

Categorisation of Scheduled Caste Reservations - An Ambedkarite Perspective

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Abstract: *The categorisation of Scheduled Caste (SC) reservations has been a contested demand for a long time. There are different views on this demand both for and against. While the most marginalised (invisible) Dalits across India have been mobilising and struggling for their rightful share in the reservation, the relatively better off (visible) Dalits are arguing that the demand is against Dalit unity. The government-appointed commissions are all recommending categorisation of reservations in the context of existing inequalities among Scheduled Castes. This paper is aimed at understanding categorisation of SC reservations through an Ambedkarite perspective.*

Reservations from the beginning to now have always created diverse opinions, contestations and many legal and institutional challenges. However, when it comes to categorisation of Scheduled Caste (SC) reservation, it is very specific, very important and very complex. When I say complex and important, there is also a need to think about this issue from the Phule-Ambedkarite perspective. I would like to make some preliminary comments here. In the Dalit movement, this issue has not been taken seriously due to various reasons. Those who have attempted to write and articulate about it publicly are largely from certain communities within the Dalits - particularly Arunthathiyars, Madigas, and Valmikis from North India.



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So, when I emphasise this problem it becomes their problem, not the problem of the entire so-called mainstream Dalit movement. And the reasons are various. I suggest that now we should get a kind of perspective for Phule-Ambedkarite thinking on this issue. My examples largely come from the Telugu regions since my work is based there, and I include some examples from other states as well. To begin with, when did the categorisation of reservation demand become more visible, more articulate? Although there were demands in Punjab in early 1975, it was with the emergence of Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) movement in the Telugu region that the issue became very visible and more discursive in public and intellectual domains as well as in the writers' circles. Before getting to that, I would like to present some context of the Dalit movement in the Telugu region as it is relevant to what I am going to argue.

In the Telugu region, the modern Dalit movement began with the Karamchedu incident in 1985 when Kammas attacked and killed Madigas. Following this, there was a huge response from Dalit leaders and writers in support of the victims. There was a camp and a committee and later the Dalit Mahasabha was formed under the leadership of Bojja Tharakam and Katti Padma Rao. They are the major leaders of the Dalit Mahasabha movement, who made significant contributions to it in the Telugu region. Tharakam came from an Ambedkarite-Left lineage, while Padma Rao comes from the atheist movement. Dalit Mahasabha was formed in response to Karamchedu incident. There wasn't an organised form of Dalit movement in the Telugu region until Dalit Mahasabha was formed.

Taking inspiration from the Dalit Panthers Movement in Maharashtra, the Dalit Mahasabha began to develop an agenda and they articulated an autonomous front for Phule-Ambedkarite thinking thus challenging the left, mainstream politics and other forces. If there was no Dalit Mahasabha, we wouldn't see the consistent movement and literature that has emerged and inspired hundreds of writers and scholars in the Telugu region. In that way, Dalit Mahasabha's contribution is enormous.

The leaders of the Dalit Mahasabha largely came from the Mala community. However, they addressed every Dalit community in Andhra Pradesh, and until 1994, the Dalit Mahasabha contributed a lot in terms of consolidating Dalits, producing literature, giving a perspective from Phule-Ambedkarite thinking, negotiating with the state, challenging hegemonic politics and organising people at the grassroots level. In 1994, however, the Dandora movement began to emerge. The Dandora movement, popularly known as MRPS movement developed under the leadership of Krishna Madiga. He was also a member of the radical left, but later left it and began to participate in the Dalit movement. He was working under K.G. Satyamurthy, who was one of the revolutionary leaders of the Dalit community. Krishna Madiga's association with Satyamurthy is also very significant for the former's Dalit consciousness. In 1994, Krishna Madiga emerged as a conscious Madiga leader who had seen Satyamurthy and also observed the activities of the Dalit Mahasabha and their leadership. There are 62 Scheduled Castes in the Telugu region, of which the

Malas and Madigas constitute the numerically preponderant communities. Besides these two, there are multiple numerically small castes such as Rellis, Dekkali, Chindu, Masti and others.

For a long time, Madigas had a complaint that in terms of state resources and opportunities they are always lagging behind the Malas. Malas are getting more benefits and Madigas are not getting those benefits – this was one of the perceptions and this was also one of the demands among the Madigas who were consistently negotiating with the political parties in demanding the sub-categorisation within the Scheduled Caste reservation so that it could reach the lowest of the low. If we look into the sub-categorisation demand, it was there during the Nizam period also. In 1925-35, during Bhagya Reddy Varma's time, Malas and Madigas were not willing to even give a memorandum together. That was the kind of situation then. But during those times, for Malas there was an education minister and the majority of the leaders came from the Mala community for various historical reasons.

I am trying to bring to your attention that the roots of the demand are historical. It did not suddenly emerge in 1994 with the emergence of Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi. Generally, people began to say that, "oh it was the creation of the Telugu Desam Party to challenge the Congress", so on and so forth. Krishna Madiga being a conscious person, belonging to the Madiga community, having organisational skills and having worked with Satyamurthy, had seen the intensity of the problem. In 1994, Congress was also mobilising caste voices in order to challenge the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), since that was also the time BSP was entering the Telugu region. Before Krishna Madiga's MRPS organisation, there was the Arunthathiyar Mahasabha which was the organisation of Madiga employees and leaders who were speaking out internally that Malas were getting more benefits of state's resources and reservations and demanding that Madigas should get equal benefits. But it was not a movement, it was only a demand, so they printed a pamphlet on which they clearly listed their demand for political representation in the assembly after counting how many Mala representatives were there in the parliament. They also mentioned how many Madigas and other castes were there among first and second grade employee sections. They had clear statistics, which they printed as pamphlets and circulated them in some of the meetings. In one of the meetings, Krishna Madiga got the pamphlet, started analyzing it and picked up this issue. Since he also had training in left politics and was also associated with Satyamurthy's work, he began to think whether there was any possibility of building an organisation and mobilising around this issue.

At that time, Krishna Madiga was working with K. G. Satyamurthy's organisation in Prakasam district, in present day Andhra Pradesh. While working in coastal Andhra, that is around Guntur-Prakasam districts, he also developed some connections with the Madiga employees and Madiga youth there. He began to discuss this demand for the categorisation and discrimination or unequal distribution of reservations with them. Since the employees already had an idea that they were not able to access the reservations, they had some sort of discomfort with the Mala representation.

Krishna Madiga got a sense that since the Madiga youth were also disappointed with the Dalit Mahasabha leadership this will be useful for the organisation he had in mind. So, he approached those youths a few times and they initially refused, but after 3-4 meetings they began to accept that there was a need for a movement in order to gain sub-categorisation within the SC reservation. When Krishna Madiga approached the Madiga youth they began to support his demand and also began to say “yes, we have to form some organization”. With this, he went to a village called Edumudi, which had one of the biggest supporter bases of the Dalit Mahasabha led by Katti Padma Rao at the time. Edumudi youth also had some discomfort with the Dalit Mahasabha because its leadership was largely comprised of Malas.

As a result, on 7th July 1994, the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi emerged under the leadership of Krishna Madiga. The single agenda of this movement was that Madigas were not able to get the state benefits, particularly reservations, and a major portion of benefits were going to Malas, who were mobile and advanced compared to other Scheduled Castes. Which meant that unless there is some categorisation in SC reservation, the lowest of the low within the Dalits would not benefit. Therefore, they demanded a state policy to categorise these reservations in order to benefit the lowest of the low. They printed the same pamphlet Krishna Madiga had read earlier, and because it clearly showed the disparities in terms of representation, in terms of employment, and in terms of education, even a 10th class student could easily understand the disparities. Krishna Madiga selected a committee and with the help of Madiga employees began to distribute the pamphlets. The occasion on which he chose to distribute the pamphlet was the Karamchedu Martyrs death day. In those days, many top intellectuals, civil rights movements advocates, Dalit leaders, and writers such as Gaddar and Balagopal used to attend that meeting. Krishna Madiga distributed the pamphlet titled ‘Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi’ among the attendees. Everybody on the stage also read it, and Gaddar and other leaders began to talk about it. Malas were also present in the meeting and some of them began to attack the Madiga cadre. I think that was the beginning of some sort of contestation on the very idea of categorisation. Gaddar was with this demand from the beginning and announced on the stage that there should be a discussion on this issue. With that spirit, this movement spread and they began to mobilize. Since that was the only agenda for the organisation, with the Madiga sentiment they began to mobilise in huge numbers and with this mobilization of MRPS and Dandora movement many important questions were posed to the Dalit movement. In my understanding, those questions have not yet been addressed. I am not referring only to the Telugu region; these questions are very important for the entire Dalit movement in India.

So, what are those questions? Who are the Dalits? Can an assertion demand for the equal distribution of reservations for the lowest of the low? Can it divide the Dalits and Dalit unity? How do you distribute any opportunity that is available and common to Dalits to the lowest of the low? And why are Dalit leaders not able to address these questions? These are some of the big questions that began to come up when MRPS members began to mobilise in the villages. By looking at the

archival material of the MRPS movement for 1995-97 we see that lakhs of people used to attend its activities.

When Madigas in the MRPS movement began to demand that there should be a categorisation of SC reservations, they were able to get support across organisations. In the Telugu region, many communists and other organisations supported this demand. The reason being that for the upper castes, there was nothing to lose. I am aware that after 75 years of independent India, how reservations are still not implemented properly, how they are diluted and even for their meagre presence hundreds of lives are sacrificed. You take any educational institute, there is everyday struggle to get a minimum representation for Dalits, Adivasis, and OBCs. That is the kind of situation we are facing. However, the issue that we are trying to discuss is equally important. When this demand for categorisation began to emerge, a lot of support was gained. I think almost all political parties, from parliamentary communists, radical left, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress, and all other political parties as well as civil society organizations supported categorisation of the SC reservations. But what was the contestation, who was opposing it?

In 1997 when MRPS became an important organisation, influencing the political parties, demanding and questioning, they were asking the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government to implement the categorisation. And TDP, since it had a calculation that it needed to challenge the Congress, they were also supporting the categorisation movement. In 1997, they appointed Justice Ramachandra Raju commission to look into this demand and he proposed that categorisation should be implemented. In 2000, TDP brought in rationalisation of Scheduled Castes Reservation Act. As per Justice Ramachandra Raju report, scheduled castes in the Telugu region were divided into four groups: A, B, C and D. In the first group scavenger caste, known as Rellis, who are also the most marginalised, were included. In the second group, Madiga affiliated castes - Dekkali, Chindu, Masti – were included. In group C, Mala-affiliated castes were included. Group four included Adi-Dravida communities who are the advanced communities when compared to the above-mentioned communities.

However, Mala employees began to organise and oppose this categorisation under the banner of Mala Mahanadu. Even though this was not a mass movement, it was definitely a movement of the Mala middle class. It was led by government employees who were beneficiaries of the reservations, and who, in some sense, had nothing to do with the Mala agriculture laborers and people at grassroots level. V. Rao, who was the leader of the youth wing of the Republican Party of India in coastal Andhra Pradesh, became a leader of Mala Mahanadu and began to oppose this categorisation. What were the arguments in opposition to categorisation? First, that the attempt to categorise reservation goes against the Ambedkar spirit. Second, that it would divide the Dalits. So, if Madigas or other castes are backward, they can be given some packages for their economic development, but not categorisation. Third, that governments are not implementing reservations in the public sector and that there is a crisis of reservations. So, we have to demand full

implementation of reservations rather than demanding categorisation. Fourth, that the private sector is growing and the government is not implementing reservations in the private sector and therefore instead of categorisation we have to demand reservation in the private sector. Fifth, that reservations are very limited and ruling classes are not interested in implementing them. Thus, we have to fight for political power. When we gain political power, we will implement the reservations so that everybody will benefit.

I think there are many different arguments. When I present these arguments, I am not only referring to the Telugu region. These points, I think, also form the common sense of many Dalit intelligentsia and writers across India, both within and outside institutions. The same arguments are provided if you attend any seminar on this theme. Both university intellectuals as well as common man opposing this categorisation will more or less give the same arguments with some sort of statistical data.

There were also arguments that since Malas have merit, they are getting the benefit of the reservations. Therefore, Madigas and other castes should improve their merit. So, the question of merit! Then came the question, does categorisation divide Dalits? So, the assumption is Dalits are a homogenous community. If you go by any logic, Dalits in terms of Scheduled Castes is a legal-administrative category which combines ex-untouchables for some sort of bureaucratic, legal convenience. It doesn't capture or explain the socio-cultural differences that exist among Dalits.

Though Dalits face common problems at grassroots level, there are differences that we are conveniently hiding and deliberately sidelining. This is true if you take any study, and I am not referring to the upper caste studies here, that will be misleading again, I am only referring to studies by scholars who have an honest commitment towards the liberation of Dalits and Bahujan communities. Also, there isn't much work done under the so-called Dalit scholarships. Those who are demanding this sub-categorisation began to explore these issues on their own. Arunthathiyars began to produce their demands through pamphlets, through booklets etcetera. And Madigas also were doing the same through booklets and through studies. And Valmikis also began to produce some literature on their own. However, the so-called university-based Dalit-intelligentsia has not taken this project seriously.

Though there is a need to articulate this category called Dalit, both in its ideological and political framework, one has to be conscious how these disparities, both culturally and in everyday life exist between Dalit communities. It is not for the sake of convincing the upper castes. It is for the sake of understanding and advancing Ambedkarite thinking. Thus, the argument is not for the sake of convincing the state, or judiciary or upper castes. My concern is how do we practically advance Ambedkarite thinking by understanding these core issues. When Malas began to argue that categorisation is dividing the Dalits, Madigas began to explore how the cultural differences were already existing in their everyday life. If you see the Madiga literature after the Dandora movement and if you look at Dalit literature from the Telugu region, I think 80% of the literature is produced

by the Madigas. I do not know why it took that dimension but Madiga writers began to explore every aspect of their cultural lives. Cymbals, chappals, drums, the burial grounds of the Malas and Madigas – all these aspects have been documented in their literature. Madigas began to argue that in the name of Dalit identity our experiences cannot be homogenized; because by saying Dalit, you are subsuming our differences. When you subsume, that may work out in the larger framework but it will only benefit those who have already benefited. Therefore, the distinction has to be clear. They would ask, how would you homogenise the Dekkali experience of untouchability with the Malas' experience of untouchability? Unless you see a Dekkali, who is the lowest of the low among the Dalits, you can't make sense of the holistic framework of Dalit liberation. Therefore, his experience of untouchability, his vision of annihilation of caste becomes a foundation for addressing the caste question within the Dalits. Madigas began to argue that while we face common problems and there is a need for building common politics, common movement, when it comes to disparities, we have to understand how these communities historically have differences in their cultural lives and how it reflects in their material life.

You can get a sense of these differences If you read Professor Muthaiah's (2006, p. 4) article on the caste hierarchies among Dalits, or if you read A. Ramaiah's (2010) paper and work from Tamil Nadu, the cultural differences and everyday social hierarchies among the Parayas, Pallars and Arunthaiyars and if you see some of the writings from Karnataka¹, both material and cultural differences between Valayars, Madigas and others and if you see some of the writings from B. S. Waghmare (2010) and other people from Maharashtra on the differences between Mahars and Mangs, Mangarodis. Note that I am referring only to Dalit scholars here.

With this background Madigas began to argue that though there is a common agenda to fight caste, that doesn't mean that we are culturally united. There are historically produced caste divides and such caste practices also make a difference. On the other hand, Mala Mahanadu began to argue that if there are any caste differences, exclusion, untouchability practice, it is not because of Malas; it is because of caste. Therefore, we have to fight against caste. I think this is also a common understanding among many intellectuals. It is true that caste is the foundation for the Indian social and economic structure, because economy and economic relationships, all work within the framework of caste in a broader sense. Caste, the primary Brahmanical ideology, is the foundation for any exclusion within Dalits but who practices it is also very important. Because somebody is there to practice it. The agency of the person who practices it is also equally important. There is a need to question both the caste structure, which is created by the Brahmanical forces, and also people practicing it. The agencies of people are different, the degrees are different, layers are different. So, when it comes to within the Dalits, Malas practicing caste at a different level, with a different form, with a different degree towards other lower castes, will have to be taken into consideration. We have to critically question this. That's where I think we have not taken things

¹ See Justice A. J Sadashiva Inquiry Commission (2005) in Karnataka.

seriously. To whatever degree that caste discrimination, untouchability practice, and exclusion are practiced within Dalits, we have not developed a mechanism to address those questions. While it is easy for us to address the people at the top of the caste hierarchy for annihilation of caste, it is very difficult to address the lowest.

Unless there is self-interrogation, we cannot be part of the entire annihilation of caste project; whether you are Dalit or not. I can quote many studies in support of this argument. In Gujarat, Martin Macwan and others have done studies on untouchability between Dalits and upper castes, and untouchability among the Dalits. I think that is a unique study. They identified more than 50 forms of exclusion within Dalits. One may say that there are different forms, but still, one has to understand this. Untouchability practice that exists in whichever form, whichever degree, within the Dalits, we have not yet addressed it as a problem. In that context, when you attempt to homogenize the Dalit identity, it helps in many ways the already advanced communities within the Dalits. That is how they can also speak the language of unity. But the language of unity is not always a good value in itself. That is what communists have done and that is what Hindutva forces are doing. When it comes to Dalits, we need to have Ambedkar's spirit, you need not go anywhere else. True Ambedkar spirit helps us understand it better. We have to be critical. That is where people who oppose categorisation in the name of Dalit unity have to understand – unity of what, unity for what, unity at the cost of whom? At the same time, it does not mean that there are no challenges by the upper castes. I am very conscious about that.

Coming to the second point, that we have to fight for the full implementation of reservations rather than going for categorisation. When the Matang community demanded there should be a categorisation within reservations in Maharashtra, many Mahar people began to oppose it. Until Matangs were raising these questions, there was no Mahar leader who was fully aware of the kind of disparities that were existing in accessing the state offered opportunities. However, there are limitations to such demands also. Imagine there are only two reserved seats, how to distribute them is also a question of justice. I am just bringing to your attention that even if it is one seat what should be the Ambedkarite thinking? That is the question.

Upper castes can manipulate anything; that is our experience in everyday life. But my question is, we have to think about Ambedkarite thinking in distribution of resources even if it is a single opportunity. What is the procedure that we can visualise? When Madigas in Karnataka began to demand categorisation, Sadashiva commission (2005) was formed and following a study, it recommended categorisation². Similarly, the Janardhanan commission (2008) in Tamil Nadu also

² In Karnataka the Madiga Dandora Horata Samiti (MDHS) has been demanding the sub categorization of SC reservation for the benefit of the lowest among the low. After many agitations and memorandums in 2005, N. Dharam Singh, the then chief minister of Karnataka, appointed Justice A.J Sadashiva Inquiry Commission to look into the methods of equitable distribution of reservation facilities among all Scheduled Castes (SCs). The commission submitted its report in 2012 after an extensive study of the Scheduled Castes' socioeconomic and political conditions and pattern of distribution of reservations among them. The commission recommended the subclassification of SC

recommended categorisation. The Hukum Singh commission (2001) in Uttar Pradesh, Justice Ramachandra Raju commission (1997), Justice Usha Mehra Commission (2008) in United Andhra Pradesh, Lahuji Commission (2003) in Maharashtra made similar recommendations. Here I am referring to just some of the commissions which were appointed by the state governments, all of which recommended categorisation in reservations. One can support categorisation and one can also fight for the full implementation of reservation at the same time. There is no contradiction there. However, those who oppose the categorisation only focus on the implementation of reservation rather than understanding the importance of categorisation. They make it into a contradiction in order to nullify the very idea of categorisation.

Same is the case with the demand for reservations in the private sector. Who will oppose it if we demand it? We have to demand it. We have to collectively demand it. All SC, ST, OBC and even religious minorities have to demand it given the situation. It is our right to get reservations in the private sector also. That does not mean we oppose categorisation of existing reservations. These demands are not contradictory. We can simultaneously fight for reservations in the private sector while distributing reservations equally among ourselves. Note that I am not referring to this just because there is a judgement of the Supreme Court. I am not referring to any Supreme Court judgement here.

Even if the current reservations are properly implemented, who will get the benefit? How will a Dekkali, who is a first-generation student and in his entire community there is no one who has studied till graduation, compete? Similarly, if you take the Musahars of North India and study their condition, you will come to know the situation. Musahars come under scheduled castes in North India – Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh – and they are nomads. Forget about universities, some of these communities have not even seen schools and degree colleges. How do you imagine them competing for a post even if 15% reservations are fully implemented unless there is some categorisation where such a group always has an opportunity to compete with equivalent people? If Malas, Valayars, Parayas, Mahars have some middle class – middle class not in terms of the upper caste definition – middle class that is articulate, which has a first generation of jobs and so on, let there be some middle class within the Musahars so that their articulations, their experience, their literature, their representation also becomes visible. Then our Ambedkarite spirit will be advanced.

My own experience is that as long as these communities do not articulate their problems, the Dalit movement is not mature enough to recognise them. We have not paid much attention. We have a framework of critiquing and challenging upper caste domination but we also have to develop a mechanism to interrogate ourselves. When there was no articulation from the Matang community

reservation keeping in view the disparities in accessing reservation amongst the 101 listed Scheduled castes. The commission recommended reclassifying these castes into four groups 1. Right community 2. Left community 3. Touchable 4. Other Scheduled Castes, to avail 15 % reservation. Within the allotted 15% reservation, the commission allocated 6% to the Left castes, 5% to the Right castes, 3% to the touchable castes and 1% to other castes.

in Maharashtra many of the major Mahar leaders were not paying attention, not only to the disparities in accessing the representation and educational opportunities but also in understanding their life, symbols, leadership etcetera. When Matangs came forward, Annabhau Sathe became a symbol. He became one of the anti-caste thinkers. When Matangs as a group were not articulate, Annabhau Sathe's influence was very limited.

The lowest of the low within Dalits should not only talk about the question of reservation, they need to go beyond it. Categorisation of reservation is a very symbolic, powerful demand that is in front of us. There are many questions that implicitly come up and those are equally important. As far as fighting for political power is concerned there is no contradiction – you can think about categorisation alongside, you can fight for it simultaneously. Some people say that there is insufficient data with regard to who is having more representation in each state. Let there be statistics! Let us demand that the state collect statistics just like we are demanding the caste census. Opposing the very idea of categorisation, however, goes against the spirit of Babasaheb Ambedkar.

These are not new problems. Dr. Ambedkar also faced these problems. During 1930-35, I think Babasaheb Ambedkar was the only leader who was challenging thousands of Brahminical forces and organisations in defending the rights of Dalits and marginalised communities. During that time also, in Maharashtra, there were problems. And representation among Dalits was precisely one of the questions. A Mang brother wrote a letter to Dr. Ambedkar saying, *'look in your organisations there are many Mahar leaders and in villages Mahars do not allow us to enter into their houses. They discriminate against us, they do not come to our marriages, there are no inter-caste marriages between us. How do you give justice to us?'* This letter has been translated by Eleanor Zelliot for her book (2005, pp. 106–7)³, as one of the reference points. And Babasaheb Ambedkar was very conscious in trying to address this issue. Though he was not explicitly talking about untouchability among the Dalits, he was practically adopting certain things that a leader with an anti-caste vision has to follow.

After this letter, Dr Ambedkar began to look at things in that light and started giving more representation to the Mangs in Maharashtra and to Chamars and others in different states. On one of the occasions, in order to show that we are committed to the representation of every caste within the Dalits, Babasaheb Ambedkar nominated P. Balu, who was a famous cricketer, and he gave representation to the Chamar community in the Legislative Council. On the issue of inter-caste

³ In references (p. 122) the details are cited from Janata, 14 June 1941, Bombay, in Marathi. The letter from the first educated Mang in the Nizam's state, Mr. D.N. Kamble, makes the following requests: 1) Mahars must consider Mangs as equals, 2) promising Mang young men should have a chance to go forward 3) Mahars must not obstruct Mang processions, 4) Mahars must not take watandari rights from Mangs. 5) Ambedkar must give as much concern to the improvement of Mangs as to Mahars. Ambedkar replied that he had successfully encouraged inter-caste dining, that the Mahar hostels were open to all, and that the Independent Labour Party considered quality, not caste, and warned the Mangs against taking the way of congress.

marriages, he famously said in one of the meetings, ‘If I had a daughter, I would certainly give her to the Mang community and not to the Mahar community’.

During Babasaheb’s time there was a hostel accommodation problem for the depressed class students and the decision had to be made between Mahar and Mang boys to accommodate in one of the hostels in Maharashtra. Babasaheb Ambedkar thought that since Mahars could have been accommodated anywhere given that by then they had some sort of family financial support but where would Mangs go? In giving admission in hostels, he preferred the lowest of the low, that is Mangs.

These were instances where Babasaheb Ambedkar was conscious of giving representation and justice to the lowest of the low. But when it comes to categorisation we only go by some sort of upper caste arguments, like merit. We have fought against merit, the very idea of merit as it exists in India. How can we then invoke the merit question when it comes to categorisation? It goes against the Ambedkar spirit.

I am not very concerned about what kind of final judgement the Supreme Court gives, although that is very important for the policy level consideration. I am more concerned about Ambedkarite thinking on this and many other such issues. That is why I say that categorisation in many ways is very important to reach the lowest of the low. And that is where we can create a scope to build solidarities. Though in the initial stages, we may feel discomfort, in principle it will help us advance Ambedkarite thinking on certain issues. It will help in the long run to build solidarities among different communities.

Same is the case with the Adivasis. In Andhra Pradesh, the reservations have mostly benefited the Lambadas. How do you expect a Gond to compete with the Lambadas? What are the possibilities? It is just unimaginable. There is no way unless there is some specific categorisation within the Adivasi reservations wherein a Gond can have a bigger scope to access reservations.

Therefore, my submission to you is – we have to think in principle about how categorisation can help us. Because, I would say, in the Telugu region, we are in a situation where Malas do not believe in Madiga leadership and Madigas do not believe in Mala leadership. That is the kind of situation in which we are living in. This is due to various other reasons as well, but the issue of categorisation has added to it. You take any political party, Congress, TDP, or BJP, they have their own politics around this issue. And Congress was the first political party which looked to exploit these disparities in 1930 itself, when Gandhi challenged Ambedkar as the sole representative voice of all Dalit communities, by highlighting differences between communities such as Chamars and Valmikis. In order to show that Ambedkar did not represent the Valmikis, Gandhi and Congress precisely focused on Valmiki colonies, and Gandhi used to go and sleep in their homes. However, Babasaheb Ambedkar, with his principled life and commitment, stood strong and was able to challenge the politics of the Congress and Gandhi. And later on, even the BJP and other regional

political parties are playing their politics by promising categorisation as well as opposing it. However, in my understanding, categorisation is very important.

While Valmiki, Madiga, Arunthaiyar, Matang demands may seem to be only about categorisation, I think they are demanding much more than that. And that is where we have to understand questions of disparities, caste practices, and untouchability practices among the Dalits. When we seriously engage with them, we will also understand their experience, literature, leadership, representation and a range of other issues.

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