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**EMPOWERMENT OF DALITS AND ADIVASIS
ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE EMERGING ECONOMY**

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Dr. Ronald Daniels, Dr. Ram Rawat, Dr. Devesh Kapur, Ladies and Gentlemen, Please accept my apologies for being late. As was mentioned, I made a dramatic entry. I came straightaway from the flight. I'm not even out of the jet lag, and I'm not able to even hear very clearly, but Devesh said that everybody is waiting and you must deliver, and so I am here...so if I'm going to be a little more incoherent than what I normally am, you will please forgive me.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I feel greatly honored to have been invited to deliver this inaugural keynote lecture in the Nand & Jeet Khemka Distinguished Lecture series for this international conference on India's Dalits. I am indeed grateful to my friend Professor Devesh Kapur, Director of CASI, and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania for providing me this opportunity to participate in this conference on a theme that has been very close to my heart. I understand that the Nand & Jeet Khemka Distinguished Lecture series comprises public lectures on contemporary India that will stimulate a dialogue on campus. Given this focus of the distinguished lecture series and the fact that this also happens to be the inaugural keynote lecture for this International Conference on India's Dalits, I have chosen to share some thoughts with you this evening on the theme of "Empowerment of Dalits and Adivasis: Role of Education in the Emerging Indian Economy."

Well friends, let me begin by narrating a short story. In the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, dated around one thousand B.C., there is a celebrated fable about

Ekalavya, an Adivasi boy; some of you will certainly be aware of that. One day, this Ekalavya saw a group of young princes learning the art of archery and warfare from the famous guru Dronacharya. He tried to befriend the princes, but they were surrounded by armed guards who roughed him up. Ekalavya was warned that if he was ever seen again in the vicinity he would be killed, but curiosity got the better of him. He began rising at dawn to furtively watch the training of the young princes. He would strain to hear everything that was taught, and by night, in the moonlight, he would practice, reciting the instructions he had heard the guru tell, and soon he mastered the art of archery. One day the guru saw Ekalavya shoot a deer that was bolting at lightning speed. Amazed at the precision of the young boy dressed in rags, the guru questioned him and was shocked to discover that this boy was a tribal outcaste, an Adivasi. Ekalavya admitted his efforts – what Ekalavya was doing is what we call in the modern parlance “distance education” – Ekalavya admitted his efforts of distant learning from the guru and offered *gurudakshina* which, as some of you know, is a traditional gift offered to a teacher in gratitude. Ekalavya offered himself as the guru’s slave, but to his utter surprise and dismay, the guru asked Ekalavya for his right thumb instead. In his right thumb rested all the prowess of archery. Nevertheless, Ekalavya calmly said that the guru was equivalent to a god and he would gladly do as the guru wished. So saying, he severed his right thumb and laid the bleeding stump at the feet of guru Dronacharya. Every Indian child hears this mythological story, and they call this a story about *guru bhakti*, “devotion to the teacher.” Great are the disciples as dedicated as Ekalavya; “See? His name lives forever!” children are told.

Actually, the tale can be seen in a very different light. Ekalavya was a representative of marginalized strata of society. He was denied empowerment through education by Guru Dronacharya, who embodied the high-born and hence the establishment. In demanding the right thumb of Ekalavya, the guru was not only protecting his intellectual property rights, but he was also perpetuating a social order that was inherently unjust. The moral of the fable is simply that power of establishment will remain the guarded position of the high-born, striving to ensure that an outcaste remains a lowly outcaste. Paralyzed by the establishment, the outcaste will never dare to question it. Ekalavya was cleverly cornered into sacrificing his strength, and as a consolation, his devotion was glorified. His silent consent was transformed into a myth that actually promotes submission among the disempowered. This is not a story about *guru bhakti* or “devotion to the teacher.” This is a story of traditional disempowerment of Dalits and Adivasis in the Indian society.

Let us look at the historical context of disempowerment of Dalits and Adivasis in India. Every sixth human being in the world today is an Indian, and every sixth Indian is an erstwhile untouchable, a Dalit. Currently there are about 180 million Dalits, variously called “Scheduled Castes” in India. In addition, there are about ninety million Adivasis, called “Scheduled Tribes.” There are some finer differences, but let’s not go into that. So, 180 million Dalits, ninety million Adivasis; 180 million Scheduled Castes, ninety million Scheduled Tribes. They continue to suffer under India’s 3,500 year old caste system, which remains a stigma on humanity.

The doors of empowerment through education, were closed on these people. In fact, the ancient Hindu law books such as *Dharmaśāstra* did not allow Dalits to possess any wealth other than dogs and donkeys. Indeed the scriptures prescribed for untouchables who dared approach the sacred text as follows: “If a Dalit listens intentionally to the Vedas – Vedas are the scriptures – if he listens intentionally to the Vedas, his ears shall be filled with lead. If he recites them, his tongue shall be cut, and if he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain.”

The 3,500 year old caste system in India is still alive and violently kicking. Actually, untouchability was once officially abolished by the Indian Constitution when India became a Republic on 26 January 1950. Mercifully, today, untouchables are no longer required to place clay pots around their necks to prevent their spit from polluting the ground, and as was referred to by Mr. Daniels, they are no longer required to attach brooms to their rumps to wipe out their footprints as they walk.

But while caste discrimination may have changed form, it has not disappeared at all; the substance is still there. In fact it is a common experience in India, Mr. Daniels, that in cities they will tell you that the caste system is a thing of the past and that it only exists in villages. You go to villages and they tell you, “Oh no, no, not here, some other villages.” And yet, you open the matrimonial section of any leading newspaper and you will find a shameless display of castes, sub-castes, and sub-sub-castes, and so on.

Dalits and Adivasis are divided into more than three thousand castes and sub-castes with mind-boggling differentiation built into the hierarchy. Every individual is believed to have been predestined by his or her fate into a caste. The caste is the defining factor in determining the course of a life: the place where he drinks water from, whom he dines with, whom he marries, and whether he becomes a scholar or a scavenger really depends on his caste. Did the caste system go unchallenged all these years? No, certainly not. Revolts did take place against this monster of a caste system in the course of history.

The most notable one was by Gautama Buddha, in the fifth century B.C., who questioned the human stratification in the form of caste system and discarded exclusion of the disempowered masses of Dalits and Adivasis. Buddhism, which promoted “inclusiveness” (again, using a modern expression), gained prominence over a large part of India and spread to other countries such as China and Japan and to Southeast Asia, from the fourth century B.C. to the sixth century A.D. However, Buddhism’s influence in India declined in the seventh century and virtually disappeared as a widely practiced religion before the arrival of Islam in India in the tenth century.

The next major move in India towards inclusiveness had to wait until the fourteenth century. In India, the fourteenth century saw the emergence of a religious revival and reformation – somewhat similar to the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation in Europe – and it took the form of anti-orthodox *bhakti*

movement which included Dalits and Adivasis. Under this helm were serfs, poets, philosophers, who mainly came from the so-called lower strata of society: potters, gardeners, tailors, barbers, carpenters, and even Untouchables. The *bhakti* movement established equality before God. Its followers believed that even Untouchables shared the grace of God. It was said that as they reach God, they cease to be distinguished; as salt becomes one with the ocean, Untouchables become one with God. However, the inclusiveness of the *bhakti* movement was confined only to the religious sphere, even the compassionate saint poets tended to uphold the divisive caste system in the social realm. While the *bhakti* movement raised awareness, it was not radical enough to challenge the exclusion embedded in the caste system in day-to-day life.

With the advent of British Raj in the early nineteenth century, education – which was for a very long time a privilege of the upper-caste alone – gradually became accessible to castes lower down in the hierarchy. Knowledge brought with it desire to be recognized and to be respected. It strengthened the resolve of Dalits and Adivasis to struggle against discrimination.

And then there was this historic event in 1873, when Jyotirao Phule, a teacher in a Christian school, who came from a gardener community, established the first non-Brahmin social organization that emphasized education for the masses and strongly advocated the reduction of Brahmin ritual power. Fully educated, he trained his wife Savitri, who started a school for women; the first school for women was started by them, this couple. Over the years, Jyotirao established

many schools for Dalits, Adivasis, and women. Indeed, when the Prince of Wales visited India in 1889, he was greeted with signs – and the signs were very illuminating – the signs said “Tell the Grandma, we are a happy nation, but 190 million are without education.” These were the signs which were shown to the Prince of Wales in 1889, and this was indeed the beginning of a revolution empowering Dalits and Adivasis. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule also strongly advocated representation for members of all castes in public services. Phule’s seminal campaign for the education of the traditionally disenfranchised and his advocacy for representation of the so-called low-caste in public services laid the foundation – the much-needed foundation – for the significant social change that followed.

When the twentieth century began, it was Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, of (a small princely state in today’s Maharashtra) Kolhapur, who took the historic decision, proclaiming reservation of 50 percent posts in all departments of the state for all backward classes. This was indeed the first move in India toward affirmative action, and the date was July 20, 1902.

In the meantime, in 1891, came the birth of someone who would lead the revolution for equality in India. This man, a son of a Dalit school teacher in the British Army, was Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, affectionately known as Baba Saheb. He was highly educated: a Ph.D. from Columbia University, a Doctor of Science from London School of Economics, and Barrister at Law from Gray’s Inn, London. These achievements, which were of course spectacular by any standard, were no

doubt simply incredible for a Dalit. As a scholar extraordinaire, Dr. Ambedkar wrote books on economics, history, law, sociology, politics, and comparative religion. He published *Mook Nayak*, the first of many newspapers for Dalits. He established a chain of hostels, schools, and colleges primarily for Dalits. He founded a political party that successfully politicized Dalits throughout Maharashtra and, in due course, all over of India. His message to Dalits: “Educate, Organize, and Agitate,” has reached far and wide. He led numerous protests, and when he feared there was no way to change the Hindu caste system, he declared that he would not die as a Hindu, setting in motion a movement that eventually led to the conversion of five hundred thousand people at a time to Buddhism in 1956, just before Dr. Ambedkar’s death.

Dr. Ambedkar, a great champion of human rights and empowerment of Dalits, was undoubtedly the greatest leader of the Dalit movement in the twentieth century. It was he who organized and inspired Dalits to effectively use political means towards their goal of social equality. Dr. Ambedkar participated in the Round Table Conferences, organized by the British government in London in 1930 and 1931. As a member of the minority subcommittee, Dr. Ambedkar submitted a concrete program of action called “A Scheme of Political Safeguards for the Protection of the Depressed Classes in the Future Constitution of Self-Governing India.” The document constituted a declaration of fundamental rights for the depressed classes. It called for equal citizenship, abolishment of untouchability, and banning of discrimination by law; it demanded adequate representation in public services and establishment of a public service

commission for recruitment and enforcement; most importantly, it demanded representation in the legislatures, and the rights of the depressed classes to elect their own representatives through separate electorates.

The relentless struggle by Dr. Ambedkar at the Round Table Conferences (where he crossed swords with Mahatma Gandhi in several acrimonious debates) and Gandhiji's fast until death, finally culminated in the signing of the Pune Pact between Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi on 24 September 1932. In addition to political representation for Dalits, the Pune Pact, clause 8 in particular, admitted, and I quote, "there shall be no disabilities attaching to anyone on the ground of being a member of depressed classes in regard to appointment to public services. Every endeavor shall be made to secure fair representation of the different classes in this respect." The content of the Pune Pact was subsequently incorporated in the Government of India Act of 1935, and this was the first time that the representation of depressed classes in public services was accepted at the national level.

When India became independent in 1947, it was Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar who was chosen as the First Law Minister of India, and the task of framing the Constitution of India as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution) was entrusted to him. The architects of the Indian constitution recognized that for the Indian independence to succeed, social and economic empowerment of the marginalized community was imperative. Accordingly, safeguards and provisions aimed at securing for all citizens social, economic, and

political justice, and equality of status and opportunity to all citizens of India were incorporated in the Indian constitution, and thus, the legal basis for affirmative action in the form of reservation policy was finally put in place.

The Constitutional basis of reservation policy in India is evident from several articles. I don't want to go over each one of them, but Article XV.4 of the Constitution in particular says that nothing shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Similarly, Article XVI.4 states that, "nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class or citizens which in the opinion of the State is not adequately represented in the services under the State." Article XVI, which is one of Directing Principle of State Policy in the Constitution clearly ensures, and I quote, "the state shall promote with special care the special economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation." In other words, while the Indian Constitution upholds the right of all for equal treatment before law, it makes protective discrimination towards the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. And there is also an embedded mechanism to oversee; the Constitution creates a statutory authority to oversee the operations of various safeguards specifically provided for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

What is the point of all these provisions in the Constitution? I think the purpose of reservation policy is to mitigate, at least partially, the centuries-old all-pervasive injustices inflicted on SCs and STs and enable them to participate in the process of development and social change. Many comparisons have been drawn, and we will be, I believe, talking about a comparison between the reservation policy in India and the Affirmative Action policy in the United States, so I will not go into those details.

When the Indian Constitution was adopted and India became a republic in 1950, after that, various articles relating to reservations were invoked for interpretation by the Supreme Court and High Courts. The implementation of reservation policy eventually led to a series of controversies, litigation, and political agitations. The famous agitation about the Mandal Commission; Mandal Commission did not really relate to SCs and STs, it related to OBCs, so I will not go into that. However, on the positive side, as far as SCs and STs are concerned, particular amendments which have been made to the Indian constitution – 73 and 74 – are extremely important because they relate to participation by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the locus of government in rural and urban areas (they became effective in a law in 1993). So going beyond the central government and state government level at the legislature, even at the district level, at the block level, and even at the village level, there is now representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which I think is a remarkable change. A very important constitutional amendment that was made in 2002 was the 86th Constitutional Amendment, which has led to a new article, 21a, in Part III of the

Constitution. This Amendment makes free and compulsory education to all children ages six to fourteen years a fundamental right. However, the central legislation to follow up on this is still awaited. So this is the broad legal framework of empowerment.

Let me now turn to the actual track record, and here I want to begin by making some observations about the emerging Indian economy. To make the story short, we know that the Indian economy has gone through a lot of changes in the last few years. When we became independent in 1947 and started the so-called planned economic development in 1951, in the first three decades of the planned economic development, the real GDP growth of India was only about 3.5 percent: the famous “Hindu rate of growth.” And in the 1980s there was acceleration of growth, but that was unsustainable, and it finally led to an unprecedented macroeconomic crisis in 1991. The year 1991 was probably the lowest ebb in India’s economic history, where the country was caught in a bind where we had to actually swap about forty-seven tons of our gold in order to be able to get even the bridge finance which was needed to come out of the crisis. But we also converted that challenge into an opportunity, and the new economic policy that came into being after that has made a lot of difference in the subsequent period. So in 1991, in the aftermath of the crisis, we changed the policy stance, which was at that time very highly debatable. But after the passage of time, people have seen and understood the positive achievements which have come out of the new economic policy.

One very important thing there that I would like to mention is that there has been a very strong acceleration in the real economic growth rate of India. As I said, for the first three decades, from 1951 to 1980 the growth rate was only 3.5 percent. After the reform started in 1991 – 1992-2002, the first ten years of reform – the real GDP growth average was 6 percent. 2002-2005 the real GDP growth average was 8 percent. And in the last three years, until the last financial year, the growth rate averaged 9.3 percent for the first time in India's recorded history. So there has been a very sharp acceleration of economic growth, and even with the global meltdown, we are talking about the growth rate coming down, but that would still be around 7 percent, which is, by all means, not insignificant at all.

The resurgence of growth that India has seen in the last seventeen years after the reforms and the growing resilience of the economy has also been reflected in the social sector; the poverty ratio has declined and there has been improvement in the health scenario. However, with all these good things that are happening, there is a basic paradox. If you rank all the countries in the world today by the rate of economic growth, India happens to be the second fastest-growing economy in the world – and we are all very proud about it – next only to China, with 9 percent growth. If you rank, on the other hand, all these countries not by the rate of economic growth but by their Human Development Index, then it turns out that India is almost in the rock bottom, in the bottom 20 percent. Last time I saw we were about 125th out of 175 countries for which the United Nations Development Program has compiled Human Development Indices, and I think this is a major paradox. Why is it that when you rank the countries by rate of

economic growth we are the second fastest but when we rank them on the social indicators, particularly the Human Development Index, we are in the bottom 10 percent?

This clearly shows that we have simply not done enough as far as empowerment of the marginalized sections of the society is concerned. A comparison of India with Southeast Asia clearly shows how enough has not been done in India. In other words, we need to specifically take a look at the Dalits and Adivasis. The next section which talks about status of Dalits and Adivasis gives an overview of what has happened to these people, with all the legal provisions made in the Constitution and Amendments and economic policy changes.

First I'll talk about the non-educational indicators: one can see that there has been an increase of the proportion of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes as a ratio of the total population. We have now about 17.5 percent of our population as Scheduled Caste and 8.6 percent Scheduled Tribes, so as a proportion we are 26.1 percent of the total population, which is very large. As far as the sex ratio is concerned, amongst the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, and in the rural population, the male/female ratio has been coming down. Peculiarly however, what is happening is that amongst the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes there is a difference in that the fall is much sharper for SCs and STs compared to the general population. Same as it is for the poverty ratio; while the proportion of people below the poverty line has come down generally. At one point of time in India, 44 percent of the Indian population was below the poverty line, and that

has come down. Especially in the last seventeen years it has come down to 26 percent. But that is a national average. If you focus on Dalits and Adivasis and then compare that with the overall population, you will find that while there is an overall improvement, the improvement is much less among the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, so the proportion of people below the poverty line is still fairly high among the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. Same with the access to credit: again, much smaller than their proportion in the general population. One area where they are doing very well is the representation in the central government services, and if you look at the numbers in different categories – in India we have four different categories: A, B, C, D – and all the government data shows that they have done reasonably well. In fact, broadly comparable to their proportion in the population they have occupied these positions if you take A, B, C, and D, all categories, put together. But if you make a diversification, you will find that they are very large in the C and D, that is the lower categories, and very small in the higher categories.

Now let's come to the education side. There again, at the national level, we have done very poorly, and particularly so for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In India, for many years we have been talking about how in 1966 there was a commission appointed, (Kothari Commission) which proscribed for the nation as a whole 6 percent of GDP ought to be spent on education. In spite of all the lofty talk in India about education, can you believe that we have never ever spent more than 3.5 percent of GDP on education? Last two years there was a big

talk about a very large increase in expenditure on education. The fact of the matter is the numbers are always given in absolute terms or they are given as a percentage increase. I remember, year before last, they said there was a 35 percent increase in the expenditure on education, which was considered most significant. It is not. Even a back-of-envelope calculation will show that the large percentage increase on a small base can actually be smaller than a small percentage increase on a large base. And that is precisely what has happened. As a ratio of GDP this has only meant change from 3.52 percent to 3.64 percent, which is hardly significant. Then, we were told last year that there was another increase of 25 percent on top of the 35 percent increase earlier, and that also works out to taking the ratio of the GDP from 3.64 to 3.72 percent, so we are not even at quarter to 4 percent. So the 6 percent target has been elusive; something which was recommended forty two years back and accepted by the government but still not fully implemented. In sum we have not done well in education, and that is why our ranking on the Human Development Index is perhaps so low.

Today the situation is this: the population in the age group of ten to nineteen in India is about 225 million. This is the largest ever cohort of young people to make a transition to adulthood. If we want to, and there is a lot of talk about India getting this demographic dividend, but to reap the benefit of the demographic dividend we need to put our education sector in order this calls for a massive expansion of the education sector particularly with special attention to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. If you look at elementary education, they have done very well, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has done very well and they

have secured almost universal access to primary education at 94 percent. That is very good. However, the dropout rate at the elementary level has remained very high; at the national level, it is at 51 percent. Secondary education enrollment has not increased much. In the age group of fourteen to eighteen, there are 107 million people and there are going to be 121 million by the year 2011, and the current enrollment in secondary and higher education is only thirty-seven million, which is clearly not enough.

The situation is even worse in higher education. For an economy which is hoping to grow at the rate of 8 percent or 9 percent, there is a commensurate need for skilled personnel also to increase. But if you look at the gross enrollment ratio in higher education the scenario is most disappointing. The gross enrollment ratio can be computed in different ways, but it is supposed to be between 10 to 12 percent only, which means that 88 to 90 percent of our youth do not have an opportunity for higher education. In China it is 21 percent, and for developed countries the average is 54.5 percent. But we are stuck at 10 to 12 percent, and with the “ambitious” Eleventh Plan we are talking about raising it to 15 percent, and another ambitious plan, the Twelfth Plan, where we are hoping to raise it to 20 percent. The world average today is 23 percent, and we are talking about ten more years to raise it to 20 percent, by that time, the world average will maybe be 35 percent. So we are way behind as far as higher education is concerned. If you look specifically at SCs and STs, there again you only see these problems even more confounded. Available data about the SCs and STs and their literacy rate, their gross enrollment ratio, dropout rate, clearly show that generally we have not

done well, and particularly in the case of Dalits and Adivasis we have not done well at all. And there is a lot that remains to be done.

In sum, there are formidable challenges that lay ahead in the education sector in India generally, and particularly among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. India is seriously handicapped, being saddled with a very weak and narrow knowledge generation base. Within the massive expansion requirements of the education sector concerted efforts would have to be made – and are imperatively needed indeed – focused on the objective of empowerment and inclusiveness.

What are the specific policy imperatives in education that we need? As far as primary education is concerned, elimination of social gaps in enrollment and dropouts rates while increasing the retention rates, and this is about elementary education. As far as the secondary education is concerned, substantial increase in gross enrollment ratio, and reduction in social gaps in gross enrollment ratio and dropouts is needed. And as far as higher education is concerned, supporting Scheduled Caste and Tribes youth through scholarships, fellowships, hostel facilities, and remedial measures wherever necessary, besides supporting institutions of higher learning in hilly, remote and educationally backward rural areas and small towns are required without any further delay.

In conclusion, it is my submission that whether or not India would sustain its present high growth momentum would be critically contingent on adoption of an

inclusive policy stance in education. Indeed, whether or not India would become an economic super power in the course of next fifteen to twenty years, to my mind, critically depends on India putting its education sector in order. Thank you very much.

DEVESH KAPUR: We have some time for a few questions. While we wait for some questions, why don't I begin? One of the things which you've said is that, look the Indian state is so underinvested in primary and secondary education, but one thing which we see is that even where the investments are – like for instance we know that now there is ample evidence, and one of the papers in this conference also shows that – is that even where the investments are there, the teachers don't show up. So what's the point of trying to put more money for teachers who are not going to show up? Why do you think there has been so little political pressure on trying to discipline state functionaries who are getting paid but who don't show up to work?

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: Very good question Devesh. Well what Devesh is saying is absolutely true. Even while the investments are made, the social rate of return is very poor and its implementation, in many cases, is very poor. I'm saying that even the basic level, you know for education, as for many other things, one can look at two things: one is access to education and the second is the quality of education. Throughout, I'm not even talking about quality. I'm saying that the elementary thing, before quality comes access. That access itself has been so ridiculously poor that there is a major improvement required there. The

gross enrollment ratio for higher education is very poor. In India, whenever we talk about high growth and whenever we talk about human resource potential, people will quickly tell you that we produce X hundred thousand engineers, Y hundred thousand doctors, and so on. People are increasingly recognizing that very few of them are really employable. So the quality is really very poor, and certainly not commensurate with the high growth profile of the country for the next fifteen to twenty years. Here, the basic thing to be done is to improve access to get opportunity for everybody, particularly in the rural areas among socially disadvantaged and economically disadvantaged parts of society, and simultaneously work on quality improvement.

If you look at the long history of India, a two thousand year history of India; one American scholar (i.e. Prof. Maddison) has come out with a very interesting study three or four years back where he has tried to estimate GDP for old civilizations like India and China over the last two thousand years. And he comes out with something which is music to India's ears, but not to mine. Year one, when Jesus Christ was born, India's share of the global GDP was 31.5 percent, so almost one third of global GDP came from India. I pose a very simple question: India's share of global GDP was 31 percent in year one and in year 1991, that share came down to 2 percent. Why? When I pose this question, and the obvious answer is because of the British rule. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Yes, of course, during the 150 years of British rule, India stagnated. But that doesn't explain the precipitous decline for 1,991 years. To my mind, the only thing that can possibly

explain that is a system of social relationships embedded in the caste system in India.

The caste system in India has done irreparable damage over the last two thousand years, and the underlying logic is also very clear. In a society where only 3.5 percent of the people have opportunities to realize their own potential, to get empowered through education, whereas the remaining 96.5 percent are denied those opportunities, are required or ordained by the social system or the caste system to do things which are menial in nature, depending on the caste into which they are born, how can that society grow? Any society which is so rigid and inflexible, where people do not gravitate towards the realization of their own potential, people don't have opportunities to realize their own potential, that society cannot possibly sustain a decent growth rate. And that is the lesson of the last two thousand years. And that is why, when we talk about India becoming an economic superpower, we need massive investment in education, both in terms of improving access and of course part and parcel of that is improvement in quality. That is the order of the day, and I am very much convinced, in my heart of hearts, that if we don't do that, if we don't get our act together as far as the education sector is concerned, all our visions, our dreams, as you may, of becoming a superpower is going to become a daydream. That is the regrettable reality.

QUESTIONER: You have offered a remarkably moving account of the importance of education, nobody would argue with you against that, although if I wanted to

be cynical I would suggest that you have yourself suggested that the last seventeen years of extraordinary growth have not been paralleled by an equivalent expansion of educational opportunities for Dalits and other lower castes. So I'm not certain, if I want to be cynical, that the future cannot be devoted to an equivalently oligarchical form of economic expansion which will use a variety of systems to allow a certain sector of the backward classes of India and castes of India to progress to a point where they can participate, but only barely, within this larger expansion. So that is cynical and we'll set that aside.

I wanted to take you back to a wonderful three-term set of ideas that you suggested Baba Saheb Ambedkar made available, because it seems to me that is the proper democratic and political form of the state policy that you were enunciating, to talk about this need for, this insistence on education, organization, and agitation. So I was hoping that you would then extend your analysis and your understanding away from this top-down state policy exhortation to an account of what it might mean for Dalits to organize and agitate very much as part of a democratic future, rather than to see Indian growth via this insistence upon the superpower status that all of us are supposed to be so thirsting for.

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: Thank you, thank you very much. A quick comment on what has been said here about being cynical if one wants to be. Your observations are absolutely correct. I am saying that in the last seventeen years, while there has been very rapid economic growth, there has not been a

commensurate improvement regarding investment in education, which would be important for long-term sustainable growth. In fact on this issue I have several times spoken to Devesh, and even in the states where those who represented Dalits came to power – Mayawati is a clear example – one doesn't see that there is a disproportionately large emphasis on education, even in the state of Uttar Pradesh where Mayawati has come to power. The point is that this top-down approach is something which is necessary but that cannot be sufficient.

But at the same time, go down south and what do you see? In the land of Dr. Ambedkar, you know this educate, organize, and agitate was not an election slogan, it became part of our psyche for a very large number of people. My father, who never went to school, takes his child to school in 1949 – my elder brother, it's there in my book – the point is that he goes there and says you have to take my child into the school, and he did not know typical academic cycle – June to July, June to April – but he had gone to the school somewhere in between, and he said that, “If you don't admit my child, I'm going to go on a hunger strike.” You know, what prompted him to do that? He had realized the importance of education thanks to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Today a very large number of people among Dalits, particularly in Maharashtra, understand the importance of education and that it is the only panacea for thinking about a change.

I am very happy to tell you something which is not generally recognized. If you look at Dalits in Maharashtra, you know on Dr. Ambedkar's death anniversary, that is 6 December, and his birth anniversary which is 14 April, literally millions

of people – about one and a half to two million people – come to Mumbai to pay respects. When they come to pay respects, they come from different parts of the country, and then there are books available, and those books there are for serious reading. You would be surprised that the turnover of buying books there is phenomenal. Today if you look at people who are in the economically better strata of society, they would be spending much smaller proportion of their income, on buying books. The books are really bought by Dalits, and this, I think, is a revolution taking place. In fact – and I have gone on record – it is my perception that there is a silent revolution taking place in our country. In every walk of life you will find – not too many – but in every walk of life – from painting, sculpture to neurosurgery – everywhere you will find a young Dalit boy or Dalit girl trying to carve out a place for himself or herself. I think this is a silent revolution. One would want more of this to happen, but this is happening. So Ambedkar's exhortation has not remained an election slogan, it is something which is part of our psyche. I wish that happened on a much wider scale, and that should be aided and supported by policies both at the central government level and at the state government level.

QUESTIONER: I think we were all rather surprised and thankful when Obama became president of the United States. Are we going to be similarly surprised when Mayawati becomes Prime Minister of India? I assume everybody here knows who Mayawati is...

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: In fact there was a very interesting debate in India, and probably everywhere in the world on this Obama issue. In India when there was this debate, particularly two names were thrown up: One was Mayawati and the other one was Rahul Gandhi. The general consensus was that Mayawati is no Obama and Rahul Gandhi, given his family background of course, is far from being Obama. In fact there was a discussion on national television, “Is there any Obama for India,” and I had a chance to participate. I said that in the prevailing set up framework there is no Obama. But if you look at the historical context, there is only one person who could have been Obama of India, and that was Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar.

QUESTIONER: I wanted to turn to the issue of political strategies. Somehow we’ve reached a stage where this formula is available to everyone. So in this fragmented society...it ends up becoming everybody’s strategy, and in the process it appears, at least to somebody teaching here, that everyone seems to have adopted this formula, and the edge that should have been that of the Dalits...somehow the people in the front have ended up adopting this strategy. The Dalits have been reduced, in a sense, to one of the many agitators, instead of being the only people whose claim to educating, organizing, and agitating... Now we have religious groups agitating and we have all sorts of regional identities agitating too. So, I hope this will come up later on, but I think this is just a comment, but I’d like to know what you think about it. I feel that the political strategy and goals for Dalit emancipation are somewhat more difficult.

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: I'm not sure that I understand the question.

DEVESH KAPUR: I suppose that you could say that other groups are also now wanting reservations. Everyone wants special treatment...

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: Yeah. In fact that was bound to happen. That is happening...many other groups are now demanding reservations. Even among Dalits; remember that Dalit reservation is only for the Government jobs and government jobs are not very large in number anymore. Not surprisingly therefore, even on the Dalit side, there is a big debate about application of the reservation principles to the private sector. There is a big debate going on and the issue is still unresolved. But feelings are running very high on this issue. My personal perception is that, reservation of the kind that we have in the Constitution is needed in India, because of the innate inability of the system to be just and fair. If the system were just and fair, there would be no need for reservation. But the fact is that there is invariably this innate bias; now I have sat through scores of interviews and I have seen. People would often come to me and say that there were x-number of Scheduled Caste candidates and we flunked all of them, and they actually expect a pat on the back! This is the mindset that we have. So if the system was just and fair, we would not need the reservations. You see, you also have to look at it this way: in the absence of reservations, everything is *de facto* reserved for 3.5 percent of the people. What we are saying is that if the system were just and fair, then broadly speaking, people would be absorbed in different jobs broadly in line with their share in the population, give or take half a

percentage here and there. Is that what is happening? It is not. We know that 3.5 percent of people, the so-called high caste, occupy about 67 percent of the jobs. Now where is fairness in this? So what we are talking about is the remaining 96.5 percent of people who are presently competing for the remaining 33 percent jobs should be competing for jobs which are much larger than that. And I think that would be commensurate with *any* principle of social justice.

QUESTIONER: The issue of identity supersedes the issue of economic opportunity. My question was really can you differentiate those two...or even agitation as part of that? The second question, related to that, is what do you consider to be the central issue when it comes to identity?

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: I will take two more questions and then try to respond.

QUESTIONER: My question is about the whole discourse about the empowerment of Dalits. We tend to think that Dalits are, to a certain extent, disempowered. Here in the U.S. I was reading some discourse, and they say that diversity in schools and higher education is important for cognitive development of all students, also for developing social competencies and also developing democratic citizenship amongst students so that they are competent enough. So here, the problem lies with the whole system, as such, across caste and class. So why is there no discussion in India in this line? And why, I see there are a lot of students coming to USA – like eighty thousand students last year, and this year ninety thousand students from India – the largest international student

community. I don't know how many students from Dalit community? Because there are facilities like the RBI loans which are very far for Dalit, so I am afraid there very few people are coming. And this is for education abroad. This is just an example for education at the primary level, I'll just give you an example of an Adivasi school, tribal schools in Maharashtra, which I'll say it is kind of like a segregated schooling system in India. So there are a lot of things, like ideas are there...in USA you have community colleges, there are a lot of people coming to USA, so why don't we see a lot of educational reforms? There is no formal education system, there are a lot of jobs lost...at call centers, there is no formal training centers for such jobs. So what is your perception, and as a policy maker, what is your stance on this? Thank you.

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: Sure. I'll take one more question and then try to answer.

QUESTIONER: That gentleman over there, when he asked about Obama, and then your response...for me, it appears that for Maharashtra Dalits history starts and ends with Ambedkar...as though we really cannot produce another Ambedkar. I think we really need to reflect on why after Ambedkar, in the last fifty years of post-colonial India...why we can't produce another Ambedkar...or why can't we produce an Obama in India? I think that we need to ask these questions...why can't we produce another person like Ambedkar? Or maybe it's only a comment, I don't know...

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: Actually, some of these questions will be debated in this Conference. I'm not in a position to answer all of them, but some quick remarks before we close...How much time do we have? Only three minutes...okay, in three minutes I will make some quick remarks.

On this question of Obama in India. If you say that for Dalits in Maharashtra it begins with Ambedkar and closes with Ambedkar, that would be absolutely right. But I think symptomatic of the phenomenal contribution made by Ambedkar. I think it is undeniable, in whichever part of the country you go, I think only now that people in the rest of the country are coming to recognize and understand the unique role that was played by Dr. Ambedkar. In the twentieth century the most important person in Dalit movement in our country, historically, was Dr. Ambedkar. One, two and three; all top three positions are taken by Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar! And I am not saying that because I come from Maharashtra, because that stands out; if there is one person who made us human beings, it was Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Before that we were treated worse than cats and dogs and never thought that there was something wrong. Why is it that all of the generations before mine never complained about the sweeping jobs that they were doing? Why is it that I could come to the United States? This is the enormous change that was brought about by Dr. Ambedkar, and this is not only in Maharashtra but I think everywhere in India.

Second, there was this question about diversity by itself being a virtue: yes, it may be so, but not of the kind that we have in India. You also mentioned about eighty

thousand students coming here, I will tell you that very few of them are Dalits, and not because of the opportunities there. In fact I see another paradox there, and this is a non-Dalit paradox. I was one of those students who came here, but after I finished my Ph.D., the fifth day I went back to India because I know my future is there. Now, what I have seen is very interesting. People who come from India, they are all predominantly from the so-called high caste. Dalits are very small in number and in proportion. These are the people – many of these people have been complaining after being here about the glass ceilings in the U.S. and so on – but these are the people who represent the oppressors back home! There is a paradox there. Whereas, a person like me, who came from Dalit community, comes here, goes back after education, and I am not complaining, So there is an inherent contradiction there.

On the last question about identity, I'm not really very clear about your question. I think we will take it up as we go along in this Conference. I must say that I really appreciate all the questions that were asked and raised here and I thank all of you for those questions. I'm sure I have not answered all the questions but we need to stay that way because we are at a two day Conference and we certainly will have an opportunity to discuss those questions and more with many more people and experts. I want to thank Devesh Kapur and Dr. Rawat for having given me this opportunity to come here and share a few thoughts with you. Thank you very much.