



## Unto the last

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Tuesday 4th July, 9.30 – 12.30

### ABSTRACT:

The struggle for national independence was not only waged to gain freedom from foreign rule but also redemption from poverty. The constitution of the new nation proscribed equality before the law of all citizens and democracy as the organizing principle of the political order. Universalizing suffrage was an act of considerable civil courage in a society marked by hard-core social inequality. The hierarchical ranking was attributed to the divisive impact of colonial policies. In the construction of a contrast mutuality was highlighted. It came back in the postulate of a village community founded on a division of labor in which peasant, artisan and service castes cooperated in reciprocity. This image was strongly contested by B.R. Ambedkar who argued that giving the right to vote would not result in the emancipation of the underclasses if they remained dispossessed from a proportionate share of economic and social rights. To the extent land reforms were carried out, they benefitted the better-off segments of the peasantry and not the sizable class of agricultural laborers of subaltern stock. The Gandhian model of small-scale village development was completely ignored. While the pretense of a socialist blueprint to the future was foregrounded in political statements, those who belonged to the landless underclass, identified in official reports as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, were often still tied in debt bondage to substantial landowners. Population growth went on unabated and bringing down the high pressure on the resource base was a must. Agriculture had to be released from a low-productivity workforce redundant to regular demand. A better life was awaiting the rural underclasses in the city where they would find steady employment in mills that were expected to absorb and skill a huge army of labor from the countryside. But this turn around failed to materialize.

### READING LIST:

Breman, J. C. (2016), *On Pauperism in Present and Past*, New Dehli: Oxford University Press, chapters 5-6.