

Politics and Mobilization of Lower Classes

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Part I

In India, we have been witnessing a long-drawn process of mobilization and struggle between two broadly grouped ideological camps. On the one hand, are the powerless, marginalized lower classes, such as, dalits, tribals, lower OBCs, and women, who are trying to liberate themselves by using the available political means and, who, in the process are making the Indian society more egalitarian, humanized, democratic and just. The *status quoist* castes and classes are, on the other hand, found engaged in devising strategies, either to resist or undo the emancipatory project of democratization and humanization of the Indian society (Baxi, 1992; Iyer, 1992; Ilaiah, 1997; Patel, 1997a&b; Parmar and Chaudhari, 1998; Macwan, 1999 and Patel, 1999a&b,2003; Shinoda,2002; Shah,2002a&b;Yagnik & Sheth,2005). After Independence this conflict acquired an institutional character as the constitution-making efforts brought these rival ideological churning and conflicts to the fore in the Constituent Assembly. The provisions in the form of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution are to a considerable extent the culmination of these long drawn, often intermittent, upsurges, struggles, or movements. How democratic empowerment of these powerless lower classes is achieved in last five decades is the subject of contemporary political as well as academic relevance, interest and analysis.

Thus, the Constitutionally-guided democratic politics and governance have created historically unprecedented scope for different kinds of mobilization among various communities, castes and classes in society (Kothari, 1997 & 1998; Sharma, 1997:24; Pushpendra,2002). These mobilizations, either in the form of major and minor stirrings, protests, agitations or movements can be broadly captured by a generic-thematic term like 'social movement', but they can easily be delineated more specifically as political, religio-cultural, or developmental - economic mobilizations (Hardiman, 1987; Bhatt, 1989; Shah, 1990; Desai, 1997). They can also be sub-categorized as sectarian, communal, electoral, peasant, workers, gender, dalit, lower classes, OBCs, middle class or tribal mobilization. However, this article will attempt to identify, analyze and interpret those mobilizations, which in content, form, and substance involve or concern lower classes such as dalits, tribals and OBCs in Gujarat. The article looks into the types and strength of various mobilizations such as electoral mobilization and their limitations. It also comments on the political implications of this mobilization of lower classes in Gujarat.

AN INTRODUCTORY VIEW

The birth of the State of Gujarat on 1st May 1960, itself, is the product of a fairly long-drawn (1955-1960) first major political mobilization led by the Mahagujarat Parishad in the post-Independence period. It was an all Gujarat anti-Congress front for separate statehood for Gujarat, stretching across Kutch, Saurashtra and mainland regions. Navnirman movement in 1974 was an anti-price rise and anticorruption mobilization, engulfing once again all the regions of Gujarat. It was successful in achieving its end in ousting the Chimanbhai Patel-led Congress Government. Both these successful movements were essentially middle class mobilizations, erupted and operated from urban and educational centres of the state (Shah, 1977). Historically, the middle class youth has been pursuing its educational goals and subsequently ensuring economic (class) continuities in inadequately growing opportunities in job market.

From here, the state witnessed a sea-change in its brief history of statehood and of political mobilizations (Yagnik, 1981; Sanghavi, 1996; Khare, 1998; Rutten, 2001). The class character and political agenda of the mobilization, henceforth, drastically changed. The doyen of pro-poor lower class political mobilization emerged in 1970s in Gujarat in the form of Jhinabhai Darji, a grass roots Gandhian stalwart, in the organizational structure of Congress party. This heralded a new era of lower class mobilization, ascendance and prominence in the state's democratic politics. He succeeded in devising a master mobilizational strategy by forging a grand alliance of the have-nots of the four neglected, but numerically preponderant communities/castes of lower OBC-Kshatriyas, Harijans, Tribals and Muslims (Shah, 1998; Jani, 1998a). Madhavsinh Solanki and Sanat Mehta, the other two prominent leaders and lieutenants of Darji along with him, created a formidable KHAM (kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis, Muslims) alliance which shook the upper castes and upper classes, represented by the Patels or Patidars, Banias and Brahmins, who had hitherto benefited from their colonial connections and hegemonic power over the newly born state and its sub-structures right up to 1980. This caused a major erosion and alienation in Congress' upper caste support basis such as Patidars, Brahmins and Banias. It is unfortunate that the KHAM mobilization, though electorally most rewarding to Congress Party, miserably failed on policy front. However, major pro-poor policy shifts in economic agenda could not be effected and whatever changes came in the form of 'food for all' and 'mid-day meal' schemes were more symbolic than substantive. Yet, the politics of this period calls for a more focused analysis, since some attempts, though foiled by the powerful upper castes and classes of Gujarat, were made to change the laws governing land ownership and lucrative cooperative sector (Khare, 1998).

As a massive reaction to this decade's pro-poor lower class political mobilization, there came in a major counter mobilization of upper class-caste sections of society, riding over the issue of reservation in social and economic spheres (Yagnik, 1981). It took the form of anti-reservation agitation, which somehow was prevented by Solanki during his first term as Chief Minister. The anti-poor forces in the state found another golden opportunity to re-mobilize, oppose and dismantle the Solanki regime in his second term as CM. Congress was returned to power in 1985 State Assembly elections with a record electoral harvest of KHAM formula, winning 149 out of a total of 182 Assembly seats. This phenomenal, historic electoral supremacy made Solanki very abrasive and he took a hasty suicidal step of extending the reservation to OBCs of the state, thereby increasing the total quota from 21 to 49 percent. What followed was a clash of two socio-political mobilizations with distinct class character and contents. The first emerged in the form of anti-reservation agitation by Patels and other upper castes, which were numerically in minority. And the second was the politically majoritarian mobilization of KHAM castes/communities, which ultimately wilted and buckled under the tactical pressures strategically exerted by the upper class forces. Solanki was disgracefully ousted and his pro-poor policies were repealed by his successor, who was a tribal leader. The KHAM mobilization was thus lost to anti-poor dominant class and caste forces, which in turn succeeded in effecting a rightist, rapidly communalized, sectarian mobilization (Patel, 1999c&2003). This reactionary mobilization undid Congress electorally, ideologically and politically. After Solanki's end in 1985, Congress, though in power, steadily alienated and handed over its KHAM support bases to BJP at the behest of skillful orchestration of Sangh Parivar forces. Patidar peasantry led by BJP's Bharatiya Kisan Sangh and the RSS-VHP-BD (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-Vishwa Hindu Parishad-Bajrang Dal) combine was at the forefront of two mobilizations, namely, the movement for liberation of disputed site at Ayodhya and Farmer's agitation. A social reconfiguration had thus emerged which produced the BJP as a new hegemonic power bloc and regime, dominated by the upper castes and classes in the state. In the 1990s, the emergence, decline, survival and re-emergence of BJP in successive State Assembly and Parliamentary elections in Gujarat on the one hand, and declining electoral fortunes of Congress, on the other, have sealed the fate of lower class mobilization for substantive and not merely positional or symbolic share of power in the state (Shah, 1998; Patel, 2003).

However, during this entire period, stretching from 1960 to 1999, there is another side of a less visible, manifested and demonstrated face of politics, which has kept the hope of lower class mobilization, organization and action alive by its politics of agitation, protest and dissent to anti-poor steps by successive regimes (Jivanlal, 1981; Adhvaryu, 1981, 1986 & 1994; Macwan, 1982 & 1986; Maheriya, 1988; Jani, 1998a; Macwan, 1999). The issues of social injustice, exploitation, violence, deprivation, etc., have intermittently surfaced on the terra firma of state politics, mostly from non-political party space of voluntary action by various ideologically conscientious groups aiming to mobilize lower classes for a moderate to drastic social transformation in the state. There is an island-like spectrum of such a minor mobilization in the interest of lower classes, which need to be properly chronicled, documented, analyzed and understood, especially, at a time when relationships among the state, market and civil society are undergoing changes at local, national and global levels (Yadav, 1998; Setu, 1999; Shah, 2002a; Yagnik & Sheth, 2005). Hence, the article intends to discuss this issue along the following lines:

1. Composing a brief history of nature, character and content of various major lower class mobilizations in the state to get an idea about the deep-rootedness of contemporary upper class biases against the lower classes.
2. Profiling and interpreting the pro-poor lower class political mobilizations, issues, leadership, their efficacy and achievement by documenting and analyzing minor mobilizations initiated and steered by non-political party space, i.e., pro-poor NGOs committed to egalitarian ideology.
3. Emergence of religio-cultural and politicized forces of Hindutva in the 1990s and their impact on lower classes, especially in reference to the prospects of future political mobilization and possible forms it may take.

HISTORY OF LOWER CLASS MOBILIZATION

In this section, it is intended to trace the history of lower class mobilization and to characterize its content in the context of contemporary emancipatory mobilization in Gujarat. This exercise shall give us valuable insight into: (a) the social and political vulnerability of lower classes; (b) problems of their mobilization and organization; (c) efficacy of the efforts to resist upper caste atrocities; and (d) the intensity of the prevalence of anti-lower class biases. It throws light on the use of culture, religion and caste as traditional sources of perpetuating hegemonic dominations and at the same time reinterpreting the same for liberative, transformative and emancipatory mobilizational purposes. By lower classes, it is meant here the three chief socio-economic and demographic components of Gujarat population, which comprises Scheduled Castes forming 7 percent, the tribals 15 percent and the OBCs forming 28 percent of the total population of the state. The Census data thus put the lower classes at 50 percent of the state's total population. But some sources put the figure of lower classes at 70 percent (Jani, 1998b:40).

Dalit Mobilization

Let us obtain historical insights into the social and cultural experience of the dalits. For dalits, it has been, indeed, a very long march of moving literally and otherwise from 'periphery' to the 'centre' of social settlement. Parmar (& Chaudhary, 1998:63), who is a leader of Dalit Panther and progressive social activist, argues that these three lower classes of dalits, tribals and OBCs either do not have a history or vital part of it is lost, withered or erased. Therefore, one of the strands of contemporary cultural mobilization among dalits is evident in the form of creative efforts tracing the 'missing roots' by intellectuals of these communities. According to him, SCs of today are "tribes of the past". His argument is that like Vagharis they have '*kuldevis*' (goddesses of clan or family) unlike Brahminical gods of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. The Brahminic tradition has survived whereas that of labouring classes has weakened, marginalized or run over. Another account in the

form of popular history, which Parmar gives, is that when Aryans invaded, the defeated natives fled to forests and resisted the Aryan hegemony from forests. When the pressure relented, they returned near to Aryan settlements but were not admitted inside the village. Hence, they settled on the outskirts. These settlers are today's SCs and those of them who stayed on in forests are STs. Parmar observes that, throughout this long period, they challenged Brahminic supremacy. The Bhakti movement produced dalit saints and reformers among others, who questioned the caste system, the vedic religion and Brahminic rituals. It appears that tracing the roots by the oppressed in this manner is a part of the contemporary mobilizational politics of the victims (like dalits here), which has become possible partly due to the availability of democratic means for dissent and protest. Culture has been a powerful, effective and rich resource for organizing political action by the oppressed. Such a cultural reconstruction of identity and injustices suffered provide succour to the contemporary emancipatory struggles.

After the passage of several decades, a major change came in both the communities of dalits and tribals with the introduction of education. Both benefited from Gaekwad's (ruler of the State of Baroda) efforts. Gaekwad started *Sanskrit Pathshalas* for dalit Brahmins to promote their assimilation. The Arya Samaj conferred the status of pundits upon some dalits, known as 'Garos Brahmins' in Gujarat. Parmar notes that the earliest mobilization among dalits occurred in Gujarat "around the legendary dalit martyr Vir Mahya". In the 11th century, King Siddharaj of the Chalukya dynasty built a huge step-well but water did not come forth. It was said that human sacrifice of a man with exceptional qualities was needed. A dalit named Vir Mahya was found after a great effort. He agreed to sacrifice his life but in exchange he put up "the first dalit charter of human rights" to be accepted by the king. He demanded abolition of the practice of tying a broom behind the back of his fellow dalits and a spittoon around their necks. His conditions were accepted. His community of dalit vankars, henceforth, began calling themselves Mahyavanshis, the descendants of Vir Mahya. The dalit writers and intellectuals have begun the search of linking their identities to the works of great dalit saints and heroes, such as, Sant Rohidas or Ravidas by the Chamaars; Swami Tejanand, Guru Valmiki, and Matang Swami, *et al.* Subsequently, the dalits came under the influence of Christian missionaries and the British by working as house servants and cooks for the latter. It must be noted that during this long period, unlike in Maharashtra, in Gujarat there was no anti-Brahminical movement. Nor did Gujarat have a Jotiba Phule or Shahu Maharaj. As a result, the dalits in Gujarat continued to be under the influence of reformist initiatives like Bhakti movements and the spread of education. Educated dalits began reforms within their own castes. The caste organizations became the chief forum and some castes, as Parmar (& Chaudhari, 1998:65) notes, drafted caste constitutions. After Gandhi's arrival on the national scene in 1915, many dalits joined the Congress and thereby Gandhi's movement.

The emergence of dalit elites began in 1930s in the form of the most powerful *mukaadams* or 'jobbers' (also known as 'masters') in the textile industry. Besides being a worker himself, the jobber was also a recruiting agent of fresh labour for the mill from his village. The formation of Majoor Mahajan, a Gandhian textile mill worker's union, opened the first avenue of organized mobilizational activities for the dalits, as they joined it in big numbers. A few dalit workers rose to become members of the executive committee of the Mahajan. Over the time, the master's power decreased and the members' power increased. The mill-owners took the 'members' of the Mahajan in trust, whereas the 'masters', who were closer to working class dalits, were marginalized. The dalit 'members' wore Khadi and preferred being known as Gandhian. The scope of acquiring a new identity was thus tapped by emerging dalit elites in this form. As a result, the dalit textile working class, under the leadership of 'masters' took to Ambedkar and invited him to Ahmedabad in 1928 and 1931. The distinction between dalit 'members' and 'masters' became clearer within the textile dalit community. The former became ally of the mill-owners and the Gandhians in the Congress and came to be perceived as exploiters of vulnerable common dalit workers. Even today, Parmar observes, the term 'member'

is used with contempt within the dalit community. There are cases of resistance by dalits to *veth* (a practice of forced, unpaid labour) in the princely states and the British areas. During 1938-39, a monthly called *Chingari* (spark) was started by some dalits in Ahmedabad for conscientizing, mobilizing and creating dalit consciousness for rights and solidarity.

It is interesting to note that between 1947-50, two major dalit mobilizations took place in Gujarat. The dalits of Ahmedabad launched an agitation for hotel or restaurant entry and the other was launched for motor (city public transport) entry into city buses. The former spread to other areas and cities of the state like Bharuch and Surat. The most sensitive mobilization was for temple entry. Parmar states that the Congress, including Sardar Patel, resisted this agitation by the dalits. The agitation to enter the Swaminarayan Temple at Kalupur, Ahmedabad culminated in knocking the doors of the Supreme Court. The Swaminarayan temple authorities disclaimed being Hindu and pleaded to be out of the scope of the Act. In some other cases, the Jains also took the same stand to keep the dalits away. Ironically the same sect had been in the forefront of backing Hindutva forces in the 1980s and 1990s. A large part of its followers are Patidar peasants, Bania trading community and middle classes of Central Gujarat.

Since Independence, the dalits of Gujarat were mobilized for four major agitations. Interestingly, all these four mobilizations were linked with the wider Ambedkarite movement. Firstly, the Republican Party mobilized the dalits in Saurashtra for the land question in 1960s. This movement ran for almost a decade and about 2,50,000 dalits went to jail in response to the movement's call of jail *bharo* (fill prisons). The government was forced to increase jail allocation to feed these dalit prisoners and it was lightly known as 'dalit budget' (Parmar & Chaudhari, 1998:65). The second major stirring in the dalit society of Gujarat occurred in the form of *dharmantar* (religious conversion) to Buddhism, a call issued by Ambedkar in 1956. Many educated dalits became Buddhist to assert their identity and to escape the indignity, insults and atrocities inflicted by caste Hindus. The third mobilization, which had its roots in the pre-Independence period, emerged from the dalit *akhada* (gymnasium) activities centred in and around Ahmedabad. The dalit *akhada* trained a few youngsters, who became the pillars of Ambedkarite movement and produced sporadic militant dalit leadership in Gujarat. Fourthly, the '70s saw the advent of dalit literature inspired by the Dalit Panther Movement. Today it has acquired vital literary space and commands influence on dalit society. The gains of this mobilization became prominently visible during the two phases of anti-reservation agitations by the dalits in 1980s. The dalit communities of Gujarat were shocked at the anti-reservation agitation by the upper castes of Gujarat. In the first phase, the upper caste *savarna* (having a caste category of higher status) communities, alongwith opposing the reservation system, began attacking the dalits in cities and rural areas. The dalits retaliated and launched a counter agitation, which lasted for 102 days.

The second phase of anti-reservation agitation was launched by the *savarnas* to protest against the rise in OBCs quota for Mandal castes of Gujarat. In countering it, the dalits found a new ally in the tribals and the OBCs. The resistance in tribal areas was stiff and upper caste assaults were repudiated and retaliated. Parmar states, "For the first time in Gujarat, the avarna vs savarna consciousness emerged where dalits, tribals and OBCs identified themselves with the" (the communities of the periphery or without a *varna* or status caste name). It must be noted here that these mobilizations of avarna-trio shook the savarnas. As always, the savarnas emerged triumphant. The CM was removed, KHAM was dismantled and avarna solidarity was destined to be broken brick by brick. They successfully raised the banner of Hindutva and began poaching on the avarna communities by co-opting their vocal and active leaders. The avarna forces of dalits, tribals and OBCs of Gujarat have failed to perceive and realize the Hindutva game plan of mixing up Hindu religion, Hindu society, and Hindu-nation by playing out well-orchestrated variety of tunes to curb any attempt to re-mobilize the avarnas. They are economically and politically de-mobilized and kept confused on this issue. Recently engineered systematic and deliberate attacks on dalit Christian minorities, tribal Christians and Muslim minorities by the Sangh Parivar forces of RSS-VHP-Bajrang Dal

in Gujarat are painful evidences of the wreckage of avarna mobilization of 1980s. The most unfortunate and the worst resultant development is the process of cadre-ization of the dalits by Bajrang Dal to steer attacks on the religious minorities of Muslims and Christians by the newly saffronized and Hinduized dalits and tribals.

Tribal Mobilization

In the same dialogic discussion with Parmar, which we summarized earlier, Chaudhari (Parmar & Chaudhari, 1998:64), too, traces the basic cultural roots of tribal worldview and their religious traditions. The concept of *paap* and *punya* and worship of Hindu gods and goddesses was brought to tribal societies by the Bhakti movement. Ghulam Maharaj, a saint, reinterpreted these notions and made them suitable to tribal worldview and tradition. According to Chaudhari, tribals worship nature, which is life giving. The Gujarat tribals worship mother goddess *Kansari* (goddess of foodgrain). Life is thus sacred and a cause of periodic celebrations. Chaudhari observes:

Even today, among the adivasis of the Dang, a pregnant woman's husband will not cut a tree or kill an animal in the belief that when one life is blossoming, another should not be taken. As a result, every time adivasis encounter organized religion, there is a clash... whether it is Brahminic Hinduism or Christianity.... I think all organized religions are authoritarian and hegemonistic. Even *parmatma* is authoritarian [as] kings were considered manifestation of *parmatma*.... Paradoxically, this very spirit of freedom has prevented adivasis from getting organized and offering a united opposition to authoritarianism.

Tribals have also gone through more or less the same route of moderate social transformation in Gujarat. Education was the earliest agent of change. The Gaekwad rulers in the tribal areas provided free and compulsory primary education. The British, too, promoted it in their territory by providing hostels for tribal boys. As a result, already before the arrival of Gandhi, the first generation of tribal teachers had emerged. The twin impact of the Bhakti movement and education turned them to social reforms. The great *chhapanio* famine of 1890s left a deep impact on the tribals. They lost their land to moneylenders. Thereafter, the issue of land and moneylenders acquired centrality in all future tribal mobilization and movements. The emergence of *bhajan mandalis* in South Gujarat became a unique feature of early social mobilization in the region. It produced such tribal reformers as Deviya Bhagat, Jeevan Bhagat of Vedchhi, Sonji Bhagat, Gopalji Bhagat and Tetiya Patel. These *bhajan mandalis*, as Chaudhari notes (Parmar & Chaudhari, 1998:65), did not only sing religious songs but provided important forum for discussing and debating crucial issues facing tribal society. Land continued to be the key issue of debate. It thus became a chief vehicle of spreading awareness among tribals and voicing their concerns. In 1913, leaders like Kotla Mehta, Naranji Baber, Tetiya Patel, Amarsinh Gamit, Jeevansinh Valvi and Raisingh Chaudhari founded the *Kali Paraj* Parishad. The tribals were then called *Kali Paraj* (forest people).

Chaudhari argues that the advent of education among tribals proved a mixed bag. It brought with it alien values, non-tribal world-views and patriarchy. Women's status declined. Above all, the Bhakti movement initiated "a process of Hinduization or Brahminization of the tribals". In the 19th century, their struggle was targeted against localized structures of authority or sources of injustice and exploitation, such as, moneylenders and local officials or representatives of princely states. Their struggle acquired greater and wider dimensions when they realized in this century that the real source of their exploitation and injustice was the British colonial rule as the moneylenders, local exploiters and the local despots derived their power and protection from these alien rulers. Hence, liberation from injustice required liberation from the British. *Kali Paraj* Parishad invited Gandhi at its Sheikhpura conference to awaken and mobilize the tribal society for ousting the British. He did not come but sent Kasturba on his behalf. He was the first non-tribal outside leader to be trusted by the tribals. Some tribal leaders initiated and continued (till Independence) a parallel movement in the form of local struggles against moneylenders and landlords on the issue of land. The Adivasi Khedut Mandal was formed to spearhead

this struggle. In 1929, they began publishing *Chingari* (spark) as “an organ of the movement”. Jeevansinh, a Gamit tribal, who could study upto second year of college, edited it.

In 1934, a *padyatra* (foot march) was launched. A charter of four demands was given to the Maharaja Gaekwad of Baroda. The demands were the following: (i) land to the tiller; (ii) setting up of cooperatives; (iii) measures to abolish tribal indebtedness; and (iv) the removal of penalty on parents whose children did not go to school. Chaudhari notes that they had gone to Maharaja with a thorough homework and preparedness. Alternative legislations were kept ready with the strategies of enactment and conceiving implementing machinery.

A few interesting mobilizations for tribal resistance, chiefly, against the British rule took shape in 19th century. The earlier one was in 1856 when the Bhils of Gujarat revolted against the British. Tatyapa Tope was supported in his armed resistance by the Bhils of Saputara during 1857-60. In this century, tribals of the Panchmahals were led by Guru Govind to rise against the *veth*. He preached against liquor and other vices. He blundered to challenge the British army and as a result 3000 Bhils were killed in 1912. This massacre occurred in Mangadh Hills of GujaratRajasthan border. The second major mobilization took place during Gandhi's freedom struggle. They participated in non-violent satyagrahas of Bardoli, the Salt March and the Quit India movement of 1942, facing imprisonment. A militant struggle was launched in 1940s on the issue of land alienation of tribals in South Gujarat. The Kisan Sabha was active under the leadership of Indulal Yagnik, Pangarkar, Jeevan Chaudhari and Ramji Chaudhari. Swami Sahajanand of Bihar provided inspiration to this movement. When the Congress met at its Haripura session with Subhash Bose as its president, the members of the Kisan Sabha organized a rally of 10,000 people and submitted a memorandum demanding abolition of *hali pratha* (bonded labour) and restoration of land ownership to the tillers. Sardar Patel was displeased at this representation and threatened to crush them between his fingers like mosquitoes, had it not been the occasion of the Congress session. Bose stated in his presidential address, “... if poor people did not benefit then freedom was of no use.” During the same year of the Haripura Congress meeting, at Ghulam Maharaj's village 15,000 tribals met and resolved to remove the British rule. Within a week, the number rose to 1,00,000 when many more tribals joined the resistance. The third strand of parallel mobilization was the result of modern education. It was somewhat different in character and more liberative in content. It was led by Kotla Mehta and had targeted moneylenders and landlords. After Independence, the leaders thrown up by these mobilizations and struggles were crushed, sidelined, ignored or marginalized. Congress was no exception to this process. By the end of 1950s, the original and natural leadership of tribals was erased from public space and memory. Since the '60s, Congress devised and followed the policy of proxy or protégé rule in tribal areas. This tradition has continued throughout the decades of this century, although the party in power has changed from Congress to BJP in the state. This aspect is discussed at greater length in the final section of this paper. The tribal protégés have proved to be more loyal to their party masters, be they of BJP or the Congress, rather than to the tribals whom they were representing and leading. This game plan of the politics of protégé rule has acquired the worst proportions in the now replaced BJP's penetration of tribal areas (Patel, 1999a & 1999c) in Gujarat.

After Independence, one interesting mobilization of tribals was achieved. In 1957, Kisan Sabha organized a big convention of tribals under the leftist leadership of Indulal Yagnik and B.T. Ranadive for demanding an autonomous tribal state. About 50,000 tribals attended this meeting. This movement could not yield much. It resurfaced in 1969 when Ratansinh Gamit, an MLA of the PSP, raised the slogan of autonomous state for the tribals in the budget session of the State Assembly. In May 1969, a convention of tribals met at Ahwa, the Dangs district. Desai (1970:7) states that apparently this call for an autonomous state looked like a separatist demand, but actually it was not so. There were three groups making this demand from different vantage points. The Marxists of CPI were interested in affording an opportunity to an exploited tribal community of Gujarat for exercising their right to self-determination as this strategy had succeeded in China and the Soviet Union. Their assumption was that tribal consciousness would automatically be converted into class consciousness. Four tribal MLAs of

the Swatantra Party declared on 15 June 1970 that they would give a charter of demands to the President. It is unclear whether this charter was presented or not but it could have been a move to exert pressure and generate political heat on the state government which was facing no-trust motion in the House. However, one paragraph of the charter is suggestive of the sentiments of unjust and exploitative treatment meted out to the tribals as Desai records (1970:19):

The Government of Gujarat in order to benefit its tribal supporters has allowed them to use some valuable minerals and natural forest wealth. Those who opposed it are deprived of their rights of freedom of expression and protest: Fabricated, wrongful court cases are filed and threats given to crush our political freedom.... We have decided to give this memorandum to the President to take steps vide 5th Schedule of the Constitution to protect our freedom, social justice and economic development.

The third source of demand was known as Vyara Group. Politically it can be categorized as middle path group. It was against political exploitation of the tribals but favoured political unity. In essence, it worked as a pressure or interest group for tribal society. Although the slogan of autonomous state for tribal was politically highly motivated and it was used by different groups for varying political purposes and cross-purposes as a political weapon, it did benefit tribals as they got conscientized and mobilized for the politics of democratic emancipation. A few specimen accounts are recorded by Desai (1970:22-24) by interviewing a former tribal MLA, which are worth considering to gauge the extent and intensity of maltreatment given to tribals:

After completing education, an adivasi youth faces the question of employment. He is poor and helpless. Who will help him? He registers his name at the Employment Exchange Centre. He is unaware that he has to review his registration after every three months. He awaits the order, which does not come and he gets frustrated. Besides, tribals' names are not forwarded if the job is good. How can an MA pass tribal youth be satisfied with a salary of Rs.100 to 150? On the other hand, his classmate becomes either a mamlatdar or collector. Why this inequality? They are not even able to benefit from reserved quota as qualifications are raised quite high. Adivasis are employed in teaching and cooperatives, but they are not visible in administration. Savarnas do not allow them to come up. You can understand all these only if you are an adivasi.

On 31 July 1970, as Desai (1970) has observed, the media reported that the state government made an announcement for constituting a welfare board with majority of SC & ST members. This board was supposed to be very powerful which was to make and implement the schemes for SCs & STs. The board was to protect the tribals against exploitation and injustice. There was some impact of these gains in mobilizing the tribal society for Navnirman movement in 1974 and pro-reservation struggle of the 1980s. In 1974, tribal students demanded the resignation of Congress leaders who were managing educational institutions. In 1980s, the entire tribal tract of *purvapatti* (eastern strip), stretching from Bhiloda in North to Umergaon in the South Gujarat, was mobilized for pro-reservation movement. The STs in the state bureaucracy also supported it and in 1985, they too joined the movement. Chaudhary concludes that administrative limitations and lack of political will on the part of the state government to protect the constitutionally guaranteed rights of dalits and tribals could not be protected. The political impotency of the upper strata-dominated KHAM mobilization was exposed in this and subsequent agitations. The pro-reservation agitation is remembered as an evidence of dalit, tribal and OBCs alliance against the *savarna* castes but in South Gujarat it is remembered as a forerunner of the Valia movement. It started as an agitation for minimum wages but ended up as a violent and militant struggle against land alienation and forest rights of the tribals (Adhyaryu, 1981 and Augustine, 1984). The access and use of natural resources by non-tribals through massive industrialization in tribal areas is next on the agenda for tribal mobilization. Chaudhari states that "land alienation is an everyday story" as expanding industries are pushing tribals more and more out from their natural habitats. State and market forces are out to disintegrate the tribal society of western region (Setu, 1999). In response to these trends, a mobilization of tribals was attempted to resist these forces by forming the Adivasi Ekta

Parishad. This forum not only tried to address the issues of the reservation policy or the Panchayati Raj Act but has gone beyond in taking up the issues of tribal life and survival from an ecological perspective.

OBCs' Mobilization

The emergence and prominence of OBCs in the contemporary Indian politics is mostly attributed to the implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations in 1989 (although they were made in 1981). But in Gujarat, this process had begun quite earlier. The OBCs had provided social basis to the Swatantra Party in 1960s by aligning with the Patidars and thereby forming 'Paksh' alliance (i.e. Patidar + Kshatriya). Specific in-depth and exclusive studies on OBCs are few and far between (Shah, 1975b; Patel, 1993; Lobo, 1995). Focus on OBCs has created a vexed situation of confusion rather than clarity. It is too widespread, amorphous, multi-layered and generic a category to be analytically used with any meaningful precision. New sub-categorizations, which have emerged while analyzing all-India electoral data, collected in the 1990s are: upper OBCs, peasant OBCs, lower class OBCs, artisan OBCs, landless OBCs and so on. Several caste names like Parmars, Vaghelas, Solankis, Makwanas, Rathods, etc., originally belonging to upper castes like Rajputs are adopted by the intermediate castes of Darjis and Mochis and lower castes like Vagharies and Bhangis (Sanghavi, 1996:62). This has proved the task of politico-sociological analysis quite difficult as caste names alone do not help much but its occupational history is a determining factor. In Gujarat, much before the Mandal some of the OBCs were listed as SEBCs or Baxi Panch Castes.

Now let us take up one big caste category of Kolis as a case in point from among the OBCs. According to 1931 Census, the Kolis, who are the largest caste group in Gujarat, had a population of 23 percent of the total Hindu population and 20 percent of the general population. It is believed that their proportion to the total population has remained the same (Lobo, 1995:1). By this assumption, today they must be about 1.2 crore in number. They compare with other such larger castes like Marathas in Maharashtra, Okkaligas in Karnataka, Kammass and Reddys in Andhra Pradesh and Jats and Yadavas in North India. The Kolis are a widely-settled community. They coexist with Bhils in tribal areas and are spread in most rural areas of the whole state - be it north, central or south. Koli is a generic as well as specific caste name. Two main types of Kolis are *Talpada* and *Pardeshi*. Some sub-caste names like Idaria, Palia, Chunualia and Debariya suggest the place of their origin whereas others like Pagi and Kotwal suggest occupation. The other confusing list of their caste names comprises Bariya, Bhalia, Khout, Patanwadia, Dharala, Patelia, Motia, Thakor, Rathwa, Gulam, etc. The caste name Thakor is used as a more honorific, high sounding and high status symbol than Koli. The variety of caste names impedes the process of their categorization as lower, middle or upper classes. It is quite well done in the case of the SCs and STs as Shah's study shows (1975a:159):

There is a good deal of division within... Both the Adivasis and Harijans are divided into several social groups. And political power is not evenly distributed... among them. In fact, it is concentrated... in Dhodiyas and Chaudharis among the tribals and Vankars and Chamars among the Scheduled Castes.

But, OBCs have registered a great deal of occupational and regional social variation. Some of the coastal OBCs do fishing for livelihood. In other areas, they work as agricultural labourers, tenants or small farmers. After 1947, voting rights have empowered them politically a great deal and have raised their political consciousness. Lobo's (1995:171) assessment of the situation is interesting:

In Gujarat, the upper castes (Brahman, Vaniya and Patel) held power and wealth. In 1981, Gujarat witnessed... anti-reservation struggle launched by the upper castes. The role of caste and inherited status have for long influenced the monopolizing of the available jobs by the upper castes and the mobility of lower castes is viewed as dangerous by vested interests.... At one point, it threatened to turn into a confrontation between Patels and Kolis in some parts. The upper castes have not taken kindly to the political role of Kolis, nor to their economic aspirations.

Thus, there are two groups of OBCs – one, which benefits from reservation and the other, which, despite having same caste names does not get the benefits of reservation. Besides, the ruling on the creamy layer among OBCs has come in effect which bars all those above Rs.2 lacs (two hundred thousand) annual

income from benefiting from the reservation quota. There is a strong dissent against this and efforts of conscientization are on (Patel, 1997a). Patel's (1993:142-43) discussion of economic stratification among Kolis of South Gujarat is interesting. In South Gujarat, the upper strata Kolis comprise 10 percent, which includes land-owners, and professionals like doctors, lawyers, Class-I government employees, contractors, and builders. These are elites among the South Gujarat Kolis. The middle class Kolis form about 40 percent. It comprises small landowners, Class-II employees, small workshop-owners etc. Poor Kolis are about 50 percent. Their political importance is confined only to voting. There is no other issue-based mobilization of Kolis in South Gujarat as it was done in the case of Kshatriyas in Central and North Gujarat in the 1960s. Caste sentiment is found to be cutting across these layers of classes. The elite Kolis prevail upon them and decide on behalf of the entire caste. They use it as a vote bank to increasing their bargaining capacities. The reason for relatively lesser political empowerment of Kolis of South Gujarat lies in their late awakening to the importance of caste association. As Patel observes (1993) a Koli Association was formed in South Gujarat in 1970. The caste conventions of Kolis in South Gujarat were poorly attended as lower classes felt quite alienated and mobilization was inadequate. Unlike the other two lower classes like SCs and STs, the OBCs have missed a historical opportunity of voluntary and socially constructive initiatives. Without achieving adequate levels of sustained mobilization and conscientization, the OBCs took a hasty and blind plunge to take political advantages. This did not help them substantially. As a result, they politically oscillated from one political party to the other without really benefiting socio-economically. Lobo observes that (1995:173) from four MLAs in 1952, the Kolis rose to 40 in 1980. First they went with the Congress, then in '60s to the Swatantra Party, then again back to the Congress as a component of KHAM and finally with the BJP as a part social base of Hindutva (Patel, 1999c). This has though helped in formation of elite strata among SCs, STs and the Koli-OBCs.

As can be seen, mobilization of the OBCs has been an extremely complex and scattered process. It is not so unusual to find the OBCs maintaining social distance with SCs, with whom they have, otherwise, politically allied. There is a social contradiction in this political togetherness, which prevents the emergence of progressive and meaningful political mobilization and alliance between the SCs and OBCs, on the one hand, and among all the three on the other. The OBCs alongwith the savarnas are the perpetrators of atrocities on SCs in Gujarat and as a result, their role in anti-reservation agitation was that of a reluctant, strategic and tactful involvement. The ideology of Hindutva is used for sectarian mobilization and it has brought OBCs to BJP since 1990s. Parmar has however expressed optimism that "... the deprived avarna communities are coming together to demand social justice in the coming years... The movement for asmita or the assertionist movement among dalits is powerful but does not aspire to political power. This assertionist movement has always remained at the periphery of power". The dalit elites committed to party politics are felt to be of no much use. Instead, they dis-empower assertionist movements among dalits. This is by far the trend vis-à-vis other lower class communities too. Tribal leaders or politicians are found to be of no much use to the tribal community in their hours of need. This home truth becomes starker in the narrative that follows in the second part.

Part II

VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND MOBILIZATION OF LOWER CLASSES

It is intended here to profile microscopically the cases of lower class mobilization, struggle and action chiefly to bring out the efficacy of non-political party space that has emerged as a nationwide phenomenon. How have social activists, working among the dalits and the tribals, responded to these needs of theirs is accounted and narrated around key issues of contentious conflict of interests. An attempt is also made here to focus on some of the cases of atrocities on dalits and the nature of their responses to these atrocities, injustices, deprivation, marginalization and neglect. The credit for major initiative in documenting contemporary processes of lower class mobilizations goes to three institutions engaged in documentation, research, action and interpretation of struggles. They are: (i) Centre for Social Knowledge and Action, Ahmedabad known as SETU; (ii) Gujarat Khet Vikas

Parishad, Ahmedabad; and (iii) as mentioned earlier the Centre for Social Studies, Surat. The literature on the denial of democratic, constitutional and human rights to lower classes in Gujarat and their anticipatory or retaliatory mobilization is made available under different auspices of, say, Lokayan Gujarat, Lok Adhikar Sangh (Ahmedabad), Socialist Study Centre (Surat), Samajik Nyay Kendra (Ahmedabad), *Setu Patrika*, *Naya Marg* (a fortnightly publication of Khet Vikas Parishad, Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, and Shramjivi Samaj, Bhiloda).

Voluntary sector in Gujarat has made pioneering contributions historically in initiating various ameliorative, supportive, and welfare efforts for the uplift of the weaker section consisting of lower classes with varying degree of intensity, commitment and success. The lower classes have upto a point benefited from these early efforts of pre-Independence period. We must recall that the foundation and tradition of voluntary activities has been laid in Gujarat since centuries. As Adhvaryu (1986:21) has observed, the earliest evidence has been recorded in the form of welfare activities organized by *savarna* ministers like Vastupal and Tejpal. In the medieval period, mahajan mandals used to organize charities in cities. During the British period, Christian missionaries opened up numerous agencies. They began working for backward classes directly. Their assumption was that Indian society was very backward and it was their duty to take them forward by religious propagation. These missions went beyond the work of religious propagation and plunged into opening up dispensaries, hospitals, primary and secondary schools and hostels. Once the British left, the state stopped supporting them. As a result, they folded up their religious activities of propagation and conversion. But they continued educational and health related activities. During the freedom movement and after Independence, in Gujarat as well as across the country, Gandhian-Sarvodaya voluntary organizations were opened. They penetrated interior areas and began educational activities. Even today there are Gandhian-Sarvodaya voluntary institutions, which run ashramshalas. Thakkar Bapa was a pioneer in tribal areas. Some of the illustrious organizations, continuing to work even today are: (i) Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod (established by Thakkar Bapa); (ii) Swaraj Ashram (set up by Chhotubhai Desai); (iii) Adivasi Sewa Sangh, Bharuch; (iv) Pachhatvarg Sewa Mandal, Baroda; (v) Sanali Ashram in Banaskantha; and (vi) Rani Paraj Sewa Sabha and Vedchhi Ashram, set up by Jugatram Dave.

Thus, many agencies were set up for working in tribal areas. Adhvaryu sums up that these organizations stressed only education and taught tribals how to pray and become *sanskari* (reformed with good personal habits). But they never conscientized, mobilized or taught them as to how to fight injustices, atrocities and how to struggle against violation of their democratic and human rights. It is this limiting factor, which sealed the fate and future of these institutions. They survived through their work in educational spheres but lost historic opportunities of enabling these deprived, marginalized and oppressed classes regarding how to fend themselves politically and ideologically. One contribution, however, merits attention and that is they produced over the times cadres of educated elites within dalits, tribals and lower OBCs and sent them off to either the cadres of electorally ambitious political parties of all hues or to local, district, or state level bureaucracy. Some went either to education or cooperative sectors and some others to voluntary sectors of employment. Those who went away like this mostly proved of no use to their own left-out community-members, as they watched the infliction of atrocities and denial of rights and justice to their fellow men from their positions in administration, police or politics. The result is that the poor have remained poor and there is no change in their socio-economic conditions. Adhvaryu opines (1986:24):

So far, all those (like government, missionaries and sarvodaya organizations) who have worked among the poor have done nothing to reduce the inequality. Government's new schemes have also failed to achieve equality. If we wish to remove poverty, we all will have to engage ourselves in the task of levelling the uneven ground. In this country, so far as the pits of poverty will not be filled and peaks of wealth will not be trimmed, poverty removal will only remain intact as a catchy, romantic slogan.... New agenda for all such organizations working for the poor should be to achieve unity among the poor, conscientize the poor and struggle against the injustices.... For achieving any kind of social

transformation of the poor, there is no other way but to struggle. Even for getting minimum wage Act implemented in your villages, you will have to struggle.

Thus, the electoral or political party politics is not going to be useful in any way in improving the lot of the poor. Instead, the united efforts by all those who are poor - be they dalits, STs or OBCs, have to be channelized into a grand mobilization which can lay the foundations for pro-poor policies, decisions, structures and processes.

An explosion of such efforts in this direction had occurred when in the '80s a series of interactive dialogues among the social activists and intellectuals were organized by the Gujarat Lokayan, SETU, CSS and Shramjivi Samaj from 1981 to 1988 at different places in Gujarat (Macwan, 1982 & 1986; Maheriya, 1988). This literature contains very rich insights into the issues and problems of mobilization of lower classes. Throughout 1980-81, deliberations were held on such themes of praxis as assessing the contemporary rural society, challenges of the '80s, challenges faced by social activists, the direction and future of movement for downtrodden, conscientization of and awareness among the oppressed and the workers. The First such Meet was held at Vanasthali village in Vadod taluka of Surat on 3-4 October 1981. It deliberated on the theme of identification of the rural poor, the past and present of their mobilization and organizations, their nature and problems in the present context as well as future directions. It was well-attended and open-hearted exchange of views and dialogues took place. Thereafter, the Second Meet was held at Isari Valmiki Ashram in Sabarkantha district on 25-26 November 1982. In all, 130 social activists attended it. Eighty-seven belonged to 35 yuvak mandals active in the Panchmahals district, whereas 43 participants came from NGOs active in backward regions. The Meet concluded with the following warning note from Adhvaryu (Macwan, 1982:35-38):

The Planning Commission has completed five Plans. The Sixth Plan is in motion. But poverty is not removed. You feel that there is some remedy up my sleeve but frankly my assessment is that whatever we have in the name of government in this country is half dead. It is gradually disintegrating. Bihar like situation is rising in Gujarat. When a complaint is launched against a fozdar to Home Minister for abducting a poor Luhana's daughter and returning her after three days, he gets promotion instead of punishment. The Janta rule was viewed by Patels as their own rule. The present rule is viewed by the Thakor's and Kshatriyas as their father's rule. The whole state is a hunting ground and they can hunt any [human] animal. What to expect from such government?

Yet, there is a ray of hope. It is you and your organizations. In tribal areas today you are able to dig the well as soon as the idea comes in your mind, whereas the government could not do it for 35 years. But there are 18,000 villages and limitless work. Gandhiji has compared this country's poverty with a bottomless pit! How to fill it? Government will not be able to do it and how much more can we wait? During freedom struggle, I had many hopes but they are all dashed. I had trust in education.... It did work up to a period. All my dalit and tribal students of '65 batch have good jobs. But in '70s only 50 percent graduates and 20 percent of matric pass got jobs. In '75, only 25 percent graduates could get job whereas only 5 percent matric pass got it. But in '80s, I saw that all remained unemployed.

Adhvaryu has made scathing and bitter attacks on contemporary politics and politicians. The unemployed dalit and tribal graduates have to pay bribes even to get a job of a PSI from a reserved quota category for SCs or STs. Today's politician is not able to see beyond a week or a month. His energies, priorities and calculus are election and power centric. This leaves him with the only ability of paying lip service to his needy, struggling voters. Adhvaryu appealed to all these torchbearers of pro-poor mobilization as follows: "Power is with us only, yet we elusively keep chasing the phony politicians and the leaders. People will have to exert and shape their own power. Solutions to our problems will have to be searched by us. The only path open to us for creating a new equal, just society without pits [of poverty] and peaks [of wealth] is that of 'mass mobilization'. Let us begin levelling the land by razing the peaks and filling the pits".

The Isri-Meet ended with a two point agenda of “struggle and reconstruction”. It was felt that the one without the other would prove futile. The temptations of electoral cooptation and power were debated. This Meet was a historic event in the contemporary annals of lower class mobilization, struggle and movement in the state. The Third Meet was held at Rajpipla in May 1983. About 100 participants attended it. It was a stock-taking session. Social activists felt that people’s agenda was taking shape but its efficacy was not sufficiently felt. All the splintered efforts of voluntary agencies, spread across the state, were not adding to a good big sum total. As a result, the strategy of empowering through federating was adopted and the Gujarat Gramothan Mahamandal was founded. There is a book length series of documentation available on such narratives of micro actions by micro groups (Macwan, 1982 and 1986; Maheriya, 1988; *Setu Patrika*, 1980-86; Bhatt, 1989; Adhvaryu, 1994). These narratives, reconstructed from the documented material, indicate that lower class mobilization by the voluntary sector in Gujarat was quite parallel to the political activities undertaken during the nationalist movement and electoral politics as well as agitational mobilization during the post-Independence period.

The glimpses into the efforts at pro-poor or lower class mobilizations and organizations bring us to the major theoretical question, raised by Bhatt (1989:192-94) after considering the entire process of grassroots mobilization for the lower classes and by the lower classes. They are as follows:

What are the chances of survival, sustenance and replicability of mandals? Can they be professed as an alternative model of development? Do they possess a potential of rising as a countrywide movement to achieve various goals of social justice, which could not be achieved by an established set-up? Can they blossom into a macro movement for alternative development? Would their operations be in a perpetual state of mobilization, organization and participation?

....All the macro attempts to change the social order in the last forty years, from within the system (community development and panchayati raj, the micro and bottom up planning, poverty alleviation and other development programmes and schemes); outside the system (Bhoodan, JP movement) and against the system (the Naxalite movement) have failed. In that context, these micro movements are indeed worth looking at - but whether these efforts eventually would lead to a fundamental social transformation is debatable.

EMERGENCE OF HINDUTVA MOBILIZATION AND ITS IMPACT

The decade of '80s saw three distinct trends with regard to the lower class mobilization. First, the electoral-political mobilization in the form of KHAM alliance yielded rich dividends to the Congress in terms of Assembly seats (149/182). Barring a few symbolic pro-poor measures, the gains of electoral mobilization were lost as the intracomponent elites of KHAM alliance chose to oblige their savarna bosses and masters in the Congress and did not use the opportunity for consolidating the electoral successes into policy-shifts. The second trend was marked by the retaliation by middle and upper classes against the lower classes by launching of antireservation, and farmers’ agitations and communal violence. The third trend in this decade was characterized by the emergence of a powerful, committed and radical transformative effort by non-political party process led by a band of committed social activists and intellectuals. This macro intervention under the auspices of Lokayan Gujarat provided a forum for dialogue among all those engaged in mobilizing the poorer sections among the SCs, STs and OBCs across the state. This effort raised a great hope and created confidence in the poor to fight against exploitation and injustices as well as struggle for their constitutionally guaranteed democratic rights of dignity, livelihood safety and opportunities. However, due to increasing pressure from the anti-poor lobbies of the state, the mobilized efforts, tempo and activities could not be sustained. The lower class mobilization of the '80s

could not be adequately institutionalized. Shah (1998:30-31) observes, “With the BJP at the helm today, pro-backward caste politics has decisively taken a back seat”.

These words of Shah have proved prophetic as increasing frequency of denying rightful claims of lower classes have emerged in `90s. It is observed that dalits, tribals and lower OBCs are used by the BJP only as an electoral fodder and once on the seat of power, their interests are neglected. For instance, the Home Minister of GOG, Haren Pandya has denied in the State Assembly the extent or intensity of atrocities on dalits. He viewed this event as an exaggeration by media. Anti-lower class biases of BJP have surfaced in numerous ways. The dalit and tribal MLAs are not given due attention whenever they try to convey the demands of their communities. The Health Minister of GOG, Ashok Bhatt also disregarded tribal MLAs when they wanted to represent the interests of the constituencies to their own government. Resentment against Brahmins and Patels is rising among lower castes. The tribal leaders in Gujarat exerted pressure on the BJP government and got their quota of reservation raised from 14.78 to 15 percent. As it would have serious implications on the electoral outcomes at various levels in tribal areas, this demand was quietly and cleverly conceded by the BJP government.

It is becoming increasingly clear to the lower classes that their role in politics is confined to periodic voting. In the hour of their dire as well as routine needs, none of the parties or politicians would come to their timely rescue. The dalit leaders who tried to stand by them during the attacks and atrocities on dalits in Kadi town near Ahmedabad were brutally treated by a dalit PSI who was acting under political pressures from the BJP government. In Saurashtra and North Gujarat also such incidences of atrocities have risen during the BJP rule.

Atrocities on dalits and tribals have increased as can be seen from the incidences of violation of human rights in Valia (Adhvaryu, 1981, Augustine, 1984; Desai & Maheriya, 1995; Jani, 1998a), Golana massacre, tying with a rope, beating and parading of Taluka Panchayat President and advocate Amarsinh Vasava, terrorizing and raping of a tribal woman in the police station of Naswadi, beating up of Muljibhai, a dalit in Dhandhuka police station, and atrocities by forest department on Bhura Hartan, a tribal. All these go to show that the mobilization of `80s was not only dissented but it also strengthened their resolve to crush the lower classes by unleashing a reign of terror to undo all the gains of conscientization achieved by lower class mobilization. Table-1 shows the rise in atrocities on dalits and tribals in the period between 1981-1995 (Jani, 1998a:8). These data are indicative of the violent reaction that was encountered and faced by the lower classes as a result of their organization and mobilization for democratic rights.

Table - 1 Instances of Atrocity on SCs and STs in Gujarat
During 1981-1995

Sr. No.	Category Period	Murders	Fatal Injuries	Rape	Other IPC Related Crimes	Fatal Attacks	Total
A	SCs						
1	1981-85	82	316	34	2230	252	2914
2	1986-90	76	322	78	2889	71	3436
3	1991-95	117	383	100	7272	103	7975
	TOTAL	275	1021	212	12391	426	14325
B	STs						
1	1981-85	38	114	34	327	16	529
2	1986-90	53	129	92	421	16	711
3	1991-95	86	193	150	1359	17	1805

TOTAL ~	177	436	276	2107	49	3045
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Source: Jani, Indukumar (1998a), *Manav Adhikar : Sabaar Upare Manush Satya* (in Gujarati), p. 8.

This theoretically formidable-looking lower class mobilization gave sleepless nights to the ruling caste elites of the state and in order to dismantle it and wash out its gains to the poor, they took recourse to expansion of religious space in the public sphere. A systematic orchestration of religious conscientization of the masses for evolving a pan-Hindu identity through sectarian mobilization was unleashed in Gujarat (Shah, 1998:31; Iyenger, 1999; Patel, 1999b&c,2003) by a variety of rath yatras. Within less than two months of the Hindutva-backed BJP government in power, atrocities against dalits, tribals and Muslims increased (as can be seen from Table - 1). In Dhanera properties of Muslims were burnt at the alleged instigation of a Minister and they were terrorized. In Bhavnagar, when Muslims were attacked and their properties destroyed, the collector and the DSP were away, but the Home Minister was present. In Kadi, the Minister, Nitin Patel was allegedly involved in instigating, planning and leading attacks on dalits. The President of Kadi Municipality is reported to have abused and threatened the dalits of dire consequences as it was now 'their rule' (Jani, 1998a:82-83). The difference between the Congress and the BJP governments is that during Congress rule, when such attacks were made, dalit MLAs, MPs, and Ministers used to openly rush to the victims. But during the BJP rule, its dalit, tribal and OBC MPs, MLAs and Ministers could not show the courage to rush to the victims of state-unleashed violence due to the fear of inviting the wrath of party bosses as well as the Sangh Parivar.

The Hindutva mobilization used lower classes for electoral gains and their consolidation but it did not care to protect them. But for the efforts of NGOs such as Disha, Navsarjan (Kheda), Rajpipla Service Society, Ashadeep (Vallabh Vidyanagar), Lok Adhikar Sangh, PUCL, Movement for Secular Democracy, Samajik Nyay Kendra, SETU and many others, the Hindutva forces would have completely terrorized and considerably crushed the lower classes. The cases of Golana and Sabarda atrocities are proof of such resistance from the oppressed and the welcome result of the empowerment achieved by the mobilization of the '80s, discussed earlier. In a notorious event, 332 dalits, residents of the village of Sabarda in the district of Banaskantha, fled their village on 26 June 1989 to take refuge in the compounds of the District Collectorate at Palanpur, when the Gadhvis unleashed terror on them. They were out in the open for 131 days. Six babies were born while in exile at the Collectorate. From there they were shifted and were rehabilitated in the new settlement at Swamannagar. Yet, they remained uncompensated for all their earnings they had lost in Sabarda, such as, land, wells, and electric motor pump. Throughout the Sabarda struggle, representations were made to all the five CMs (Madhavsingh Solanki, Amarsingh Chaudhari, Chimanbhai Patel, Chhabildas Mehta and Keshubhai Patel) but to no avail until in 1994 some partial steps were taken (Desai & Maheriya, 1995; Jani, 1998a).

The lower classes in Gujarat are awaiting one more drive of mobilization and organization to combat growing atrocities on them. The prospects of livelihood in rural areas, are continuously declining, the price rise is reducing the value of their wages. The land situation is worsening. Widescale industrialization is increasing land alienation of the lower classes. Shah has made valid observations about the future trends (1998:31):

The proponents of this [Hindutva] ideology seem to have succeeded in forging unity among the forward and deprived castes during the riots and mobilization on the Ayodhya issue. They also managed the support of a sizable section of dalits and OBCs, particularly their upwardly mobile strata, in the 1995 and 1998 assembly elections.... The Sangh Parivar has to some extent succeeded in sharpening social polarization along communal lines.... But that does not mean that the conflict... between the forward and backward castes/classes is dormant and can be wished away for long. In fact, tension within the BJP... or the factional fights at all levels within the party, are manifestations of

conflict on caste/class lives. The BJP, given its ideological framework and organizational structure cannot hold power for long by harping on communal conflict alone.

The assessment of Shah *prima facie* appears to be missing a few counts as the prospect of the emergence of a third force or the strengthening of the Congress at present are so bleak in Gujarat. But it is not so as Shah is aware of this as he writes, “The state does not have a Mayavati, a Mulayam Singh or a Laloo Prasad Yadav who deploy a caste idiom and argue against communal politics”.

The task of identifying the contours and prospects of future progressive political mobilization for lower classes is quite complex and formidable. Chances appear bleak as the grip of Hindutva forces on lower classes is tightening. The difficulty is compounded when specific harbingers of this process in the form of individuals, institutions/organizations and broader socio-political processes are attempted to be delineated. The promises of `80s need a well-corrected repeat but how it will happen remains unfathomed, especially, in the context of increasing saffronization of the secular democratic public space in Gujarat. In the context of such processes and prospects at the national level the following words of Yadav (1998:31) denote certain course of action, which may be considered the first step towards a way out:

But disappointment has its own functions.... There are three aspects of challenges of defining the new yugdharma.... First, where are we [standing] today? Second, where do we wish to go? Third, how will the distance from ‘where we are’ to ‘where we wish to be’ be bridged? The first question is analytically-oriented, second is about political philosophy and the third, pertains to strategy and praxis.

Let us sum up this discussion by taking the third aspect of the challenge as proposed by Yadav first, i.e., strategy and praxis. There is a yawning gap between where the lower classes of Gujarat are today and “where they ought to be” as the equal, free citizens of constitutionally governed India. The case of Gujarat indicates that the politics of mobilizing lower classes has addressed the issues of social justice only in a symbolic and electorally considered compulsions facing political parties (Patel, 1999a; Shah, 1997). Both the political parties, namely, the Congress and the BJP, have been successful in Gujarat in luring and enticing lower classes by means of populist election time promises and garnering their votes. Once in power, the original upper caste-based agenda comes in effect. On the part of the lower class electorate, the studies have shown that despite such symbolic and populist content of middle and upper class dominated mainstream politics, they see a hope in electoral politics of voting, contesting and representing their interest in whatever way possible. This is how the democratic politics works as a politics of hope for a better future by sustaining electoral interest of the oppressed lower classes.

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