Bahenji*.
21. Bose, *Bahenji*.
22. The op-ed article in *The Times of India*, Delhi, October 5, 2008.
23. In this speech Ambedkar made it clear that on "26 January 1950 [when Indian constitution was adopted] we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality, and in social and economic life we will have inequality" ("On the Adoption of Constitution," 219).

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