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RESURRECTING A LEADER: HOW RSS CADRES AND THE BHANDARA BY-ELECTION BECAME THE SINE QUA NON OF DR. AMBEDKAR'S POLITICAL SURVIVAL

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ABSTRACT

The prevailing historiography of constitutional history and political science in India often portrays Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as occupying binary opposites on the ideological spectrum—one championing the annihilation of caste and the other Hindu consolidation. However, a forensic analysis of the post-1952 political landscape reveals a complex, symbiotic relationship that contradicts this adversarial narrative. This paper argues that following the crushing defeat in the 1952 General Elections, Dr. Ambedkar's political machinery was effectively dismantled by the Congress hegemony. Utilizing the 1954 Bhandara by-election as a primary case study, this research posits that the RSS did not merely offer support but functioned as the sine qua non—the indispensable condition—for Dr. Ambedkar's political resurrection. By analyzing the statutory role of Dattopant Thengadi as Dr. Ambedkar's Election Agent and the ideological commitment of Sangh cadres to "Social Harmony" (Samajik Samarasata), this paper demonstrates that the survival of the Ambedkarite political movement in the mid-1950s was structurally dependent on the organizational backbone provided by the Sangh Parivar. Furthermore, the paper offers a counterfactual legal analysis of the Indian opposition space had this alliance not occurred, while debunking contemporary political agendas that seek to obscure this historical cooperation.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICS OF NECESSITY

In the constitutional and political history of the newly independent Indian Republic, the years between 1952 and 1956 represent a period of profound volatility. While the Constituent Assembly had successfully drafted the supreme lex loci, the practical application of democratic politics was proving to be a brutal affair for its chief architect, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The prevailing narrative in academic circles often glosses over the "wilderness years" of Dr. Ambedkar, focusing instead on his role as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee or his

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conversion to Buddhism in 1956. This leapfrogging of history obscures a critical interval: the 1954 Bhandara by-election.

This paper challenges the conventional silence regarding the operational convergence between the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It asserts that by 1954, Dr. Ambedkar faced a crisis of political existence. The Congress System, as described by Rajni Kothari, had effectively neutralized opposition voices through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral mechanism.² In this vacuum, the RSS emerged not just as an ally, but as the sine qua non of Dr. Ambedkar's public life.

The term sine qua non—a legal standard meaning "without which, nothing"—is used here deliberately. It implies that but for the organizational intervention of the RSS, the causal chain of Dr. Ambedkar's political survival would have been broken. This paper relies on primary evidence, including the accounts of Dattopant Thengadi, a senior RSS Pracharak who served as Dr. Ambedkar's Election Secretary, to reconstruct this critical historical juncture.

II. THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL VACUUM: THE POST-1952 CRISIS

To understand the necessity of the RSS alliance, one must first appreciate the legal and political devastation wrought by the 1952 General Elections.

A. The Flaw of First-Past-The-Post for Dispersed Minorities

The Constitution of India, 1950, adopted the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. Under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, constituencies were demarcated territorially.³ This system inherently disadvantaged the Dalits (Scheduled Castes), who, unlike religious minorities in Punjab or Kashmir, were not geographically concentrated in any single constituency to form a decisive majority. They were a "dispersed minority."

Consequently, Dr. Ambedkar, despite his monumental stature, could not win a seat solely on Dalit votes. He required a "transfer of votes" from the Savarna (upper-caste) Hindus to cross the electoral threshold. The Congress Party, cognizant of this vulnerability, fielded N.S.

² RAJNI KOTHARI, *POLITICS IN INDIA* 153 (Orient BlackSwan 1970).

³ The Representation of the People Act, 1951, No. 43, Acts of Parliament, 1951.

Kajrolkar against Ambedkar in the Bombay North Central constituency in 1952.⁴ The result was a humiliating defeat for the former Law Minister.

B. The Crisis of Representation

The 1952 defeat effectively barred the architect of the Constitution from entering the Parliament he helped create. From a constitutional law perspective, this created a dangerous precedent where the primary voice of the depressed classes was excluded from the legislative process. By 1953, the Scheduled Caste Federation was financially insolvent and organizationally fractured. Dr. Ambedkar was left without a parliamentary platform, his health was deteriorating, and the Congress monopoly seemed absolute. It was in this moment of existential threat that the strategic necessity of an alliance with the RSS crystallized.

III. IDEOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE: A JURISPRUDENTIAL ALIGNMENT?

Critics often dismiss the 1954 alliance as purely opportunistic or transactional. However, a deeper jurisprudential and ideological analysis reveals that the RSS support was rooted in specific tenets of their philosophy—Hindutva and Sangathan (Organization)—which viewed Ambedkar's movement not as a threat, but as a necessary corrective for Hindu society.

A. The Common Adversary: Communism

Dr. Ambedkar's opposition to Communism was rooted in his commitment to constitutionalism. He viewed the Marxist doctrine of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as fundamentally incompatible with the Rule of Law and individual liberty guaranteed under Part III of the Constitution.⁵ Similarly, the RSS viewed Communism as an "alien materialism" that threatened the spiritual and cultural integrity of India.

In the 1950s, the Communist Party of India (CPI) was the principal opposition force. Dattopant Thengadi notes that both Ambedkar and the Sangh leadership feared that if the democratic opposition (SCF and Jan Sangh) did not consolidate, the anti-Congress space would be ceded

⁴ CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT, DR. AMBEDKAR AND UNTOUCHABILITY: FIGHTING THE INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM 105 (Columbia Univ. Press 2005).

⁵ See CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEBATES, vol. VII, Nov. 25, 1949 (speech by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar defending the Constitution against Communist criticism).

entirely to the Communists.⁶ This shared threat perception created a "Constitutional Defense Pact" of sorts.

B. The RSS Ideology of "Samajik Samarasata" and the Casteless Society

A pervasive contemporary agenda seeks to defame the RSS as an organization that upholds caste hierarchy. However, the historical record of the 1954 election offers irrefutable evidence to the contrary. The Sangh's ideology, centered on the concept of the Virat Purusha (Cosmic Man), posits that all Hindus are limbs of the same body, rendering caste distinctions obsolete.

Article 17 and the RSS Mission: While Article 17 of the Constitution legally abolished untouchability, the RSS took upon itself the sociological task of enforcing this abolition through Samarasata (Social Harmony). Thengadi emphasizes that the RSS Shakha functions as a "sociological laboratory" where the Swayamsevaks—whether Brahmin or Dalit—stand in the same line (Sampat), play the same games, and eat together, effectively dissolving caste consciousness in practice.⁷

Ambedkar's Validation: Thengadi records Ambedkar's visit to an RSS camp in Pune (1939), where he was astonished to find Mahars and Brahmins living together without any segregation. This historical fact debunks the "fake agenda" that portrays the RSS as casteist. In reality, the RSS was working towards the same egalitarian goal envisioned in the Preamble of the Constitution—Justice, Social and Political—but through the mechanism of cultural bonding rather than class conflict.⁸

C. The Vision of "Vishwa Guru" (World Teacher) and National Welfare

The alignment between Dr. Ambedkar and the RSS was further cemented by a shared ambition for India's global stature.

The Superpower Vision: On the very front pages of Thengadi's treatise, Dr. Ambedkar is quoted asserting: "We are Indians, firstly and lastly... nothing under the sun shall stop this country from becoming a super power."⁹ This statement mirrors the RSS concept of Param

⁶ DATTOPANT THENGADI, DR. AMBEDKAR AND THE JOURNEY OF SOCIAL REVOLUTION 34 (H.S. Paradkar trans., Lokhit Prakashan 2005).

⁷ M.S. GOLWALKAR, BUNCH OF THOUGHTS 365 (Sahitya Sindhu Prakashan 1966).

⁸ THENGADI, supra note 5, at 145.

⁹ Id. at 4 (Quoting Dr. Ambedkar from the frontispiece).

Vaibhav (Ultimate Glory) of the nation.

National Welfare over Sectoral Interests: Both the RSS and Ambedkar agreed that the "National Interest" (Rashtra Hita) was paramount. The RSS support in Bhandara was driven by the conviction that Dr. Ambedkar was a national asset whose intellect was required for nation-building, not just for Dalit welfare. They viewed him as a Rishi (sage) who, like the ancient lawgivers, updated the Smritis (Constitution) for the welfare of all, aligning with the Directive Principles of State Policy under Article 38 (State to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people).¹⁰

D. The Saffron Flag (Bhagwa Dhwaj)

One of the most revealing legal-historical insights comes from Thengadi's documentation of Dr. Ambedkar's views on the National Flag. During the Constituent Assembly debates, the Ad-hoc Committee on the National Flag had selected the Tricolor. However, Thengadi records that Dr. Ambedkar personally favored the Saffron Flag (Bhagwa Dhwaj), viewing it as a symbol of sacrifice and ancient Indian democratic traditions, distinct from the dynastic politics of the Congress.¹¹

This affinity for the Bhagwa provided a cultural bridge. The RSS saw Ambedkar's validation of the Saffron symbol as proof that his "Indianness" was paramount, overriding his political bitterness. It signaled that his revolution was indigenous, rooted in the soil of Bharat, and aimed at making India a Vishwa Guru by purifying its internal social structures.

IV. THE BHANDARA BY-ELECTION: A CASE STUDY IN SURVIVAL

The death of a sitting MP in the Bhandara constituency in 1954 necessitated a by-election. This election became the laboratory for the RSS-Ambedkar experiment.

A. The Statutory Role of Dattopant Thengadi

The most significant evidence of the RSS's indispensable role is the appointment of Dattopant Thengadi as the Election Agent for Dr. Ambedkar. Under Section 40 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, every candidate must appoint an election agent.¹²

¹⁰ INDIA CONST. art. 38.

¹¹ THENGADI, supra note 5, at 45.

¹² The Representation of the People Act, 1951, § 40.

This is not a ceremonial role. The Election Agent is the legal alter ego of the candidate. Under Section 45 of the Act, the agent performs functions involving high legal liability, including managing election expenses, appointing polling agents, and ensuring compliance with the Corrupt Practices provisions.¹³

That Dr. Ambedkar, a jurist of the highest order, entrusted this statutory responsibility to Dattopant Thengadi—a full-time RSS Pracharak—speaks volumes. It signifies a total transfer of trust. It implies that the administrative control of Dr. Ambedkar's political vehicle was, for the duration of the election, in the hands of the RSS.

B. The "Sine Qua Non" Argument

Why was the RSS the sine qua non?

Financial Insolvency of SCF: The Scheduled Caste Federation had no funds for the mandatory security deposit or campaign logistics.

Manpower Deficit: Bhandara was a sprawling rural constituency. Reaching voters required thousands of foot soldiers. The SCF cadre was demoralized and numerically insufficient.

Without the RSS providing the "machinery"—the election agent (Thengadi), the polling agents, and the canvassers—Dr. Ambedkar could not have filed his nomination, let alone campaigned. The RSS provided the physical infrastructure for his political existence.

V. THE OPERATIONAL MECHANICS: CADRE AS INFRASTRUCTURE

The 1954 campaign was a logistical feat that underscores the "Lifeline" theory. Thengadi recounts how RSS swayamsevaks from Nagpur and Vidarbha were mobilized to support "Baba Saheb."

A. The Ideological Discipline of the Swayamsevaks

The mobilization was not merely logistical; it was ideological. A paid political worker might have abandoned the campaign when faced with Congress violence, but the RSS swayamsevaks were driven by the concept of Sadhana (national service).

¹³ Id. at § 45.

Breaking the Caste Barrier: It is crucial to note that many RSS cadres in Vidarbha were Brahmins or Upper Castes. For them to campaign for a Dalit leader required a profound ideological conditioning. They did so because the Sangh leadership had instructed that "Hindutva" meant the consolidation of all castes. Campaigning for Ambedkar became a practical application of their Baudhik (intellectual) training against untouchability.¹⁴

Countering the Fake Agendas: Even in 1954, political opponents attempted to spread disinformation that the RSS was anti-Dalit. The Swayamsevaks countered this not with words, but with action—by physically protecting Ambedkar and canvassing for him in orthodox households. This grassroots reality dispels the defamation often directed at the Sangh, proving that their commitment to a "Casteless Hindu Society" was operational, not just theoretical.

B. Protection and Logistics

The political atmosphere of the 1950s was volatile. Congress workers frequently disrupted opposition meetings. The RSS, known for its physical discipline (Sharirik), provided the security detail for Dr. Ambedkar's public rallies. They managed the stage, the sound systems, and the crowd control. Thengadi notes that Dr. Ambedkar was visibly moved by the discipline of the Swayamsevaks, contrasting it with the chaotic state of his own followers.¹⁵

VI. LEGAL AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEFEAT

Dr. Ambedkar lost the 1954 by-election to the Congress candidate, Bhaurao Borkar. However, a legal analysis of the result paradoxically strengthens the thesis of RSS indispensability.

A. The Injustice of the Double-Member Constituency

Bhandara was a "Double-Member Constituency." Under this now-abolished system, a single constituency elected two representatives: one from the General category and one from the Scheduled Castes. Each voter had two votes.

This system was legally flawed and confusing. The Congress strategy was to ask voters to cast both votes for their candidates or to "waste" one vote to ensure Ambedkar's defeat. The

¹⁴ WALTER K. ANDERSON & SHRIDHAR D. DAMLE, *THE BROTHERHOOD IN SAFFRON: THE RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH AND HINDU REVIVALISM* 67 (Westview Press 1987).

¹⁵ THENGADI, *supra* note 5, at 112.

confusion regarding the ballot marking was rampant. This structural flaw in the electoral law—which was later rectified by the Two-Member Constituencies (Abolition) Act, 1961—was the primary cause of the defeat, not a lack of support.¹⁶

B. The Vote Share: Evidence of Transferability

Despite the loss, the voting data is revealing. Dr. Ambedkar polled significantly more votes than the total Dalit population of the constituency.¹⁷ This "surplus" vote came from the Upper Castes and OBCs. Legal Inference: The only mechanism capable of transferring non-Dalit votes to a Dalit candidate in 1954 Bhandara was the RSS network. This proves that the RSS successfully executed its end of the alliance, delivering the "Savarna" vote bank to Ambedkar. The defeat was technical; the mobilization was a success.

VII. COUNTERFACTUAL JURISPRUDENCE: THE "WHAT IF" SCENARIOS

To establish the RSS as the sine qua non, we must employ counterfactual historical analysis. What would have been the legal and political trajectory of the Dalit movement had the RSS refused support in 1954?

Scenario A: Political Erasure and the Silence of the Constitution

Without RSS manpower, Dr. Ambedkar would likely not have contested. His absence from the electoral fray for two consecutive cycles (1952 and 1954) would have confirmed his political retirement.

Legal Consequence: The constitutional discourse regarding the rights of the Scheduled Castes would have been monopolized by the Congress Party. The "Ambedkarite" interpretation of the Constitution—emphasizing social democracy over mere political democracy—would have lacked a champion in the public sphere.

Scenario B: The Communist Hegemony

In the absence of a consolidated democratic opposition (RSS-SCF), the anti-Congress vacuum

¹⁶ The Two-Member Constituencies (Abolition) Act, 1961, No. 1, Acts of Parliament, 1961. (The Statement of Objects and Reasons of this Act explicitly mentions the confusion and injustice caused to minority candidates).

¹⁷ DHANANJAY KEER, DR. AMBEDKAR: LIFE AND MISSION 456 (Popular Prakashan 1990).

would have been filled by the CPI.

Political Consequence: The Dalit movement might have been subsumed into the class struggle of the Left. Dr. Ambedkar feared this outcome, believing that in a Communist revolution, the specific grievances of caste would be dismissed as "superstructure" issues.¹⁸ The RSS intervention prevented the Dalit movement from becoming a subsidiary of the Communist Party, preserving its independent identity.

VIII. THE AFTERMATH AND INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY

The "Lifeline" extended beyond the 1954 election. The operational relationship established during the campaign had lasting institutional consequences.

A. The Logistics of Deekshabhoomi (1956)

On October 14, 1956, Dr. Ambedkar led the massive conversion to Buddhism in Nagpur. Organizing a gathering of hundreds of thousands required immense logistical planning. The networks, travel routes, and local contacts established by the RSS and Thengadi during the Bhandara campaign two years prior were reactivated to facilitate this historic event.

Religious Jurisprudence: Thengadi's continued association ensured that the RSS did not view the conversion as "anti-national." Instead, framing Buddhism as a part of the Bharatiya tradition (unlike Abrahamic faiths), the Sangh adopted a stance of benevolent neutrality, which was crucial for the peaceful conduct of the ceremony.¹⁹

B. The Preservation of Legacy

Perhaps the most enduring contribution is intellectual. Dattopant Thengadi's close association allowed him to document the "nationalist" facets of Ambedkar's personality—his love for Sanskrit, his views on the Aryan Invasion Theory, and his strategic vision for India.²⁰ This literature has prevented the complete appropriation of Ambedkar by the radical Left, allowing for a contemporary discourse where Ambedkar is viewed as a unifier rather than a divider. This laid the foundation for the Samajik Samarasata Manch, an RSS affiliate dedicated to social

¹⁸ B.R. AMBEDKAR, BUDDHA OR KARL MARX (1956), reprinted in 3 DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR: WRITINGS AND SPEECHES 441 (Gov't of Maharashtra 1987).

¹⁹ THENGADI, *supra* note 5, at 150.

²⁰ See generally DATTOPANT THENGADI, SAMAJIK SAMARASATA (Suruchi Prakashan 2018).

harmony, which traces its ideological lineage to this very collaboration.

IX. CONCLUSION

The 1954 Bhandara by-election was not merely a contest for a parliamentary seat; it was a battle for the survival of an independent Dalit political identity. The evidence suggests that Dr. Ambedkar, a pragmatist and a constitutionalist, recognized that he could not fight this battle alone.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh provided the material basis for his political struggle. They provided the Election Agent (a statutory necessity), the polling agents (a procedural necessity), and the foot soldiers (a logistical necessity). But beyond the material, they provided an ideological partnership rooted in the belief that the nation comes before the caste, and that the "Untouchable" and the "Brahmin" are limbs of the same national body.

The historical evidence rigorously dismantles the defamation and fake agendas that seek to paint the RSS as an opponent of social justice. On the contrary, the RSS cadres worked selflessly for the national welfare, driven by the vision of making India a Vishwa Guru—a vision shared by Dr. Ambedkar. They functioned as the "Silent Architects" of social cohesion, working against caste differences not through noisy protests, but through the quiet, disciplined work of organization (Sangathan).

Therefore, it is legally and historically accurate to characterize the RSS as the sine qua non of Dr. Ambedkar's political life in the mid-1950s. The "Saffron" support did not compromise the "Blue" revolution; rather, it provided the solid ground upon which it could stand. To deny this is to ignore the complex reality of how the architect of the Indian Constitution fought to remain relevant in the democracy he built. The Bhandara election stands as a testament to a moment when the boundaries of caste and ideology were transcended for the higher cause of national reconstruction.