

### Summary and Concluding Observations

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The present study entitled “BALMIKI COMMUNITY IN DARJEELING HILLS: A STUDY OF POLITICS OF MIGRATION, DEPRIVATIONS AND EMPOWERMENT” has discussed the process and problems of migration of one of the marginalized communities in the hills of Darjeeling. The study also has attempted to evaluate a large account of deprivations of the community in India in general, and in the hills of Darjeeling in particular. The study further tried to evaluate the contradictions between the constitutional provisions safeguarding the deprived communities, on the one hand, and the ground reality of their marginalization and deprivations, on the other. The study has designed some research questions to guide us along our present study.

The present work has been designed in six chapters. The summary consists of three sections. The first section is an overview of the different chapters of the present work. The second section highlights on the major findings of the present study. And the third section of the summary tries to point out the requirements of and space for future research in the area.

#### Section I

. The **First chapter** entitled ‘Introduction’ contains the statement of the problem of study, a brief review of literature, objectives of study spelt out by the research questions, developed the framework for our study, explained our research methodology, along with the significance of the study. This section also points out the limitations of the present study, and at the end, it tries to highlight on the organization of the entire thesis.

The **Second chapter** reviews the historical traces of the *Balmikis* Migration to Darjeeling Hills. This chapter has been designed in a manner to provide a picture of the life of the

*Balmikis* in the Darjeeling Hills, both as it was in the past and is in present. This chapter also tries to conceptualize Migration by way of analyzing different theoretical underpinnings, and attempts to interrogate the process and problems of migration in the context of India and West Bengal in general, and the hills of Darjeeling in particular.

The **Third chapter** makes a brief survey of the constitutional provisions geared towards affirmative action and locates the position of the *Balmiki* within the same and attempts to unearth them within the broad canvass of Indian politics. There are enumerable constitutional provisions regarding the socio-economic and political upliftment of the SCs and STs and OBCs, to cope up with the main stream populace. The upper castes of Indian society in general are not prepared to accept the so called lower castes people to move up horizontally. On the other hand, due to lack of proper education and financial distress most people belonging to lower castes scare to mix up with the so called upper caste people. Moreover, the upper caste people occupy the fundamental position in the government jobs especially IPS, IAS, and IFS, and legislators who have the lion share in the law making process. Due to the red tape naught any constitutional provisions pertaining to SCs and STs is not being activated in proper time. Dilly-dally with the constitutional provisions has become a part and partial for the administration, legislature and judiciary.

**Chapter Four** begins by throwing some light into the socio-economic and political processes and *Balmikis* marginalization in Darjeeling. The community aspirations and experiences of marginalization of the *Balmikis* in Darjeeling hills. The dreams and desires, the hopes and aspirations of the *Balmikis* residing in the hills of Darjeeling have not been addressed properly. They have been dealt with ham-handedly as they were not the local people; they were migrated from the north-west provinces of India during the British regime.

**Chapter Five** have attempted to into the possibility of charting a *Balmiki* consciousness. The study have explored the complex process of identity formation for the Balmikis, sometimes as a caste based groups, sometimes as an occupation-based group mainly through ethnographic study of the community, through oral history as well as through primary sources (historical) and contemporary sources (literature on Gorkhaland movement).

## Section II

The present study started with exploring the concept and context of migration and deprivation of one of the most marginalized communities in India, as well as in the hills of Darjeeling in West Bengal. In the process the study raised certain issues with regard to the nature, pattern and process of Migrations of the *Balmiki* community to Darjeeling and surrounding areas, and the responses of the community to migration. The objective of the present study was also to perceive the community's social, economic and political position vis a vis, the dominant Nepali or Gorkha community of the area under study. The present study reveals the following major findings accordingly:

It has been observed that history has remained utterly silent about the contributions made by the Balmikis even during India's struggle for freedom. For instance during the sepoy mutiny Mangal Panday was penalized and hanged to death for his revolt against the Britishers, his contribution has been eulogized in history. But a person from the Balmiki community named '*Matadin Balmiki*' who shared the same fate as Mangal Panday, however, does not have any account of his contribution in the history.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, even the contributions of Dr.B.R.

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<sup>1</sup> Statue of Matadin Balmiki at Barrackpore and the title stone nameplate states that “ *Matadin Balmiki showed the Indian Soldiers that the factory where the tallow of the animals was being brought in that enraged the already aggrieved soldiers, and led Mangal Pande to fire the first shot and kill the British army officer. Subsequently both Mangal Pande, and Matadin Balmiki were tried in the court martial and sentenced to be hanged to death. It was Matadin Balmiki who was hanged first, and after him Mangal Pande was hanged.*”

Ambedkar in the process of nation-building, and more importantly his contribution for giving us the Constitution of India, has always remained underemphasized.

The fundamental maxim of this study was to bring the '*dissenting voices*' in the context of Darjeeling. The Balmikis as an immigrant community that have been experiencing the caste based inequality with the '*unequal*' Nepalis Indian population.<sup>2</sup> Under such circumstances, the Balmikis have been treated differently at different stages of hill life. There is no doubt that the Balmiki migration to the hills is parallel to the Nepalis and other communities, during the British regime, as a forced labour. However, the Balmiki migration from the Northern and Central Indian states was not smooth. It reflects the nature and scope of their migration in terms of '*push*' and '*pull*' elements in an alien territory. In the process of their migration, due to the changing political scenario the host communities developed the feeling of hatred towards this dalit community. Even being the permanent settlers in the hills, they have been treated as 'outsiders' by the so called cosmic local communities. In the process the Balmikis lost the sense of belongingness in an alien land and thus the practice of 'back home' migration eventually developed. Rather the problem of this dalit community, did not end here, they were again treated as '*others*' or '*Pradeshi*' at their native places.

The Balmikis traditions, societal organizations, socio-economic proceedings have been different from the local majority community. Their functioning could not match with the footsteps of the Nepali community, because of which they have been outlined from the decision making procedures. However, the Balmiki Harijan Sangh has been able to consolidate the hopes and aspirations of the community in the hills of Darjeeling. Being the apex functioning body of the community it has been trying its level best to fulfill socio-economic desires, up to a certain limit. Political demands still need to be address by the hill

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<sup>2</sup> Here '*unequal*' means Nepalese Indian population who have been treated as 'outsiders', as they have migrated to Indian states during the British encounters. They have been treated as Second Class Citizens by the mainstream Indian populace.

politics. The irony is that, they have remained inferior and considered backward community in the hills, because of which their confidence level have been further gone down in the due course. People either consider them subordinate because of their occupation or they are apathetic towards them. In the true sense of the term the community has been socially, economically and politically deprived. All these facts remained intact in their life the reason why they consider themselves as the prey to the suppressing society. The harassment and disregard by the higher authorities and local Nepali communities has filled the Balmiki with such coldness that the highly educated members of the community kept themselves behind the curtain. Most inferior of the inferiors Nepali communities, this Balmiki community is stuck in the bog of financial crises. Government has introduced so many schemes for improvement of the lower castes, but no one has ever acknowledged the necessity for schemes for the upliftment of people who keeps the society clean.

From the underpinning of the present study, it is fairly incontestable that Darjeeling is one of the most stratified societies in present day context on the bases of 'caste' and 'others.' The Balmikis has become a sandwich between the notion of caste and others, which have pushed them to the peripheries in the day to day politics of the hills. The Caste has been an incalculably important and mainly permanent marker of community stratification and it becomes more obvious from the magnitude of the caste-factor in the political landscape of Darjeeling. They were denied from providing substantive post in the Darjeeling municipality, even after working for 10-12 years of tenure, the vacant posts of Safai Karamcharis were allocated to the middle class, upper caste Nepali population due to job competition who further suppress the Balmikis on the basis of caste but not on the occupation. A part of these

the Balmikis were also denied from the benefits which they were supposed to get after their super annuation of services.<sup>3</sup>

The deprivations had come in different ways at different phases of Darjeeling politics. The single party domination and lack of strong opposition, on the issues of marginalised or dalit, in hill politics have sub-lined the upliftment of caste groups especially in case the Balmikis, because of which the segregated territory could not benefit much from this deprived section of society. The promises made by the centre and the state in the autonomous council (DGHC) could not accommodate this community. There has been reservation of seats for the representation of SCs and STs in all the elected bodies viz., Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha, Nagarpalikas, Panchayats etc. but unfortunately not a single seat had been reserved for the SCs in neither the erstwhile administrative arrangement, the Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council, nor the present Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, by election. As per the norms prescribed for the Government of India in the Constitution 3 (Three) seats for the Scheduled Castes and 4 (four) seats for the Scheduled Tribes was supposed to be reserved in the DGHC. The entire SCs and STs are dismayed by the denial of the Constitutional rights by the Government of West Bengal, who were responsible for making the provision in the DGHC Act by an Act of Legislative Assembly or ordinance.<sup>4</sup> The relation between caste distinctiveness and politics has been dynamically exploited by the political parties and the local hill populace, leading to the Balmikis deprivations, not only politically but also socially, and economically.

Further, more the study has been focusing mainly on the *Gorkhey Balmikis* to see social mobility mainly through access to education and a shift away from 'traditional' occupation.

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to, The Chairman, Darjeeling Municipality, from Balmiki Harijan Sangh. Ref. No. 3 (98-99) B.H.S. Dated: 18.04.1998.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to the President, Balmiki Harijan Samaj, from, Darjeeling Dooars Scheduled Castes and Tribes Welfare Association, Central Committee, Darjeeling - 734101, West Bengal. Ref. No. DDCTWA/DJ/3. Dated: 23.03.2003.

The practice of reservation for this Scheduled Caste group, is a colonial legacy, has been officially integrated as an element of our national program after independence. The positive discrimination or affirmative actions have been the major way in which the State had tried to deal with the question of welfare of this socially and economically marginalised community. Over the years, the legitimacy of this policy have increasingly been questioned by the Darjeeling populace on the ground that ‘others’ are being benefited as they are the outsiders, they should avail these empowerment provisions at their native place. The middle classes of the hills overwhelmingly predominated, have most prominently adopted this anti-reservation position on the grounds that the policy is in-egalitarian and anti-meritorious and therefore unfair. On the other hand, reservation policies in empowering this Balmiki community through education and service safeguards (reservation) have played an important role in giving this deprived community some access to scarce resources which have for long been cornered by the hills people.

Although the endeavor is not to reduce this doubtful outlook about various reserved group candidates, assured gear need to be borne in mind before we believe such skepticism. In understanding that social and cultural resources are immensely suspiciously accumulated with the advantaged upper castes in India, Darjeeling cannot be an exception. This has accumulated an essential purpose of caste among other factors. Coupled, with this encouragement of ‘merit’ which once more seems to somehow ‘inhere’ in upper caste Nepalis. Hence, not only are reserved Balmikis category seen as ‘inherently lacking in merit’ but those who do not fall inside this understanding are treated as exceptions which in turn reinforces the caste/dominant common sense we just referred to.

Auxiliary, hierarchies of caste, the so called ‘Sano Jat and Thulo Jat’ in Darjeeling and its practices are main obstacles to social, economic and political empowerment of these Balmiki population in hills, ever for meritorious candidates from this community have affected the

wellbeing within the context of Darjeeling. Empowerment provisions, institutional supports to this community have been rare as data, interviews and reports indicated. Perhaps, there is a necessity to take a fresh look at what constitutes for instance 'equality of opportunity', 'social justice' 'economic upliftment' as well as accesses to resources. Perceptive of 'access', its nature, its problems, its possibilities have become productive forces or way through which the contested notions of empowerment for Balmikis in hills is yet to be achieved in true sense of the term.

### **Section III**

Caste is a social division deeply rooted in Hindu society, which is based on occupation, and is also hereditary in nature. As such the Indian society has been fragmented on caste system, where the lower caste has been discriminated in all spheres of life. Some are even turn untouchables. But the factors like increase access to education, rapid growth and government policies to aid the most disadvantage groups, are helping to bring cut-out social barriers. In the education system seats are reserved for the students of lower caste and these quotas also extend in entering government jobs. A must to introduce reservation in private sector spot debate about such policies are fare. Some experts would say that the needed for the lower caste for make up the decades of miss-opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

Reservation policies have had not hitherto reached the largest section of the peoples. They have just touched the deep aspiration of the people. One needy of education or government jobs or to ask reservation in private sector, hoping that this will happen, will not eradicate discrimination.

Under such circumstance, it becomes immensely important how do we look into these Balmiki dalits? What are the motions around this dalit community? To answer these

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<sup>5</sup> Dalit Future by Anand Teltumbde.

questions, here the changing things are supposed to be taken into account, to imagine what kind of future could be for these Balmiki dalits. There are many things but we like avoid to bell upon that, as it may sound irrelevant, whatever have been gone into the history for the construction of dalits as such. But Ambedkar is one who imagined the future of dalits. In his ‘Annihilation of Caste’ he gave a definition on imaginary ‘*Ideal Society*,’ where his conception of society was based on *liberty, equality and fraternity*. Subsequently, we can draw clues from that; the minimalist kind of future is visioned for Balmiki dalits which is something like eradication of Caste. ‘A caste should go, and even the dalits should go’, as such kind of identity is not just. Many scholars many disagree and will contest that how caste could be disappearing or in other words how caste could be annihilated. Not only from the other people but the dalits themselves actually do not believe that caste could be annihilated. As a result this becomes a paradoxical situation. Secondly, the further arguments is creating a utopia, some sort of communist, communism that of Marx, that Ambedkar, interpreted liberty, equality and fraternity in the lowest at the term and acquiring these terms not from the French Revolution, but he said ‘I have taken it from Buddhism’. Now here the arguments put forward becomes more complicated, as that in Buddhism one will not find these terms 2500 years ago. As a result this kind of argument is doubtful, when and where we are present, we cannot jump on a supplement future just like that, we need to see the present. In terms of present, how does the dalits situation can been seen, for this we should go back and see how the changes that has come in the caste system, rather not going into the ancient or medieval period, but much valid from colonial times, there is distinct the caste has come out and took caste system.<sup>6</sup>

Major changes have taken place after the transfer of power. Our daily people have been more vicious, than actually is the colonialist aware of being. There have been lots of screening

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

rights from the making of Constitution itself, which had been in many issues. They have synonymously outlined *Untouchability* but reserved the caste, on the basis of the social justice to be done to the lower caste.

Now the question arises that, did the social justice exist during colonial time? The reservations for Scheduled Caste, the exceptional people were instituted, during the colonial time itself from 1937 onwards. There was policy that the Britishers had agreed and which was actually made onto quota system, and Ambedkar was member of Viceroy Council of 1943. So in recognisable term this kind of reservation or quota had come into being during colonial regime, at least 4 years before the transfer of power had taken place. But none of the framers had showed it as if they have doing a new and they created a parallel schedule for the scheduled drive, from which there were no concrete criteria, such as, and all rights were physically isolated.<sup>7</sup>

But that could be accommodated within the same scheduled and the scheduled could have been named anywhere in the Constitution. The game was at least the stigma associated with the scheduled on the Scheduled Caste could have been diluted, but ironically they did not want that to happen. They again made it open ended saying that the state would identify the classes which was to be read as caste, which are backward both educationally and socially.

The reservation by this end by creaming was forced into something like a weapon to divide people in as many ways as could it be possible. So, this was actually the conspiracy. Similar things could have been happened in the supporting evidences in terms of religion. The Indian Constitution has projected a secular, where as it is not secular. Nehru commented upon those people who are entering up secular; do not know what secularism means. Secularism is like a firework between religions and the State politics. As a result the proper setting of secularism

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

is absent in Indian context. These kinds of things, religion and caste were the biggest weapons in the hands of the ruling classes which were kept reserved with great expertise. Even Hindutva can be traced with this kind of practices. Though it may be seemed irrelevant here but still it can't be ignored as it provides some sort of basis for further arguments.

The instrument which we have adopted for our political system is that it is singularly unsuitable type of system. But just if we analyse, the colony by default like West system model, not all the colonies were adopted in toto in many ways. India got the opportunity to come out with the most suitable class system, which we term it as democracy, but theoretically 49% of the people will be excluded in the process. Unfortunately, all that ideas which were incorporated went wrong, during the formative days of the nation new nation building process.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, this has an implication to present caste or contemporary caste system having ritualistic aspect of caste, would have collapsed because of the capitalist relations. Today's caste is actually a constitutionally caste, which tends from Constitution, because what happens in means terms that it precipitated or manifested in terms of caste atrocities. Power asymmetries have happened in the villages, this asymmetry has lot of things to do with the political economic change that had been brought in after the formation of newly independent Indian states.

This kind of trendy circumstances had made immensely difficult to stitch the dalits future. The minimalist term of atrocity in annihilating of caste will have to think of instead of eliminating outlined caste itself. It might sound funny just to really outline caste. Now it may be argued that can such kind of system can be really be eliminated. For instance untouchability outward, which is theoretically impossible, because untouchability is one

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

aspect of the caste and caste undermines Untouchability, cannot go hand in hand. So, the notion of untouchability did not change anywhere. But we have to look in terms of the future of the dalits in general and Balmikis in particular. It has many assumptions behind, that there would be in the liberal kind of things etc. it is something like doable if we can build up proper awareness amongst the people, if people can put forward their demands in proper place at a proper time, such kind of things probably can be done. Now the interrogation crops up how can the derailments of caste happen? To grapple with this problem the ratification of the constitution along with the elimination of malpractices that taking place in the Indian society has to be eliminated. And thus, the outline caste identities do not remain any more.

Absolute masses of dalits around 90% who have been left out in the rural areas without any hope and aspirations, actually has to bear the stigma. In this context it is not wise to demolish reservations system as a whole rather it could be freeze for those who have been taking the benefits of reservations time and again. On the other hand once beneficiaries being refrained from receiving benefits any more, may assembled together to take the system to the fight. Here it is to be noted that these reservations should be freeze not based on caste rather on the bases of economic conditions of the dalit castes. In this way the sub-caste politics could have been controlled and more opportunities could have been created for the dalits upliftment. Reservation as Ambedkar's idea had not been defined properly, or let say it could have been used as an instrument to eliminate caste. But it has been used as a perpetual kind of thing and the same kind of dictum the dalits are inferior people where being pulled by the reservations.<sup>9</sup>

Ambedkar realized the abolition of political reservation, rather scientific reservation that he was mistaken and he was not able to unknot aforementioned full mistake during drafting the Constitution. So it was somewhere arbitrary limited to 10 years and automatically this gets

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

renewed, without any dalits asking for it. Thus, consequently, this practice became the integral part which only perpetuated by the ruling classes.

Dalits do not exist in long term that is the future; it might be a mere prediction. But the current economic, political scenario reflects this as a positive aspect, keeping in view the alternative, without any further destruction of the dalits. Still, this can be annihilated future and not dalits, which is a shared desire, although it cannot be a shared realistic possibility, because the over whelming majority of the upper castes, upper classes and elites had given up the project of reinventing communities in horizontal humanistic way. Unless dalits recognise this that society as a whole has to remagine the future, which is caste annihilated in partnership with the Hindus primarily but Muslims as well as they have caste system. It has to be read universal partnership of the exploiter and the exploited. The other side is none of the liberative striving the knowledge system of marginalised majority and related and incorporating to main stream pedagogy system.

Lastly, another way round it can be changed only through revolution. However, it is to be pointed out, that this revolution at what cost. This 21<sup>st</sup> century the political system, the fundamental things are not taken care and have been diverting the real issues, instead of addressing them, which will reinforce caste only. So as to summon the arguments it can be taken into account that ‘the future of the Balmikis dalits is at blink.’<sup>10</sup>

The present study thus opens the possibility of formulating a broad conceptual framework to understand the history of migration, the process of deprivation and moves towards empowerment of a community which has remained invisible in the social-political life of the Hills. There is no written history of the community in the Hills, and therefore, recourse to

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<sup>10</sup> Prof. Anand Teltumbde (IIT, Kharagpur), Speech at National Workshop cum orientation programme for SC and ST and other Marginalized Groups, Organised by ICSSR-ERC and Dept. of Sociology, St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata. 26<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> September, 2015.

oral history became important and unavoidable. Moreover, the literature on Dalit is vast, ever increasing and emerging in large quantities. The present work would try to provide future scope for the formulation of “identity approach” that would (re) investigate into the division of labour; wherein lies the point of departure from most other previous Dalit Balmiki research. Moreover, significant contribution to literature is hoped to be made by looking into location-specific studies.

The main discovery of the research in one way is that, it provides more than enough scope for the research to conceptualize empowerment of dalit community in Darjeeling hills, all the way through the corridor of deprivations, far away from the main land India. Furthermore, the research will surely enhance the dalit contemporary literature. Here, it is worth to be mentioned that beside the over worked ‘*Gorkhaland Movement*’, by the researchers, the study will prove to be a new platform for the future scholars to study tiny communities within the hills.