

of them rose to positions of eminence in the fields of education, journalism and literature. It was this modernized section of the Blacks that provided the leadership in the anti-slavery movement which led to the Civil War in 1861 (Pinkney 1969:16).

The Whites of the North took a leading part in the Civil War. Under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, a Union Army was formed which fought against the Confederate Army. On 1 January 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and more Blacks joined in the ongoing Civil War. They were mostly recruited to the United States Coloured Troops. The Confederate Army surrendered on 1 April 1865, and Lincoln was assassinated on 14 April. In the same year, slavery was abolished in America while the Civil Rights Act of 1866 gave the Blacks equal political rights.

The victory of the North in the Civil War was more ideological than real. The Southern States continued to practise varying degrees of racial discrimination and the 'Jim Crow Laws', a watchword for racial segregation, reappeared restoring white supremacy. In 1883, the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 to be unconstitutional. Between 1880 and 1900, thousands of Blacks were lynched by the Ku Klux Klan in the South, and there was mass migration of the Blacks to the North.

Myrdal (1944:587-588) notes that the various measures of segregation and discrimination against the Negroes assumed a descending rank order centering round white man's aversion to amalgamation: (i) ban on inter-marriage and other sex relations; (ii) all sorts of taboos and etiquettes in personal contacts; (iii) segregation in schools and churches; (iv) segregation in hotels, theaters and public conveyances; (v) discrimination in public services; (vi) inequality in politics; (vii) inequality in justice; (viii) inequality in bread-winning and (ix) inequality in relief. The Blacks attempted to organize themselves more systematically to fight against such discriminations.

It is against this background of a fluctuating fate—of an early awakening and some gains—that organized movements arose among the Blacks and the Backward Classes by the turn of the present century which attempted to establish new identities on the basis of defined ideologies.

## New Identities

### BACKWARD CLASSES MOVEMENTS

The Backward Classes, who suffered from different degrees of relative deprivation, became aware of their status with the spread of new liberal ideas and alternate sources of legitimacy that were ushered in by British rule and the Indian national movement. They began to organize themselves in different parts of India, establishing new identities based on diverse ideologies. Our concern is more with these ideologies rather than with empirical details. One may identify three kinds of ideologies (Rao, 1977). First, many castes belonging to the other Backward Classes claimed a higher *varna* status through a reinterpretation and recasting of appropriate mythologies of origin. For instance, several cognate castes—such as the Ahirs in many parts of North India, the Gopas in Bengal, the Gaulis in Maharashtra, the Gollas in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, and the Konars in Tamilnadu—claimed descent from the Yadu dynasty (a famous Kshatriya dynasty in Hindu mythology) to which Lord Krishna belonged. In the second decade of the present century they organized themselves into an All-India Yadava Association. In parts of North India, especially Bihar, the Yadavas came into direct conflict with Bhoomihar Brahmins, when the former donned the sacred thread (symbol of the twice-born) in public.

The idea in such attempts to claim a higher *varna* status was to establish a new identity so as to gain self-respect, honour and esteem. This was not a process of imitation but a language of aggression by which sections of the Backward Classes challenged the monopoly of the upper castes in terms of access to the rituals and religious services of brahmanical Hinduism from which they had been barred for centuries. Thus, when the Yadavas donned the sacred thread, the symbol of highest ritual status, they were not imitating but challenging the monopoly of the twice-born caste Hindus which was borne out by the ensuing confrontation where the latter attempted to beat up the former in order to maintain the *status quo*.

Another variation in this approach of reinterpreting Hindu religion in search of self-determination, was developed by the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Movement ('Movement for the Propagation of Sri Narayana Guru Swamy's Philosophy') among the

Izhavas (toddy-tappers) of Kerala. Until 1935, the Izhavas belonged to the scheduled castes category. They were considered to be unapproachables by the clean castes. The Izhavas, who formed about twenty-six per cent of Kerala's total population, suffered from many religious, economic, educational and political disabilities. Around the turn of the present century a charismatic leader, Sri Narayana Guru Swamy, gave them a new religion of one God, one religion and one caste which transformed their life styles and outlook. He established a set of religious institutions (temples, priests, monasteries, monks, household disciples) parallel to that of the teetotalarian and vegetarian variety of brahmanical Hinduism. Thus, although the Izhavas were not born in the upper castes, they could acquire the religious goods and services of the upper castes—something which had been denied to them for centuries. This helped the Izhavas both to gain self-respect and to adopt a protest ideology to challenge the religious, economic, educational and political supremacy of the upper castes.

A second variety of protest ideology was based on the rejection of the brahmanical Aryan religion and culture. The Dravida Kazhagam Movement in Tamilnadu idealized the Dravidian culture and religion and attacked the Aryan culture and religion. For the followers of the D. K. Movement, Ravana was virtuous whereas Rama (an incarnation of God) was wicked. The Self-Respect movement started by Ramaswamy Naicker advocated that his followers should have their own priests. The movement drew its main support from the low-castes/classes. Its leaders worked hard to escape the tyranny of the Brahmins and their culture, and to extol the virtues of the Dravidian culture and religion. In its extreme form, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam advocates the separation of Tamilnadu from the Indian Union.

The Mahar movement under the leadership of Ambedkar exemplifies a variation of the principle of rejection in protest ideology; namely, abandoning Hinduism altogether and embracing another religion (in this case Buddhism). The Mahars formed an important section of the scheduled castes of Maharashtra, constituting about ten per cent of that state's population. They served as village watchmen, messengers, and removers of cattle carcasses. These services were hereditary and were paid for in kind. The Mahars were also weavers, petty traders, carpenters and cultivators. Thus, they occupied a low position in the caste and occupational hierarchy, and as such

suffered from many religious, economic, educational and political disabilities. In the third decade of the present century, the Mahars organized themselves under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar vacillated between adopting one of two themes of identity to fight against the discriminations imposed by the upper castes—whether to stay within the Hindu fold or to abandon Hinduism altogether. He finally resolved the dilemma in 1956 by accepting Buddhism and abandoning Hinduism which also meant giving up caste. A large number of his followers embraced Buddhism which upheld egalitarian values and was also, at the same time, within the Indian tradition (Patwardhan, 1973:105-69).

Thus the ideology of the Mahar movement reflects a total rejection of the religion of the caste Hindus which was identified with hierarchy and inequality. It also reflects the message of new identity—that the Mahars now belong to a religion which stands for egalitarian values and hence they are superior to the caste Hindus. This is another strategy to gain self-respect and esteem on the one hand and to negate or protest against the religion of the upper castes on the other.

While these two types of ideologies—reinterpretation and rejection—have, in one way or the other, a religious dimension, the ideologies of civil rights and class-conflict are secular in character. The civil rights ideology, based on democracy, motivated the Backward Classes to evolve campaigns to fight for equality in educational, economic and political opportunities. Thus, the leaders of the SNDP and the Mahar movements agitated for their basic civil rights. In this they also incorporated the religious-cultural ideology in this approach in seeking to gain self-respect and honour.

The ideology of class conflict provides another secular source for establishing a separate identity as the exploited class. The Dalit Panther movement, fashioned after the Black Panthers of America, emerged among the Mahars of Bombay and Poona in 1972. Its spokesmen were Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale and J.V. Power, all eminent literary men. It cashed in on the frustration that the urban youth were experiencing when faced with diverse forms of discriminations against the untouchables and the oppressed. According to its manifesto, the Dalit Panthers included all the revolutionary parties seeking to destroy the Hindu caste system. Its declared enemies were the landlords, capitalists and money-lenders. It aimed at an all round revolution. It is significant to note that the Panthers' ideology is

akin to Fanon's (1973) view that colonialism cannot be separated from race. In the ideology of the Dalit Panthers, class struggle cannot be separated from an anti-caste Hindu attitude.

Thus, the protest ideologies of the Backward Classes movements reveal four organizing principles: (i) reinterpretation of myths of origin or of one's own religion; (ii) rejection of Hinduism and Aryan religion and culture; (iii) civil rights; and (iv) class conflict.

Protest ideologies, as discussed above, have been dominant in establishing new identities among the Backward Classes, characterized by conflict with the dominant groups. One may, however, point out that there have been attempts on the part of certain sections of the Backward Classes to move up the social ladder not by claiming equality with the dominant groups but by adopting certain elements in the life styles of the upper castes without courting conflict with them. For instance, the Chambhars, an untouchable caste of Maharashtra, accepted their position as leather workers, and gained upward mobility without coming into conflict with the dominant groups, the Marathas and the Brahmins. The Chambhars' larger identity was with the Hindus (Patwardhan, 1973:18, 49). Their self-image was to be 'good boys' in the eyes of the dominant groups and to gain access to modern economic and educational opportunities through request, acquiescence and good conduct. However, this approach or ideology has not resulted in any recognized social movement, but has remained largely at the level of individual effort. As we shall see later, the acquiescent ideology is logically opposed to the protest ideology.

#### BLACK MOVEMENTS

The ideological underpinnings of the Black movements have been wide ranging—from acceptance and accommodation to extreme forms of nationalism. The acquiescent ideology was systematically developed and practised by Booker T. Washington. Washington was a 'pussy footing' uncle Tom accommodationist. He advocated the uplifting of the Blacks through industrial education and economic self-help. He founded the Tuskegee Institute to train Black workers in agricultural and industrial vocations. He also founded the Negro Business League (NBL) around 1900 and was prepared to forego Black participation in politics and to accept segregation as the price to be paid for white financial support for his educational and economic