

# Dalit Militancy and the Brahmanic Centre

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Some years ago, my uncle in Bhayander and some of his Ambedkarite friends decided to open a small office so that meetings of like-minded Ambedkarites etc., could take place. Just the next day the Congress party representative came to make enquiries. This too, without any advertising of any kind about this endeavour. The reason I am reminiscing about this today is because of the lack of any Ambedkarite response to the **attack on 3 Dalits in Virar**, who turned out to be the sons of the local RPI leader, by 40 people who up until now have not been identified to be with any political organization. For sure these 40 guys were/will be arrested and charged with crimes, but the message that goes out as a result of this this event is obvious. If the sons of a Dalit leader in a city such as Mumbai where Ambedkarites supposedly are assertive could suffer such a fate, what does it speak for the common Ambedkarite in Mumbai?



The question that arises is: why despite those ballads of Dalit militancy with the burning of the Deccan Queen just a few years back in response to the brutal rape and murder of the Bhotmange family far away from Mumbai, are we presented with this broken record from the same community that produces no sound let alone a scream? The stereotypical response from intellectuals that I am in touch with on the Internet just reflects the total cluelessness of the movement in general. Be it blaming the neo-buddhism of the Mahars going in the Goenka direction or the Ambedkarites becoming less militant as they

assimilate better in the society with the breakdown of urban caste barriers that were the roost of the 70s etc. But then such explanations never tell us why the Deccan Queen burnt a few years ago.

In regards to the Deccan Queen burning I happened to read an article by eminent Marathi journalist Kumar Ketkar, where he dissected the rioting as a way for the younger generation of local leaders from every community trying to fill in the vacuum of non existing leadership. He further claimed that the rioters were not just Dalits, but even Brahmin leaders trying to assert their dominance in their respective area. This dissection really breaks the facade of a Dalit militancy as the core construct that burned the Deccan Queen, laying the responsibility instead on political ambitions of the young leaders who just needed an excuse to assert their coming of age in the politics of their local fiefdoms. Let us say the conclusion of Mr Ketkar is fallacious. What happens when we go a decade back and analyse the rioting during the Ramabai nagar riots in 97'? Bal Thackeray always maintained that it was the work of Bhujbal. And if one tries to correlate all political happenings to the one party that stands to gain, such a claim by the late Mr Thackeray does not seem too off the mark. All this despite the fact that the Shiv Sena govt dismissed 2000 atrocity cases, and add to that the history of friction between the Sena and the Ambedkarites. The reason is simple - that a Sena govt didn't stand to gain anything by a riot during its tenure. I mean, what is to gain through rioting that cannot be gained by biased policies!

All this exposes the farce of a genuine Dalit militancy existing inside Maharashtra in the past few decades. No riot inside a state ever can be sustained without the backing of certain elements of the political establishment. The gathering of people to stop trains and buses, throw stones and not facing serious jail time as a result, calls for the gathering to come about at the behest of organizations that are tied to the state in one form or the other. The fact that the Dalit leadership in Maharashtra is officially aligned with the party in power today implies its own political interests do not support going back to the good old street justice in dealing with the 40 hooligans who beat up 3 Dalits in Virar. The hooligans, without obvious political support, would have anyway been a piece of cake. How it affects the morale of the community seems to be of no relevance whatsoever to Dalit politicians.

This lack of a genuine Dalit militancy, apart from the mirage of occasional spurts of the same in Maharashtra, has to be the natural course of things. Because all this happens in lieu of a brahmanic centre with infinite resource pool at its disposal, ruling the state through some puppet castes. My uncle and his Ambedkarite friends being approached by the local Congress representatives is just a glimpse as to how any attempt at Dalit assertion, however insignificant, is usurped or crushed by the ruling powers. That even most of the Dalit dailies like Samrat etc. owned by political establishments that are the arms of the brahmanic central government in the state shows the level of co-option. Unless a radical change occurs with regards to dismantling this brahminic centre, there does not seem much of a promise for Dalit liberation in Maharashtra.

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Cartoon by **Unnamati Syama Sundar**.