

On the Caste Question

**Towards A
Marxist Understanding**

Abhinav Sinha

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Lucknow

Note

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CONTENTS

Preface

Caste Question, Marxism and the Political Legacy of B. R. Ambedkar

Historiography of Caste: Some Critical Observations and some
Methodological Interventions

The Tragic Regression of Anand Teltumbde – From ‘Mahad: The Making of
First Dalit Revolt’ to ‘Bridging the Unholy Rift’

Marxism and the Question of Identity

The Tragedy of ‘Dalit’ Politics: Hollow-hearted Symbolism and Ritualism

PREFACE

The question of caste and program for its annihilation remains one of the most complex questions for communist revolutionaries in India. It also remains one of the most fiercely debated questions between Marxists-Leninists and different shades of Ambedkarites, including Left-Ambedkarites. At the same time, the question of the relationship between caste and class has long long remained remain an issue of controversy among the activists and the academics alike. The he present volume contains my writings on the issue from 2012 onwards and includes five essays written between July 2012 and April 2018.

The first essay Caste Question, Marxism and the Political Legacy of B. R. Ambedkar deals with the question of the relationship between class and caste and presents a critical evaluation of the pre-Ambedkar anti-caste movements as well as a critical assessment of the philosophy, political program and social program of B. R. Ambedkar. In the end, the essay proposes a tentative orientation for the formulation of a revolutionary communist program for the annihilation The second of caste. essay Historiography of Caste: Some Critical Observations and Some Methodological Interventions focuses on the problems of historiography of varna/caste system and presents a critical overview of history of the origin and evolution of varna and igin an caste. The essay attempts to show how a correspondence exists between the changes in the nature and structure of caste system on the one hand and the changes in the production relations and modes of production on the other. Finally, the essay presents a critique of sociologism and positivism prevalent in the contemporary studies of caste and present a coherent method to study the evolving articulation of class and caste in the Indian society.

The third essay is is a a critique of Anand Teltumbde's introduction of Ambedkar's unfinished manuscript 'India and Communism'. The essay repudiates the attempt of Teltumbde to show that Ambedkar

had no contradiction with the Marxist philosophy and it was only the practice of Indian communists which irked him. In the process Teltumbde performs a liberal misappropriation of Marx and utterly fails to understand basic Marxist position on the question of violence, bourgeois democracy as well as the Leninist theory of Imperialism two-stage revolution and that of party. The essay shows how Teltumbde is unable to understand the very basic concepts of Marx's political economy like circuits of capital, the three forms assumed by process of its movement, etc. Teltumbde's knowledge of the history of Indian communist movement too is one of the issues dealt with in the essay.

The fourth essay Marxism and the Question of Identity was presented during the New York Left Forum in 2018 and pertains the question of Identity and Identity politics and the correct Marxist position on these issues. The essay attempts to dispel various illusion about positions which have been presumed to be Marxist positions and positively states the relation between the question of identities and forms of social oppression based upon them on the one hand. and class struggle on the other.

The last article is a critical comment on the hollow symbolism and identitarianism prevalent in the dalit movement, especially the Ambedkarite movement, which fails to go beyond the symbolic issues and raise the foundational questions that face the movements dedicated to the annihilation of caste. Needless to say, the selection does not and cannot claim to exhaust the ideological and political horizon of the debate on the caste question and program for the annihilation of caste. It merely aims to set the basic coordinates of the revolutionary program for the resolution of the caste question. We hope that the selection will succeed in this objective. It must be noted that even in the period after the writing of present essays our thinking has continued to develop and evolve continuously. However, this development and evolution can be traced in the video lectures on the caste question, Ambedkar and a revolutionary communist program for doing away with caste, which are available online (<https://www.redpolemique.wordpress.com>). We

would request the readers to see these videos too in order to comprehend our position in toto and in movement.

Abhinav

December 15, 2018

CASTE QUESTION, MARXISM AND THE POLITICAL LEGACY OF B. R. AMBEDKAR

It would be purely tautological to claim that caste is one of the essential characteristic features of Indian social reality. However, at the risk of being tautological I must begin by reiterating this oft-repeated *cliché*. One of the reasons for that is the recent incidents that shook the conscience of every justice-loving citizen of India and underlined the question of caste with renewed urgency. The institutional murder of Rohith Vemula and some other dalit students in universities across India; the Jat, Maratha and Patel agitations for reservation, Una incident and an unprecedented spurt in the anti-dalit atrocities: all these incidents have brought the question of annihilation of caste to the centre with reinvigorated imminence, though it was never on the periphery. Undoubtedly, any discussion of a radical and revolutionary transformation of Indian society must deal with the question of caste.

It would be a sheer act of self-suggestion if we assume that we are the first ones to attempt to understand the question of caste and its annihilation. Anti-caste movements and anti-caste warriors for centuries have tried to understand caste and have fought against it. Any attempt to understand caste must evaluate these anti-caste movements and anti-caste warriors like Ayyankali, Phule, Periyar, Ambedkar and many more. As Marx had once said, “to be a radical means going to the root of things.” This also holds true in understanding caste system, the positives and negatives of anti-caste movements of past, and proposing the possible path of annihilation of caste today. In other words, “we must begin with the beginning,” to paraphrase Lenin. The first question that we must answer is the one that has been answered a zillion times by myriad kinds of people including activists, thinkers, academicians, and philosophers: **What is caste?** I would humbly attempt to present a

Marxist understanding of caste in brief and in the process I would make critical comments on some of the major interpretations of caste system too.

To answer the question 'what is caste' we must answer the question '**how did varna/caste system originate?**' In my opinion, to understand caste system in its contemporaneity, it is essential to comprehend it historically. One of the main weaknesses of sociological studies of caste is their disdain for a historical view. This positivistic fetish to record the myriad contemporary particularities of caste prevents most of the sociological studies to arrive at a balanced historical understanding of caste system. Therefore, I deem it essential to begin with the question of origin in order to develop a rigorous understanding. Now, this question itself can be subject of a long dedicated discussion but I shall try to present my understanding of the origin of caste system, or, the *varna*-caste system in very brief and in this, I would mostly be following the leading historians, sociologists and anthropologists who have probed this question, while trying to synthesize their conclusions.

Historiography of Caste: A Very Brief Note

Varna-caste system came into existence in the North-Western part of the Indian subcontinent and then expanded in the plains of Ganges. In a gradual process, it enveloped different parts of Indian subcontinent in varied forms. This process continued till the early medieval period and to some extent, even later. If we look at the history of *Varna* system or *Varnashrama*, we find the first reference of the word '*varna*' in the tenth *mandala* of *Purushasukta* of *Rig Veda*. This belongs to the latter part of the early or *RigVedic* period.

The description of *varnashrama* in this first reference lacks three essential characteristics of caste system: the hereditary labour division, endogamy and untouchability. The description of *varna* in this first reference resembles more to a labour division and an embryonic class division, as historians of ancient India like D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, Suvira Jaisawal, etc have shown. We do not find any reference of *jati* (caste) in *Rig Veda*. The first reference of

jati is found in *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini and then in *Brihatsamhita* of Varahamihir. However, in these sources from around 200 BC, the words *jati* and *varna* have been used interchangeably and synonymously. The first time these two words are used with different meanings is *Yajnyavalkyasmriti* but only once. Thus, till 200 BC the divergence in the meanings of the words *varna* and *jati* had not taken place. This much is clear from the historical evidence that in the *RigVedic* period, the *varnashrama* (*varna* system) was signifying an embryonic class division and labour division. In other words, **at the time of origin, *varna* division represented the embryonic class division of the latter part of the early-Vedic society, as Kosambi has rightly pointed out.**

It can safely be said that Historical Materialist analysis of ancient Indian history begins with D. D. Kosambi. According to Kosambi, the first wave of Aryans had settled in the Indian subcontinent before the coming of the Vedic Aryans and they had got mixed with the aboriginal inhabitants including the surviving elements of Harappan civilization. The Vedic Aryans were mostly pastoral nomads and were divided into three social strata: *Brahmanya*, *Rajanya*, and *Vis*. Famous historian **Bruce Lincoln** has shown with the example of a number of pastoral societies from around the world that most of the pastoral people had this kind of social stratification and almost all of them had social strata of priests, warriors and common labour. We cannot go into the details of his theory; this much can be said that his claims hold water in the context of the Vedic Aryans too. When the Vedic Aryans came they clashed with these people. They used terms *dasas/dasyus* and *asura* to describe the pre-Vedic Aryans who had mixed up with the aboriginal inhabitants. However, the first usage of the term '*dasa*' was not equivalent to its modern meaning, i.e., 'slave'. The way in which the meaning of this term changed actually reflects the history of Vedic civilization and its clash with the early Aryan settlers. For example, the terms '*dasyu*' and '*asura*' have been used for Indra as well who was the main this-worldly god of the Vedic Aryans; in the beginning, for the other-worldly gods, they used the term '*deva*.' However, when the pre-Vedic Aryans who had

settled in the subcontinent and had mixed up with the original inhabitants, including the surviving elements of Harappan civilization, were defeated by the Vedic Aryans, the meaning of the terms '*dasa*' and '*asura*' changed. '*Asura*' began to be used for the chieftains of the defeated pre-Vedic Aryans (*dasas*). The term '*dasa*' assumed its present meaning, that is, 'slave.' These *dasas* were termed as *shudras*. According to Kosambi, with the emergence of this new *varna* and expansion of Vedic civilization into the mid-Gangetic plains, the four fold *varna* system came into existence: *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*.

Use of iron started around 7th c. BC which led to clearing of extremely dense forest areas of plains of Ganges and increase in agricultural production. With increase in the surplus production the class divisions within the Vedic society consolidated. Moreover, with the eastward expanse of Vedic civilization, new tribes were assimilated into the Vedic society mostly through violent and sometimes through non-violent process. According to Kosambi, this assimilation of tribes led to proliferation of castes (*jati*) within the fourfold *varna* system. According to Romila Thaper, the vanquished tribes got assimilated as the lower castes. However, Suvira Jaiswal has argued that the assimilation of tribes into the Vedic society was differential. Often the priests of these tribes got assimilated into the *brahmana varna*, warriors into the *kshatriya varna*, and so on. This very process led to creation of new castes within these *varnas*. Kosambi argues that the subjugation of *shudras* and their use as slaves and servile labour and collusion of *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* to dominate *vaishyas* and exploit and oppress *shudras* towards the end of the Vedic period showed that class society had come into being. **At this stage of development of production system, *varna* was the class division of society.** It had not yet emerged into a system of what Ambedkar had called 'enclosed classes' or 'graded inequality' because caste endogamy had not emerged.

R. S. Sharma, another leading historian of ancient India builds upon Kosambi's account and argues that before the advent of iron and consequently sufficient surplus production, the *varna* division

signified a social stratification based on labour division, which cannot yet be called a properly developed class society or consolidated *varnashrama*. He provides evidence that hereditary labour division was very weak and in the process of development; *varna* endogamy too was not present and there was no sign of untouchability. Even the hierarchy was not rigid and off-springs of *shudras* and higher *varnas* got assimilated into higher *varnas* without discrimination. However, with surplus production after the advent of iron, these social strata consolidated into *varnas*, which represented the class division of that period. Still, untouchability did not develop at that time.

Between 700 BC and 1st century AD, that was the period of the 16 ancient republics and the Mauryan empire, we witness the proliferation of new castes, beginning of caste endogamy and consolidation of hereditary labour division. This process was also characterized by the emergence of the outcastes or the *pancham varna*. However, they did not become untouchables immediately and untouchability emerged in a process along with the emergence of feudal mode of production from the 1st century AD, to which we will come shortly. **B. N. S. Yadav** and others has furnished ample evidence of this process. **What is notable here is that the caste/varna hierarchy is altered in this period.** Most notably, the status of *shudras* underwent a change from that of unfree labour class, including slave labour, controlled by *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas*, who combined to form the ruling class, into the main agrarian population of free and semi-free peasants. Before that, agriculture was the main occupation of the *vaishyas*. At the same time, the *vaishyas* who used to be the main agrarian *varna* were transformed into the trading *varna*. This was also the period of second urban revolution in the pre-feudal India (first being the urban revolution of the Harappan civilization), that witnessed flourishing trade and commerce. **Evidently, the changes in the varna order were result of the changes in production relations due to advent of iron and increase in surplus production.**

The beginning of Gupta period was marked by emergence of feudal relations. In India, feudalism was not characterized by consolidated serfdom like its European counterpart because the supply of unfree labour was furnished by existence of castes that were out of the fourfold *varnas* and partially by semi-free *shudra* peasants and the so-called *hina shudras*. It is notable that by this time *brahminas* made a distinction between the *hina* (lowly) and *ahina shudras* to make certain forms of manual labour as extremely downgraded. Though untouchability had not consolidated by that time, yet, a sense of repulsion has been expressed regarding the *hina shudras*. The *pancham varna* or the outcastes had proliferated with the assimilation of defeated tribes into the Vedic society with the eastward expansion of Vedic Aryans into the Gangetic plains. The 1st century AD witnessed the beginning of land grants to the beneficiaries of the State. The beginning of feudal relations was marked by ruralization and localization of economy and demonetization. The chief mode of wealth now was land unlike the previous period when it was primarily cattle stock and secondarily land. The Gupta rulers gave land grants to *brahmanas* for their priestly services. This led to a change in the character of *brahmana varna*. Till now, it was considered inappropriate for *brahmanas* to own land. But now a section of *brahmanas* emerged as wealthy feudal landlords also. In the course of time, the landlord *brahmanas* climbed higher in the caste hierarchy whereas the priestly *brahmanas* living on alms became downgraded. **Again, as we can see, these changes in certain *varna*/castes and the caste hierarchy was due to the changes in the mode of production and production relations.**

Suvira Jaisawal has shown that *varna*/caste system cannot simply be *reduced* to caste endogamy and hereditary labour division. In fact, all these traits of caste system evolved in a process due to social, economic and political changes. The ritualistic aspect of the caste system was determined *in the last analysis* by the socio-economic developments in the society. Otherwise, the caste system would have been temporally and spatially identical. **Whenever, there**

was correspondence between new production relations and class dynamics on the one hand and the caste system on the other, the caste system became more consolidated and rigid and whenever new production relations and class dynamics were not in congruence with the prevailing caste system and its hierarchy, structural changes took place in the *varna*/caste system. This does not mean that caste/*varna* are class; rather, except the point of origin, there is a relation of correspondence between them. We will come to this Correspondence theory after a little while. At present, it suffices to say that the historical development of *varna*/caste system and its internal temporal and spatial variations are due to its continuous dialog and dialectics with the class relations, production relations and production system.

Now, let me dwell on the **Correspondence theory** for a while. As we saw, at the point of origin there was an overlapping between *varna* and class. In other words, *varna* represented the class division of early-Vedic society. However, afterwards a relation of *correspondence* developed between them. **Why did it happen?** The reason was the peculiar kind of ideological legitimation of the class hierarchy by the ideologues of the ruling class in the Vedic period. The role of these ideologues was played by the *brahmanas* who were also part of the ruling class combine of *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas*. This peculiar kind of legitimation can be characterized as **religious-ritualistic ossification of the labour division and class division prevailing in the later Vedic period**. As we have seen, the principal characteristics of caste system, i.e., caste endogamy and hereditary labour division were not to be seen in the *varna* system of the early-Vedic period. These traits developed only with surplus production, class and state formation and consolidation of patriarchy, as Suvira Jaisawal has rightly pointed out.

Now, every ruling class in the history of world has constructed an ideological justification for the class division and hierarchy as well as labour division. However, in almost every known case, this ideological justification has taken a form that was temporally and spatially temporary and more dynamic; it was not fossilized or

ossified in the religious codes as such. In the plains of Ganges, we witness a different and peculiar kind of ideological justification constructed for sustaining the class and *varna*/caste hierarchy by the ruling class in the later-Vedic period. The social class division and labour division was religiously and ritualistically ossified. The ideological device of this ritualistic ossification was Brahmanism, which was based on the idea of purity and pollution. **Consequently, this led to the disintegration of the overlapping between *varna* and class because *varna*/caste divisions assumed a religious, ritualistic and divine aura through religious codification and ritualistic ossification and became *relatively* less dynamic than the class relations.** This ideological legitimation of class relations was bound to develop a higher relative autonomy from the real dynamic class relations in the course of time. This particularity led to a gap between the ossified form of previous class division of a bygone era and the new emerging class relations. **The relation of overlapping was transformed into a relation of correspondence.** This obviously does not mean that caste became completely independent and autonomous of class relations. The relationship of correspondence is evident from the fact that whenever there were radical changes in the production relations and class structure of society, tremors in the old ritualistic hierarchy could be felt finally leading to disintegration, realignment, readjustment and restructuring of castes and their hierarchy, as we saw during our discussion of the history of origin of *varna*/caste system in the preceding paragraphs. All these changes in the ritualistic hierarchy were brought about by the same Brahmanical ideology based on purity/pollution. It can be said that the one relatively consistent feature of caste system is the Brahmanical ideology showing a strong element of continuity, though the social and economic variables have kept changing through ages.

In my opinion, it is essential to understand this relation between caste and class, that I have called **Correspondence**, if we hope to understand the spatial and temporal changes in the caste system. For example, we can consider changes in *brahmana* and *kshatriya varna*. According to *Brahmin Samhitas*, *brahmanas* are allowed to

accept gift of things only. However, with the emergence of feudal relations *brahmanas* began to receive land grants and emerged as landlord class. Those *brahmanas* who continued to depend on gift of things for their priestly services descended in the caste hierarchy. Similarly, the period of 16 tribal republics in North India and Eastern India saw the emergence of *brahmana* rulers. Earlier, it was considered appropriate only for *kshatriyas* and lowly for *brahmanas*. We also witness changes in the structure and status of *kshatriyas* with changing socio-economic relations, for example emergence of many new castes within the fold of *kshatriya varna*. These castes had diverse origins. For instance, research has shown that the caste of *rajputs* was formed by a complex fusion of Indianized foreign elements who got mixed with other tribes conquered by them and with people coming from other *varnas*. Later, matrimonial alliances with *kshatriyas* and assumption of higher ritualistic status due to enhanced political and socio-economic power led to their assimilation as a caste within the *kshatriya varna*.

These are examples of a few temporal changes in the structure of *varna*/caste system due to tectonic shifts in the class structure of society. Similarly, we come across major spatial changes in the caste system. For instance, if we look at the South Indian caste system (though, there are notable internal variations within the caste system of South India), we find that the two intermediate *varnas*, i.e., *kshatriyas* and *vaishyas* did not exist there. The peasant communities themselves performed the functions of the warrior class. Regional states ruled by peasant rulers emerged when with increasing surplus production, the process of state formation reached a certain level. This ruling class, their kings came from the peasant communities itself. They mostly imported *brahmanas* for the legitimation of their rule and the construction of a higher ritualistic status for them. These *brahmanas* got mixed up with the local priestly elements and formed the *brahmana* castes in South India. These *brahmanas* played the role of construction of the legitimating ideology here also. The peasant kings were designated as *shudra* kings by them, but here they made a distinction between *asat shudra*

and *sat shudra*; the latter were described as the 'protectors of Brahmanas' and equivalent of *kshatriyas*. For instance, *Vellalas* were called the protectors of Brahmanas. The poorest agricultural people were included into the *varna*/caste system as *asat shudra* or untouchables. **Why were the peasant castes of South India included into the *shudra varna*?** Because when the caste system reached South India, *shudras* had already become the main agricultural *varna* and *vaishyas* had become the principal trading *varna*. In Eastern India also we do not find the two intermediate *varnas*. For instance, in Bengal. We cannot go in detail of these spatial variations, but this much is clear that **these spatial variations were due to the regional variations in the modes of production and production relations.** The origin and evolution of *varna*/caste system cannot be understood in a rigorous fashion without understanding the Correspondence between caste and class in which the class relations play the determining role *in the last analysis*. Needless to say, class does not and cannot play the determining role in every instance. We will come to this point later in detail. First we need to look at the origins of untouchability.

The emergence of untouchability is closely linked with the emergence of feudal production relations. In the earliest Brahminical codes, a distinction was made between *hina* and *ahina shudra*. For instance, in the earliest sources *chandalas* were mentioned as a *shudra* caste but they were *hina shudra* caste rather than an untouchable caste. On the one hand untouchability came into existence among those *hina shudras* who were at the lowest rung of the *shudra varna* while on the other hand when some forms of manual labour were declared by *brahmanas* as lowly, polluting and repulsive to institutionalize the slavery of those assimilated tribes who used to perform these so-called menial tasks, these castes were described as outcastes and untouchables. This process also has a history. Some castes were included into untouchables later. For example, the caste of tanners and cobblers (*chamakar* or *chamars*) was never described as doing lowly forms of labour in the Vedic sources. On the contrary, it was customary to carry all the

material for the Vedic rituals in bags of leather. It was only during the development of feudal mode of production that these castes were described as untouchables.

Vivekanand Jha has clearly shown that the rise of untouchability was closely linked with the advent of feudalism. The feudal ruling class, in order to make the exploitation and oppression of the exploited and oppressed castes structural, gave this exploitation and oppression the extreme form of untouchability. Jha shows that it was not the notion of purity and pollution which made certain tasks so inferior that people performing these tasks were declared as untouchables; rather the exploitation of some classes became so naked and barbaric, that the concept of pollution was attached to their occupation and the people in these occupations were declared as untouchables. This can be understood because later it happened in the case of *brahmanas* living on alms also. For example, **Declan Quigley** in his book 'The Interpretation of Caste' has mentioned the case of untouchable *brahmanas* which shows that the status of entire *brahmana* population too was not fixed and impervious to change. **Once again, the Brahmanical ideology performed its function and readjusted the forms of ritualistic ossification and caste hierarchy when new forms of class relations and new modes of surplus extraction emerged.** The development of untouchability can be traced from the 500 BC in embryonic forms and it continued to 1200 AD with the proliferation of untouchable castes.

We cannot go into detail about the impact of rise of monotheistic sects like Buddhism and Jainism on caste system; however, this much must be said that while Buddhism and other monotheistic sects challenged the hegemony of *brahmanas* on the level of ideology and critiqued the Brahminical ideology, it failed to pose any serious challenge to the social reality of *varna*/caste system. They caused some tremors in the caste system but also strengthened it in some ways as **Irfan Habib** and others have shown. Habib argues that Buddhism rejected the religious legitimation of the caste system but also accepted the caste system as a reality of the society. For

example, certain prejudices existed in these religions against slaves, debt-ridden farmers, and also against women. These were not allowed to take *pravrajya*. Similarly, Buddhism's insistence on the principle of *karma* and non-violence also proved to be an anathema for the untouchable population because the occupations which were declared as lowly while laying stress on these values were generally the occupations of untouchable castes. Moreover, with becoming a state religion Buddhism declined. Besides, with the emergence of *Vaishnava* and *Shaiva* sects in Hinduism, Buddhism became irrelevant due the fact that these sects showed even more enthusiasm in prohibiting cow-slaughter. Finally, Buddhism was also suppressed violently by the rise of Brahmanical reaction. However, the Brahmanical reaction succeeded in doing this because Buddhism was not in congruence with the changing socio-economic relations whereas being a remarkably flexible and hegemonic reactionary religion, Hinduism got into step with the new scenario. **Max Weber** for once was more-or-less correct when he remarked that Hinduism is actually not a religion at all in the classical sense of the term because, in general, religion thrives on *dogma*, whereas *doxa* prevails in Hinduism. Ambedkar was correct when he said that the core value of Hinduism is the caste system. This caste system enhances the flexibility of Hinduism. As we can see, Buddhism or other monotheistic sects while posing a challenge to the hegemony of Brahmanism at the level of ideology, accepted the social reality of caste and in a different way accepted the class exploitation also.

The ideology of caste has given a useful instrument to the ruling classes through all ages. Even the Islamic rulers did not interfere too much with the caste system. Except *Al Beruni*, no Muslim observer utters anything critical about caste system; Hinduism is criticized only on the basis of idol worship and polytheism, not for its caste system. Even the Muslim rulers found in caste a useful instrument to keep the toiling agricultural population in structural subjugation. As Irfan Habib has shown, these Muslim rulers viewed caste system with a certain kind of jealousy. Since the *Quran* makes distinction only between slave and free man, the

Muslim rulers could not co-opt caste in their own way. Still, caste system in practice made successful inroads into the Islamic society. The people from the untouchable and lower castes who converted to Islam came to be known as *kamins*, which means inferior and lowly. This shows the remarkable hegemonic character of caste system and Brahmanical ideology. In nutshell, even during the entire medieval period, the Muslim rulers did not make any attempt to tamper with the caste system as it provided them an instrument to keep the huge agricultural population under structural subjugation. Brahmanism is such a flexible ideology which in all ages and especially in the pre-capitalist societies provides the ruling classes with an instrument to consolidate their rule. It gives religious legitimation to the naked and barbaric exploitation by the ruling classes and assumes the form of ritualistic ossification. Definitely, due to this ideology, there persists a difference between class and caste. However, a profound correspondence remains between caste and class and any major change in the mode of production and production relations is clearly reflected in the readjustments of the caste hierarchy and structure. The caste ideology remains autonomous from the system of class in a certain sense and this relative autonomy has increased with the decline of economic and political registers of caste with the rise of capitalist mode of production in India after Independence. However, this increased relative autonomy has enhanced the hegemonic character of Brahmanical ideology. We will come to this a little later.

The impact of British rule on caste system has remained an issue of controversy. Some like Ambedkar and also some other anti-caste reformers have stressed the mainly positive impact of British rule on dalits and so-called low castes, emphasizing the role of western education and military service. However, in my opinion, if we view the role of British rule on the caste system in totality, it did much more to strengthen the caste system and make the status of dalits even more vulnerable politically and economically, principally in two ways.

First, the land settlements introduced by the British colonial state. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 and later the Ryotwari and Mahalwari Settlements were actually against the landless dalits. The Permanent Settlement introduced private property in land and made the *zamindars* the owner of the land legally-juridically, who almost always belonged to higher castes; the Mahalwari Settlement made the village community the owner of the land and gave it the right to allocate land rotationally among villagers. Now, almost every village assembly was headed by a headman belonging to higher castes. This was reflected in the injustice committed against the dalit landless. Ryotwari Settlement in comparison was the most progressive; however, even Ryotwari did not give land to the dalits but to the upward mobile middle peasant castes that later came to be known as the Other Backward Classes in administrative and legal terminology. **The British land settlements made the landlessness of dalit labourers even more chronic and perennial.** The miniscule possibility of any kind of upward social mobility for dalits was firmly blocked by the British state. **It was not without reason that the high caste landlords and rulers of the princely states throughout remained the most important ally and social prop of the British colonial state. It is not without reason that the most Brahmanical and casteist forces like Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS never fought against the British, rather acted as rats against the revolutionaries and remained the most faithful ally of the British till the end.**

The **second factor** introduced by the British colonial state which led to consolidation of caste system and its politico-juridical formalization was **the rise of the ethnographic state.** The modern bourgeois fetish of the British state to count, enumerate and categorize the bodies to construct a suitable political subject led to myriad forms of surveys, studies and researches of Indian social reality and its classification and categorization according to the governmental principle of the colonial state. From the establishment of the **Oriental Society of Bengal** in 1784 to the beginning of caste-based Census in 1881, the British constantly attempted to create a body of colonial

knowledge about India and in the process constructed and re-invented 'the Orient'. A major part of this endeavor was translation of religious texts of Hinduism and Islam with the help of *brahmanas* and Muslim clerics. Another major part was the beginning of the Census which for the first time defined, delineated and constructed the juridical entity of 'scheduled castes' which were much more concrete and rigid and impervious to change. These two factors undoubtedly contributed to the consolidation and rigidification of caste system.

It is true that the English also introduced Western education for dalits in some provinces; at the same time, Christian missionaries did a lot of educational work among dalits and other oppressed communities in certain areas. However, given the size and extent of the political entity of colonial India, it was miniscule. **Secondly, the British introduced these reforms not for the upliftment of dalits, as Anand Teltumbde has rightly pointed out;** it was a by-product of the colonial creation of a faithful and loyal intelligentsia to man a part of the bureaucratic apparatus of the colonial state. The British recruited dalits to army; however, after the protest from the higher castes and comparatively highly placed upper caste Hindus within the colonial army, the recruitment of dalits was first restricted to non-combatant positions and then stopped in 1890-91. It was resumed briefly during the First and Second World Wars; however, the bias and partisanship of the British state was evident.

Another impact of the British rule was to introduce a few industries, a little bit of urbanization and railways. These steps which signified a limited and regulated capitalist development under a colonial regime, no doubt, weakened some registers of caste system to a certain extent. Emergence of an urban working class also contributed to this process. Marx had anticipated this development and Ambedkar in his own ways later argued the same. However, if we judge the impact of the British rule on the caste system in totality, there is no doubt, on the whole, it consolidated the rule of the upper castes, co-opted *brahmanas* and Brahmanical ideology for their own colonial interests, and made the position of dalits and other lower castes even more vulnerable, not to speak of the historical injustice

committed against the tribals by reconstructing a number of them as juridically criminal entities. This criminality was not removed even by the Constitution of India immediately.

During the colonial period also, there were some shifts and readjustments within the structure and hierarchy of caste system which was temporally and spatially differential due to changes in the class structure of Indian subcontinent under the colonial rule. Some castes who played the role of scribes in North and Eastern India rose up the ladder of caste hierarchy. A part of *brahmana* population was urbanized and got into the service of colonial state. The feudal domination of *brahmana* and *kshatriya* landlord class was strengthened even more due to the land settlements and patronization of the colonial state. Due to limited urban and industrial development and railways and also emergence of commercial agriculture in certain pockets certain economic, social and political registers of caste were weakened to a certain extent. Commensal prejudices were also weakened especially in urban and industrial society.

This process continued after Independence when the Indian bourgeoisie adopted a particular path of development of capitalism in India. The Indian bourgeoisie adopted a special Indian edition of Prussian path of land reforms, which allowed the major part of the feudal landlord class to transform itself into capitalist kulaks and farmers. It also facilitated the rise of a class of rich tenant farmers who pursued capitalist agriculture, produced cash crops for the market, exploited wage labour and mechanized their agriculture in a long process, which was accelerated especially after the Green Revolution. **This path kept the dalit landless labourers in perennial landlessness and poverty because there were no radical redistributive land reforms after the Independence.** A part of dalit population migrated to towns and engaged in urban and industrial jobs in the informal sector. This is still the worst paid part of urban and industrial working class. Those who stayed in villages now form the worst paid part of rural proletariat. It is not without reason that still **47 percent** of agricultural landless labourers are dalits. This

share, no doubt, has decreased relatively with capitalist development of agriculture, differentiation of peasantry and depeasantization of a large section of middle peasant castes. However, still they form the largest chunk of the landless labourer population. Similarly, out of total dalit population around 75 to 80 percent are landless. Out of 60 to 70 million child labourers, almost 40 percent come from dalit families. Unemployment rate among dalits is at least double of the unemployment rate among non-dalit population. The same can be said about other human development indices which clearly show the **partial overlapping between caste groups and class groups**. *In toto*, it can easily be said that majority of dalits still belong to the class of urban and rural working class. According to some non-governmental estimates, around 85 to 90 percent dalit population belongs to rural and urban proletariat and semi-proletariat (whose principal means of livelihood is now wage labour). **However, among the total working class population of India, the share of dalits is less than 30-35 percent.** Another large portion of it comes from the OBCs, mostly middle castes. A small portion of these OBCs has also emerged as the rich farmers and peasants and of late most of the perpetrators of anti-dalit atrocities have come from these well-to-do rich farmers.

Recent decades, especially after the inauguration of neoliberal policies and increased differentiation of peasantry, have witnessed a spurt in the anti-dalit crimes. Almost in 95 percent cases the victims belong to the rural or urban poor and working class dalit families. We can clearly see **the class character of the anti-dalit atrocities**. **Here it would be useful to note that economic exploitation and social injustice have rarely existed in pure archetypal isolation. Even Marx has shown in 'Capital' that varied forms of social oppression and economic exploitation are almost always intertwined and articulated, when he talks about Irish workers, Black workers, etc.** It can safely be said that they have almost always existed in an articulated and intertwined fashion, one facilitating and giving impetus to the other. **The archetypal categories of economic exploitation and social oppression are**

socio-economic, political and philosophical abstractions which play the role of analytical instruments. However, exploitation and oppression are seldom found in their archetypal forms in concrete social phenomena. They are almost always mediated, articulated and intertwined. In other words, if we apply this general social scientific rule to the reality of caste and class in India, it can be said that all dalits face social discrimination but target of the most brutal and barbaric forms of social oppression are poor and working class dalits; similarly, all workers face economic exploitation, however, *the excess of vulnerability of dalit workers makes them victim of super-exploitation*. It is true that even the small section of upper and upper middle class of dalits face caste-based humiliation and discrimination; however, those who have become beneficiaries of state, seldom fight against it. This task too lies with a class-based anti-caste movement. We will dwell on this theme later.

Due to capitalist development, untouchability and commensal prejudices as well as the rigid hereditary labour division have definitely weakened, if not finished. However, probably the most important characteristic feature of caste system since its consolidation has not become weakened, i.e., caste endogamy. Why? **Because this feature is not in contradiction with capitalism.** It makes private property even more sacred than the classical political economists would have desired. It stands in no contradiction to the fundamental logic of capitalist accumulation. Here too, we can see the **principle of Correspondence** at work. This also makes clear that within the ambit of capitalist property relations and division of labour, we cannot hope for the annihilation of caste by liberal reforms. As Gramsci had made clear the bourgeoisie is different from other ruling classes of the past in one important sense. Its rule is based on the concept of hegemony, that is, rule by consent. All of us know that this consent is manufactured by the ruling class through various means like media, education system and other forms of ideological state apparatus. **Consequently, the formal ruling ideology of capitalist ruling**

class cannot be *openly* religious in character. The ideology of caste too cannot be the *formal* ruling ideology of the capitalist state because the principle of legitimation of its rule cannot be other-worldly. However, the question of caste system is not linked with the state only. Over the centuries the casteist mentality and ideology, with the various changes it has undergone, has been made to permeate every pore of the Indian social psyche. The core of this ideology is the hierarchy determined on the basis of purity/pollution, and not a particular caste hierarchy that prevailed during a particular historical era. This casteist ideology functions in subtle forms and does not always require open invocation by the ruling classes. **No capitalist ruling class can draw its legitimation from caste ideology but can use and sustain the caste ideology in two ways as the present capitalist ruling class is doing.** On the one hand, it is used to keep sections of the exploited working masses divided on casteist lines and along with it as an instrument to construct hegemony in its favour. Secondly, different factions of the ruling class in their mutual rivalry for share in the resources (the booty!) and vote bank politics, use caste equations, albeit, rulers of every caste without fail, stand united against the people. **Thus caste ideology despite being formally and juridically separated from the state apparatus, plays its historical role for the ruling class even under capitalism. In fact, due to the correspondence between caste and class becoming more complicated, the hegemonic use of caste ideology by the capitalist ruling class has become even more effective.**

We must understand that it is essential for caste ideology to remain relatively autonomous if it has to remain really effective. If the caste ideology were to reflect the class division directly, then it would lose all its divinity and aura. We should not forget that caste ideology is a religious ideology which obtains its authority from religion, through occupational and matrimonial restrictions and on the basis of the idea of purity/pollution, to justify its hierarchy. If we comprehend this, it becomes easier to realise that caste can never fully overlap with class, except the point of origin of *varna*.

They can have a relation of correspondence only. Caste ideology from the time of its inception to this day has been providing an enormously powerful instrument to the ruling classes in different forms and fundamentally different ways. On the one hand it keeps the poor toiling masses under structural subordination and on the other it keeps them divided among themselves into so many castes. **It would be Quixotic to expect annihilation of caste within the ambit of capitalism through the benevolence or “affirmative” action of the bourgeois state.** *Varna*/caste system came into existence with class, state and patriarchy and it can be annihilated only with the withering away of class, state and patriarchy. Only a struggle for classless society can also be a struggle for a casteless society. It needs to be added here that even after Socialist Revolution and establishment of a workers’ state, caste will not wither away automatically; perpetual revolution in the sphere of superstructure and continuous revolutionization of production relations will be necessary for that. The caste (as well as class) divisions will wither away in the same proportion that the three great interpersonal disparities, i.e., the gap between mental and manual labour, the gap between industry and agriculture, the gap between town and country, will diminish; and we probably should add a ‘fourth interpersonal disparity’, namely, the gender disparity to this. Patriarchy has a central role to play in the perpetuation of the caste system. It is essential to fight against patriarchy if we hope to fight effectively against caste. Needless to say, that these struggles will have to be continued on a higher level even after Socialist Revolution through perpetual revolution. Nevertheless, such a revolutionary transformation of the political superstructure and economic base is essential for annihilation of caste; it would be a historical step forward in the anti-caste struggle.

However, from this it cannot be concluded that with revolutionary transformation of capitalist production relations and establishment of socialism, caste will be annihilated automatically as we mentioned earlier, or, the fight against caste can be suspended till such a revolutionary change. **On the contrary, it must be claimed that**

without a consistent and continuous revolutionary class-based anti-caste movement from today itself, revolutionary organization and mobilization of the working masses necessary for such a revolutionary change is not possible. It must be reiterated that we need to build a non-identitarian anti-caste movement which has the might to fight the Brahmanical forces on the streets as well. This cannot be achieved on the basis of identity-based movements. We will dwell on this notion later.

First, let me embark upon a discussion of anti-caste movements of past and especially the contributions and limitations of the political legacy of Dr. Ambedkar.

Anti-Caste Movements before and during the time of B.R. Ambedkar

There is a long history of anti-caste movements from ancient period to present day. It would primarily be impossible and secondarily be unnecessary to present a comprehensive account of all those struggles. We would content ourselves with a brief discussion of anti-caste movements of a couple major figures before Ambedkar: **Jyotiba Phule** and **Ayyankali** and in very short, **Periyar**. A longer discussion on Periyar too would have been useful but due to limitation of time I intend to focus on Phule and Ayyankali.

Let me make it clear at the outset that I am not discussing the anti-caste movement of Ayyankali because I am speaking in Kerala. I have talked about him in my presentations in other parts of India as well for the simple reason that present class-based anti-caste movements have a lot to learn from Ayyankali. Ayyankali was an anti-caste warrior who fought against Brahmanism not only in social arena but also in economic and political arena. Secondly, he was one of the few anti-caste figures who were radical not only in their social program but also in their political and economic activism. **He was not a reformist, though he might not have been a conscious materialist revolutionary. His movement was a radical movement which transcended the limits of the legality of**

the colonial state. It was not bothered by the politico-legal ambits of the system and trespassed it time and again. His movement for the right of Pulayars to walk on public roads led to violent clashes with the Brahmanical forces. The *Cheliyar Riots* and the subsequent violent assertion of Pulayars has rightly been termed as the first armed rebellion of dalits by Anand Teltumbde. Ultimately, this movement succeeded in winning the right to walk along public roads for dalits in 1900 and to admit their children into public schools in 1907.

It is notable that Ayyankali was also the trailblazer of workers' movement in Kerala. He organized an Association for the Protection of the Poor (*Sadhu Jana Parpalana Sangham*) and fought for the rights of dalits and workers. When his attempt to admit a dalit girl in a school met with violent resistance from upper caste elites, he organized the first strike of agricultural workers who stopped work in lands owned by upper caste landlords. This movement clearly assumed an anti-feudal character also. The strike continued till Ayyankali won the complete removal of restrictions on education for dalits. **Two elements were notable in the movement of Ayyankali: first, the clear anti-establishment character of his movement and his reliance on the power and agency of the people rather than just persuading the State through legal and social advocacy.** It was clearly a radical progressive mass movement and the revolutionary anti-caste movements of present have a lot to learn from Ayyankali. In my opinion, one of the leading symbols of present revolutionary anti-caste movements should be Ayyankali, because he was not a conformist or statolator. We must think why Ayyankali was not established as a symbol of dalit revolt and anti-caste movement by the many governments of India? The reason is simple: the system would not accept any figure as such a symbol who was anti-state and anti-establishment, who was not a reformist but a radical.

Jyotiba Phule was the other anti-caste warrior from whom present anti-caste movements can learn a lot. Phule belonged to the *mali* caste and was educated in a Christian missionary school. He was

imbued with the ideas of rationality and modernity. In his early works, especially *Ghulamgiri*, he was pretty much convinced about the liberating role of Western modernity introduced by the British rule. However, towards the end of his life he was slowly becoming critical about the colonial rule. For example, if we read his testimony to the Hunters Commission in 1879, he wonders why the British colonial state is patronizing the Brahmanas rather than the dalits and backward classes. Again, in his work the *Cultivator's Whipcord* of 1881, he becomes increasingly critical of colonial state where he goes on to the extent of saying that the blood of colonial officers and a Brahmin is same. In the last three chapters, Phule severely criticizes the British state's policy towards the peasants. Due to this very reason, his disciple Lokhande did not publish these last three chapters of the book in an edition edited by him which annoyed Phule a lot. His hopes with the liberating role of colonial rule were not completely dashed at least till the mid 1880s. However, his trajectory can be comprehended. His approach was becoming more and more critical of the British rule because the role that he had expected the British to play for the upliftment of dalits was actually not being played by the British colonial state, which continued to patronize and ally with the Brahmanical orthodoxy and landlordism. I am yet to read Phule's work after 1881 which are not available in English or Hindi. If the same trajectory was followed, then the last works of Phule must show much more critical stance towards the British colonial state. It is noteworthy that while he appreciated Western modernity and its vehicle in India, i.e., English education, Phule was also able to see the connection between the policies of the colonial state and Brahmanism. Moreover, Phule apart from persuading the colonial state for reforms for dalits and women, also believed in organizing them. The work done by Jyotiba Phule and Savitri Bai Phule was exemplary. **In my opinion, these two characteristic features of thought of Phule are essential to assess his contribution.**

Periyar was another major anti-caste warrior of modern India. Periyar's philosophical and political thought can be termed as

militant materialism. He was a consistent atheist. In analyzing the caste system also, he puts Hindu religion into the dock and makes it clear that militant materialism and atheism are essential to do away with caste system. Without a radical rationalist outlook it is not possible to do away with caste. Though this argument has a grain of truth, the militant but mechanical materialism of Periyar prevented him from seeing the role of the British colonial state in consolidation of the caste system. Periyar appreciated Soviet Union precisely because of its truly secular state which actively propagated the militant materialist and rationalist ideas. **However, it must be noted that caste cannot simply be reduced to religion, though it emerges through religious-ritualistic ossification.** It is very likely to come across an atheist who is a casteist! So, annihilation of caste is not simply an issue of propagation of rationalism and materialism. Thinking so would be mechanical materialism, not dialectical and historical materialism. However, despite these limitations, Periyar can be called the most consistent radical rationalist among the main anti-caste figures of the 20th century.

The Philosophy and Politics of Ambedkar

We must start this discussion with the contributions of Ambedkar. As far as the contributions of Ambedkar are concerned, we can mainly talk about two contributions. First, Ambedkar contributed immensely in creating a sense of dignity and self-respect among the dalit population. No doubt, in this, Periyar, Phule, Ayyankali as well as the Communists also had made vital contributions. However, the particularity with which Ambedkar raised the question of the human dignity, civil and democratic rights of dalits and the respect that he commanded as a highly educated and knowledgeable figure which also helped him in emphasizing the question with such effectivity, was unique.

The second contribution of Ambedkar was that he established the question of caste on the agenda of the national politics of that period in an unprecedented way. One can agree or disagree with the different solutions that he proposed from his testimony to the

Southborough Committee to his proposals to the Cripps Mission. However, it is much more certain that the emphasis and particularity with which Ambedkar raised this issue throughout his political life was something special. It is true that the communists also had made a special mention of the problem of caste on their party forums in the late-1920s. However, theoretically communists could not understand the problem of caste in its historicity and contemporaneity. It would be useful here to make a brief detour and discuss the failure of communists in understanding the problem of caste in its historicity and contemporaneity.

The Communist Party of India at least till the surrender of Telangana, continued to fight for the rights of dalit landless labour in the most radical and revolutionary fashion. The struggle for land and against feudalism naturally and spontaneously assumed an anti-caste agenda because the overwhelming majority of landless labour was dalit. In the experiment of Kisan Mahasabhas as well as the peasant revolts of *Punapra Vylar*, *Telangana* and *Tebhaga*, communists organized dalit labourers and fought against upper caste landlords. Empirically, they raised the issue of caste-based discrimination. However, they failed to study and understand the caste question historically. Consequently, they failed to provide an effective and special political and social program for annihilation of caste and fight against Brahmanical ideology. **However, this failure cannot be understood in isolation.** The communist movement of India was intellectually weak from the very beginning. We are talking about a party which was formed in 1925 and continued to function without a central committee till 1933. In 1933, a provisional central committee was formed but the first general secretary of party was elected only in 1936. And all these things were done due to the friendly criticism from some fraternal parties like the parties of Britain, Germany, China and Russia. Till 1951, the party had no program of revolution based on the concrete study of production relations prevalent in India. When in 1951 the party adopted a program, it was not on the basis of a concrete and original study of Indian conditions, but on the basis of dialog between a delegation of CPI and a delegation of

Bolshevik Party comprising of Molotov and Stalin. The Soviet delegation gave some suggestions and made some tentative remarks regarding the Indian condition on the basis of which CPI adopted a program of People's Democratic Revolution in 1951. However, by that time, the party had become a parliamentary Left party. So the program of revolution was good only for cold storage. For almost 25 years from 1925 to 1950, the communists fought for the rights of landless dalits and made exemplary sacrifices. Those who ask what have the communists done for dalits, need to study history objectively.

However, the communists fought against caste only in an empirical fashion rather than on the basis of a scientific and positive understanding of caste system and its history. But this was not due to casteist bias of the party. It is only from the 1950s that we witness conscious opportunism of communist leaders on the question of caste and their surrender against Brahmanical ideology and value system in their personal lives also. This too is an identitarian question that how many dalit leaders were there in the central committee of the party before 1951? Though one can name a number of dalit leaders at state and district levels in the Communist party like R.B. More before 1951, and as far as the Naxal movement is concerned, it produced a number of dalit leaders, but that is not the point. Similarly, in the same vein, one can ask, 'how many working class dalits were there in the leadership of identity based dalit organizations?' Or one can also ask, 'why 12 out of 14 candidates of the ILP of Ambedkar were Mahars?' **In my opinion, all these questions are invalid and miss the fundamental point.** The failure of the Communist movement in India was much broader. Yes, they could not provide a socio-economic and political program for the annihilation of caste. But did they have any program of Indian revolution? Did they have a clear line on the question of gender, nationality, environment and language? No. They took positions on all these questions empirically and in a contingent fashion, without a proper study and understanding of the question. In my opinion, the critique of communist movement should be made in totality and only

in that context we can understand the failure of the movement in understanding the question of caste. Otherwise, one can rush to a conclusion that would be an injustice to the communist movement. Let us now return to our discussion on the political legacy of Ambedkar.

Ambedkar arrived on the political scene of India in 1919. However, for the sake of consistency, we must start analysis of the political thought of Ambedkar from his paper 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development' till his death in 1956. First, a few words on *how not to critically analyse* the political thought of Ambedkar. A number of scholars and political thinkers have criticized Ambedkar for the inconsistency in his political theory and practice. However, to these critics Ambedkar had replied in his lifetime itself when he said, 'consistency is virtue of an ass.' Secondly, I firmly believe that social scientists should not talk about the question of intent of any political party, person or movement. What matters for a social scientist is the philosophical outlook, politics and class character of any political party, person or movement. In the case of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar too, the analysis must start from the philosophical world outlook of Ambedkar and thereafter we can embark upon a critical assessment of the political experiments of Ambedkar. **It is my proposition that if we understand the philosophical worldview of Ambedkar and see where his theories are coming from, it is easier to make sense of his political experiments and strategies; if we approach the problem from this standpoint, we can see that there is a consistency in Ambedkar which can be called the 'consistent inconsistency of pragmatism.'**

A disciple of Ambedkar, **K.N. Kadam** has rightly said that one cannot understand Ambedkar without understanding **Deweyan Pragmatism**. Ambedkar himself had once said that he owed his entire intellectual life to **John Dewey**. His second wife Savita Ambedkar told a scholar extremely sympathetic to Ambedkar, Eleanor Zelliot, that Ambedkar after thirty years of sitting in the class of John Dewey was happy to imitate the classroom mannerisms of John Dewey. There is no doubt whatsoever about the immensely

strong impact of John Dewey on Ambedkar. Dewey was one of Ambedkar's teachers in Columbia University along with Seligman, Shotwell and others in the 1910s that was the heyday of philosophy and politics of pragmatism. Dewey was the leading pragmatist philosopher and pedagogue. Before discussing the particular brand of Dewey's pragmatism, it would be beneficial to spend a few words on the historical development of the pragmatist philosophy so that we can contextualize Ambedkar's political thought in a proper fashion.

Historical Development of Pragmatist Philosophy: A Brief Note

Pragmatist philosophy originated in the US in 1860s and its foundations continued to develop till the Second World War. Even after that many pragmatist philosophers or philosophers influenced by pragmatism emerged, like **Richard Rorty** and **John Rawls**, however, they built upon the same foundations. Here it is essential to understand that the US was established as a capitalist country. The revolution of 1776 was led by people who were influenced by the ideals of Tom Paine and anti-feudal and anthropocentric, secular philosophy of the Enlightenment. The Declaration of Independence and Declaration of Rights of Man, the two founding documents of the American Revolution reflect these ideals and philosophies. These very ideas had propelled the French Revolution of 1789. However, unlike France, the US did not have a long history of pre-capitalist and feudal mode of production. It was a capitalist nation from the very beginning. The Weberian 'spirit of entrepreneurship' could be found in its archetypal and pure form in America. Moreover, America was also an imperialist country from the very beginning and as soon as it came into existence it expanded its imperialist tentacles to Mexico and Latin American countries like Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti and later many others. America is a huge country and American capitalism had immense potentiality of inward and outward expansion. The westward expansion of capitalism within America continued well into the 19th century. The possibilities of capitalist

expansion and accumulation were tremendous and were not going to be saturated for a long period to come.

This factor allowed the American bourgeoisie to prevent the contradiction between labour and capital from becoming too sharp for a long time. America was propagated as 'the land of opportunity' and 'the land of freedom' where every person was free for 'pursuit of happiness.' and 'to get rich.' Feudal idleness was subject of scorn, disdain and ridicule. The dominant philosophy of the American social life from the late-18th to mid-19th century was determined from the philosophy of Declaration of the Rights of Man and Declaration of Independence guaranteeing the unhindered freedom of 'pursuit of happiness' and individualism. Resources and opportunities were abundant due to the special history of America because the potential of geographical and political expansion was immense, preventing the class contradictions from sharpening. Consequently, even the working class was imbued with the ideas of bourgeois individualism, entrepreneurship and 'pursuit of happiness'. This ideology was the dominant social philosophy of American life. It was well-reflected in Benjamin Franklin's 'Poor Richard's Almanac' which ridiculed feudal idleness and parasitism and extolled the spirit of industriousness, entrepreneurship and bourgeois individualism.

During the Civil War, this same ideology came in the garb of Transcendentalism of Emerson who believed that the individual should be free from the baggage of past and should not follow any theory, but should do whatever appears to be practical immediately. The American sayings and idioms like 'what's it good for', 'whatever works' and 'everyone for himself' reflect the same system of values. We cannot go into detail of transcendentalism here. The process of westward expansion of American capitalism started hitting the fan by 1860s and 1870s when American capitalism was entering into its phase of monopolization.

The process of monopolization entailed the proletarianization and ruination of the class of petty- bourgeoisie, small owners and middle classes. In reaction to this process of monopolization 1880s

witnessed the rise of a petty-bourgeois, middle class movement. This movement found its political manifestation in the Populist Party (also known as the People's Party) guided by the ideas of the first Pragmatist philosophers like **Charles Saunders Peirce** and **William James**. These philosophers represented a nostalgia for the free competition phase of American capitalism when America was still "the land of freedom and opportunity" for everyone. The populist movement did not represent the aspirations of American working class and the poor black population, but the fears of a petty-bourgeoisie faced with the threat of proletarianization. Since the petty bourgeois ideology plagued the working class also, a section of American working class joined the Populist Party. The guiding light of the first pragmatist philosophers were the same 'Rights of Man' and 'Declaration of Independence' and Emerson's Kantian transcendentalism. These philosophers were true theoreticians of the social philosophy of American society. The Populist Party declined towards the end of the 19th century, which is the destiny of any petty-bourgeois movement or party: a political bifurcation. The petty bourgeois elements of Populists joined the Democratic Party whereas the working class elements later joined the Communist Party of USA. However, pragmatism continued to be the reigning social and political philosophy of the US.

The third major Pragmatist philosopher was **John Dewey**. Dewey developed pragmatist philosophy into new dimensions. His edition of the pragmatist philosophy has been given a number of epithets like Instrumentalism, Progressive Experimentalism, Operationalism, etc. It was this Deweyan pragmatism that had a defining impact on the philosophical and political views of Ambedkar. What are the basic tenets of Deweyan pragmatism?

Characteristic Features of Deweyan Pragmatism

The first assertion of Deweyan pragmatism is that **there can be no general theory or principle of natural or social phenomena**. In other words, there can be no generalization of any sorts. Pragmatism has a natural antipathy to theory. The reason for this

animosity to generalization is that according to Deweyan pragmatism no causation of phenomena is possible. Therefore, what we can do is follow a “scientific” method of observing, recording and on the basis of these develop a tentative idea for immediate action. If this plan of action is validated practically, then one must hold on to it. Otherwise, again make an observation, on the basis of that observation develop a tentative idea leading to a plan of action and so on. As we can see, there is a method fetishism in Deweyan pragmatism coupled with natural antipathy to theory. According to Dewey, there is no need for critical evaluation of previous practice because *past does not create present*, as there is no causation. One can hear the echo of Emerson here. Only pragma, no dogma! No approach, only the “scientific” method of progressive experimentation! Dewey develops this first principle taking inspiration from positivism and empiricism of Hume, Kant and Comte. According to this, there is no gap between phenomena and essence. Dewey himself comments, “There is no history of materiality before human intelligence.” Again, “reality is a domain of ‘pure experience’.” Anyone familiar with the continental and English philosophy from 17th to 19th century can discern the unmistakable impact of Hume and Kant on these statements.

The **second central assertion** of Deweyan instrumentalism is that **any change or development in nature or society is always incremental and gradual**. This theme of Deweyan pragmatism was developed under the influence of Darwin’s evolutionism. As we might recall, Darwin had once remarked, “there are no leaps in nature.” According to Dewey, there are no leaps in the social or natural development and all change takes place incrementally and gradually. Consequently, there can be no revolutionary change in society; all change in the society must be incremental. As we can see, pragmatism is fundamentally opposed to the very idea of revolutionary change. If we translate the philosophy of Deweyan pragmatism into politics it naturally results in the liberal bourgeois reformist politics of the Fabians and later the Labour Party-type political formations. The impact of these brands of politics on the

political thought and practice of B.R. Ambedkar is clear and will be demonstrated later. Here this much shall be added that later research in biology showed that Darwin was wrong about gradualism of evolution and the process of evolution involves a series of gradual development till saturation within the old shell or form and then a rupture, or a leap.

The **third major assertion** of Deweyan Instrumentalism is that, as we mentioned earlier, no causation of natural or social phenomena is possible because past does not contribute to the creation of present. The present is created by the pragmatist endeavors of the individuals of the society. Since, there is no cause-effect relation between past and present, for a pragmatist, it is useless to review or sum-up the failures of past experiments. What one is required to do is start “scientific” observation anew, develop a tentative idea again and on the basis of that derive a plan of action and then plunge into action: progressive experimentation *ad infinitum*.

The **fourth important characteristic** of Deweyan pragmatism is implicit in his idea of Society. What is Society for Dewey? It is not constituted by dialectical relations between different social strata. To view society as divided into different strata based on the access to economic, social and political power, or in Marxist terminology, to view society divided into classes, it is essential to perform a generalization of social relations. However, due to his anathema to causation and generalization, Dewey refrains from seeing society as constituted by social relations, which in turn, are constituted by the logic of contradiction. **For Dewey, society is a ‘collection of disparate groups.’** These groups might include from a trade union, an association of industrialists to a club, a baseball team (!), or a political party. As we can see, Dewey uses the term ‘group’ not conceptually, but in a descriptive and generic fashion. For Dewey, there are no *real* contradictions in the society. All the contradictions exist on the plane of idea, on the plane of perception. So there is no *real* contradiction between capitalists and workers; these contradictions are perceived and can be resolved by the mediation of

the 'Great Mediator', 'the Most Rational Agent'. This brings us to the next important characteristic of Deweyan Pragmatism.

The **Fifth important argument** of Instrumentalism of Dewey is that **the State is the most rational actor in society. It is the 'Great Mediator'**. All changes take place in society on the basis of the action of the state. It is the most important institution of society. Dewey takes cue from the Classical bourgeois theories of the State, especially the 'Social Contract' theory of Rousseau and Locke and develops it with pragmatist slant. Since, the State is the most rational actor and the 'Great Mediator', all change in the society depend on the (affirmative?) action of the State. Dewey was instinctively against any idea of change from below, based on the collective initiative of the people, or collective agency of the people because it is bound to end up in violence and for Dewey "violence is a waste". Obviously, Dewey did not see the institution of the State itself as one which perpetuates violence against the people on an everyday basis and he was oblivious to the idea that this institution has a history as an instrument of force and violence. Even the bourgeois state based on the theory of Social Contract came into being as a result of a popular revolutionary process full of violence or at least use of force. However, this violence was justified only against feudalism! The basic liberal bourgeois prejudice of Dewey's theory of the State is clear. In a (bourgeois) democratic republic, the State is the most rational actor, the Great Mediator and the sovereign and there is no place for, even collective use of force against this institution. All change is contingent on the actions of the State. So, what one must do to inspire this Great Mediator to take progressive action? The intellectuals should influence the State to take affirmative action to resolve the 'perceived' contradiction for example between an industrialist and a trade union, or between one social group and the other. The role of intellectual was very important for Dewey as well as Ambedkar.

The **sixth and last important assertion of Deweyan pragmatism** was that there is a need of an ethical and humanist religion in the society. It is important for the process of **endosmosis** in the society

and essential to end isolation. This requires an ethical humanism in the inter-personal relationships in the society. Dewey was sceptic about the existence of God and yet he insisted on the need of such an ethical humanist religion in society for, what he called endosmosis (Ambedkar has used Dewey's idea of endosmosis time and again). Dewey's ideas on religion were explained in his article 'Common Faith' that he wrote in 1897. The State as the 'Great Mediator' cannot resolve all the perceived contradictions at the level of inter-personal human relationships and therefore there must be an ethical humanist shared faith, a religion.

These are the basic tenets of Deweyan pragmatism in very brief. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was a consistent Deweyan Pragmatist. It is essential to understand the philosophical world outlook of Ambedkar in order to understand the different political strategies he adopted throughout the four decades of his political career and also to critically assess the contributions and limitations of Ambedkarite political thought.

Political Strategies of B. R. Ambedkar: A Case of Progressive Experimentation or Deweyan Pragmatism in Practice

In the four decades of his political career, Ambedkar employed myriad strategies and did a number of experiments. However, if we analyse all these strategies and experiments, we can see the method inherent. We can broadly talk about four major strategies that Ambedkar employed at different times and sometimes simultaneously in his political career.

The **first important strategy** was constructing a unitary identity for dalits and the *shudras*. Ambedkar understood that caste system is kind of a 'graded inequality' internalized even by those lower castes who have someone beneath them on the ladder of caste hierarchy. So a *shudra* might be oppressed by the upper castes, yet she would not be willing to break the caste because of the comparatively higher status that she enjoys over dalits. In his lifetime itself Ambedkar had seen even the dalit castes fighting among themselves. For example,

there were considerable contradictions between the Mahars and the Mangs as well as between the Chambhar and the Mahars. That is why Ambedkar said that caste is not simply division of labour but a 'division of labourers', though his explanation of how it became a 'division of labourers' is not satisfactory at all. A number of historians and sociologists and other social scientists have shown the weaknesses of Ambedkar's analysis of the origin and evolution of caste system, which is mostly based on the descriptions in the scriptures coupled with historical speculations and simulations. However, these academicians fail to understand that Ambedkar's academic works are not simply academic works but political endeavors to construct a unitary identity for the dalits and *shudras*. For instance, in his explanation of the genesis of caste in his paper 'Caste: Development, Genesis and Mechanism' and others, he argues that it was endogamy that created caste. Endogamy was the convention of *brahmanas*. *Brahmanas* did not impose caste system on the society but successfully persuaded the society that their customs, traditions and values were superior. As we can see, this is a circular logic: endogamy created caste; endogamy was invention of *brahmanas*; *brahmanas* were a caste; but caste was created by endogamy; then who created the caste of *brahmanas*?

Similarly, in 'Who were the Shudras?', Ambedkar argues that *shudras* were actually *kshatriyas* in the ancient times. Some *kshatriyas* were downgraded by the *brahmins* and converted into *shudras*. The historical evidence for this claim is lacking. We have already discussed some of the leading historians who have written about the *shudras* and the formation of their *varna*. Also, in 'Untouchables: Who were they and How they became Untouchables?', Ambedkar argues that following the conquest of the Aryans, the defeated tribes were peripheralized, subjugated and fell prey to disintegration. These tribesmen became 'the broken men' (*dalit* in Marathi). These 'broken men' became the earliest converts to Buddhism when this monotheistic sect rose to prominence. Soon, Buddhism cornered Hinduism and became the guiding light of a number of *shudra* kingdoms. However, some *brahmin* sects

emerged that borrowed the positive teachings of Buddha. A Hindu reaction set in which finally led to the Hindu re-conquest and defeat of Buddhism. However, the broken men, the dalits, continued to be the followers of Buddha and did not let Brahmanical hegemony into their fold. This irked the *brahmins* and led them to cast the dalits as the Untouchables. Now, this explanation of the origin of untouchability cannot be supported by historical evidence. Though the research on the evolution of different dimensions of caste system are still going on, some things have become fairly established on the basis of conclusive evidence. The origin of untouchability cannot be explained away by this simplistic narrative. **However, one must understand that these writings of Ambedkar were primarily an exercise in identity constructions.** The narrative evolved by him clearly shows this. To fight against the 'graded inequality' of the caste system, it was essential to invent an unitary identity which would be able to unite the dalits and *shudras* who together form the numerical majority of Indian society. **Gail Omvedt** has rightly pointed out that towards the end of his life, Ambedkar was working on a grand theory of caste which was racial-ethnic in character, though Ambedkar had always opposed British interpretations of caste based on race. However, in this theory he argued that much before the Muslim or British conquest of Hindu India, there was Hindu/*brahmana* conquest of Buddhist India. He attempted to build the identity of Ashoka and the Mauryas as Naga kings. It is true that this theory too falls flat on the test of historical evidences. Again, we need to understand the project of Ambedkar here, which is a *political* one; a part of his desperate fight against caste. Therefore, these ostensibly academic writings of Ambedkar on the origin and evolution of caste system must be read as political tracts rather than looking for historical accuracy because Ambedkar was not just an academic, but primarily a political activist and leader committed to the annihilation of caste, whether we agree with this strategy of identity building or not.

The **second strategy** of Ambedkar was in the arena of electoral and social politics. Ambedkar's intervention in the arena of electoral politics starts with his testimony to the Southborough Committee,

which had come to India in 1919 to define the electoral franchise on communal basis. It was a precursor of Montford Reforms. Ambedkar represented the dalit community as the most educated person from that community. Ambedkar had returned from the US, though he would leave again for London to continue his studies. In his testimony, Ambedkar argued that the real cleavage of the Hindu society is not between the *brahmanas* and non-*brahmanas* but between the touchables and untouchables. The untouchables constitute a separate community entitled for communal award. Consequently, he demanded that the dalits be awarded either reserved seats or separate electorate. It is noteworthy that till now Ambedkar considered both these options. Later, when he returned from England, he formed **Bahishkrut Hitkarini Sabha**. BHS was dedicated for educational and cultural reform work among the untouchables. In 1927-8, on behalf of the BHS, Ambedkar presented a proposal to the Simon Commission. He made a slight change in his proposal *vis-à-vis* his testimony to the Southborough Committee. Here Ambedkar argued that the dalits should either be given separate electorate or reserved seats with universal franchise for dalits alone. The Simon Commission gave its nod to reserved seats but added a caveat. It ruled that in the reserved seats too, the dalit candidate will have to get his competence certified by the governor of the province. This was like denying the right of reserved seats also. Obviously, Ambedkar was irritated with this rider. However, he was against adopting a confrontational approach towards the government and not only the British government but any government because the basic political prejudice of Deweyan pragmatism was that the government/state is the most rational actor of society and all social change depends on the way it thinks and acts. This way can and should be influenced by the intelligentsia by getting into the government service. That is the reason why Ambedkar in almost all of his writings underlines the role of intellectuals. For instance, in 'Annihilation of Caste' he argues that within the fold of Hinduism, caste cannot be annihilated because the intellectuals of the Hindu society are *brahmanas* and they will never allow that. The intellectuals are the vanguard of society and making of history is

work of the intelligentsia. Similarly, this attitude is clearly visible in the one of the most important episodes of Ambedkar's political life: the Mahad movement, which happened in the same fateful year of 1927. Let us ponder over it for a while.

The first Depressed Classes Conference in 1927 was organized by a group of untouchable leaders led by R.B. More. R. B. More was a young and energetic activist with exceptional organizational skills. The idea of such a conference was incubated in 1924. It was decided that the conference should be presided by Dr. Ambedkar and he should be felicitated for his academic achievements. Ambedkar in the beginning did not agree to be a part of the conference. Anand Teltumbde has cited a number of sources who have given different reasons for that. One was the fact that Ambedkar was not assured about the capabilities of More. When a comrade-in-arms of Ambedkar, Kamlakant Chitre assured him about his capabilities, Ambedkar began to consider his participation. Secondly, the son of Bhai Chitre, S.V. Chitre claims that Ambedkar in the beginning declined to be a part of the conference because he wanted to be a district judge and avoid political activities that might involve direct action. Teltumbde argues that it is unlikely that Ambedkar declined the proposal on this basis, however, this much was clear that unlike Ambedkar's earlier reform activities, this conference proposed some direct action, which he wanted to avoid. Anyhow, in the end Ambedkar did participate and preside over the conference. Bhai Chitre has written that it was him and another comrade-in-arms of Ambedkar Bapu Sahasrabuddhe who persuaded him to accept the proposal.

In the first conference, during his presidential address, Ambedkar reveals his Deweyan pragmatist understanding in illuminating terms. He opines, **"There is another reason also for why I say that the Untouchables should adopt white-collared professions. The government is the most important and powerful institution. The manner in which the government thinks, makes things happen. However, we must not forget that what the government wants, depends entirely on the government employees. The mind of**

the government is basically the mind of its employees. One thing clearly follows from this, which is that if we want to get something of our interest through the government, we must get ourselves into the government service. Otherwise, the kind of neglect we suffer today will continue forever...Without that they (untouchables) will never attain their state of vigor."

Again in the same address, "If these educated boys and girls (of untouchable community) had reached the ranks of mamlatdar, collector, and magistrate today, they would have constituted an armoured shelter over the entire Untouchable community. Under its protective cover, all of us would have made progress. But in its absence, we are living under the hot sun and getting scorched. I am fully convinced that unless we create this protective cover over ourselves, we will not achieve our development."

In the same address, Ambedkar argues that the other profession that dalits should adopt is farming. However, for land, Ambedkar did not propose demanding redistributive land reforms from the British government. Rather, he says, **"It may perhaps be difficult for the Untouchables to purchase farm lands. But there are many fallow pieces of land belonging to the forest department. They may be available if they make a request for them."** The conference culminated in implementing the Bole Resolution passed in 1923 by drinking water from the Chavdar Tank. Dalits returning from Chavdar Tank were attacked by a mob, mostly comprising Marathas, though the violence was instigated by a *brahmana* priest. Dalits, overwhelmingly Mahars, gathered at Mahad were ready to retaliate as they were in thousands and a considerable number of these Mahars had been military servicemen. However, Ambedkar prevented them from retaliation and pursued the course of legal action. Anand Teltumbde has shown in his excellent book 'Mahad: The Making of the First Dalit Revolt' that Magistrate was in town at the time of attack but he did nothing to stop the attack and violence by caste Hindus. He has also cited records of the colonial government to show that the state was not in favor of dalits

exercising their civil and democratic rights. The District Magistrate clearly writes in his report that the lower castes cannot and should not expect the support of the government if they assert their rights by direct action.

The experience of public drinking of water from Chavdar Tank prompted Ambedkar to organize a Satyagrah for implementing the Bole Resolution again. In December, the Satyagraha was organized. More than ten thousand dalits, mainly Mahars, gathered in Mahad again. Just before the beginning of Satyagraha, Mahad municipality performed a *volte-face* and ceased its support to the implementation of the Bole resolution. The district administration had modernist-rationalist dilemmas about whether to let the Satyagrahis implement the Bole Resolution or not but in the end it decided not to allow the Satyagrahis. **Because, despite its Western modernity, the colonial state was always driven by the exigencies of the political rule and this prevented it from breaking its close alliance with feudal landlordism and its ideological basis, Brahmanism.** The government supported the attempt of the *brahmanas* and other caste Hindus to secure an injunction against the dalits from implementing Bole Resolution by claiming that the Chavdar Tank was not a public water tank, but a private one. The court granted the injunction in one day, whereas, Ambedkar had to fight the legal case to remove this injunction for ten long years! Teltumbde has shown that the colonial state had actually supported the Touchables in getting this injunction. The partisanship of the state was clear.

The second conference began on 25th December 1927. On the first day, *Manusmriti* was burned which was definitely a significant symbolic act of ideological resistance. On the second day, Ambedkar in his address informed the crowd gathered about the injunction and instructed Mahars not to take their lathis during the Satyagraha, not to disobey any government official and be prepared to go to jail and not plead guilty. The crowd happily agreed. However, Ambedkar continued to inform the crowd about the possible outcomes of the Satyagraha and sacrifices that everybody might need to make. Then

the Collector came to the conference and in his address clearly threatened the crowd that though he sympathises with them, yet if they go against the legal injunction, then he will take action against them. Still, the crowd was unmoved **because the very idea of Satyagraha was to non- violently disobey an unjust law.** After that, Ambedkar said that he is not content with the oral agreement of the general body and he made them fill a prior consent form that stated that the participants of Satyagraha are aware of the possible consequences which includes jail or even martyrdom and still want to continue with the Satyagraha. Nobody raised any objection and everybody gave their prior written consent (in fact, activists started filling up the form; at 3500 forms they stopped because everyone was ready to make any sacrifice). Then Ambedkar held a meeting of organizers to decide and finally decided against doing Satyagraha. In his address to the crowd he said that he was only checking the preparedness of the participants whether they were ready to go all the way or not! Now that he is assured about their resolve and strength, there is no need to use that resolve because it will go against the government. He said, **“If we do Satyagraha today, it would go against the government...the government has sympathy for us. Then why should we put the government in dilemma unnecessarily? Next, you see that the touchable people do not have any sympathy for our Satyagraha...We have to survive through this trap of injustice and oppression. For this kind of survival, we need cooperation from the government. There is nothing wrong if someone says, doing Satyagraha against the government is not proper while the government is giving assurance of such cooperation.”**

Anand Teltumbde has quoted the record of DM of Kolaba of the private conversation with Dr. Ambedkar about cancelling the Satyagraha. This record clearly shows that even before the Collector came to the conference to threaten dalits against Satyagraha and even before Ambedkar made his decision to cancel the Satyagraha known to the core of organizers of the Satyagraha, Ambedkar had agreed to cancel the Satyagraha during this conversation with the

DM of Kolaba. Ultimately, the Satyagraha ended in an anti-climax. The participants were extremely disappointed. To understand these steps of Ambedkar one needs to understand his firm commitment with Deweyan pragmatism. He genuinely believed in Deweyan pragmatism which prevented him from going against the state throughout his political career. **We spent so many words on the Mahad movement because it is exemplary of the political and philosophical worldview of Dr. Ambedkar.** Now let us move forward.

Though Simon Commission had agreed to give reserved seats to dalits (with the certification of competence of candidates by the provincial governor), this meant nothing because the Congress was not part of these negotiations and opposed it. To resolve the deadlock two Round Table Conferences were held in 1930 and 1931. In these round table conferences too, all the parties failed to reach a consensus. Ultimately, the British government gave separate electorates to dalits. However, Gandhi began his fast unto death against this decision of British government in jail in Poona. Finally, Ambedkar accepted Gandhi's formula of 148 reserved seats (mostly with considerable number of dalits votes) rather than 73 separate electorates. Some people have claimed that the reason for this surrender was that Ambedkar feared that if something happens to Gandhi, there will be a violent Brahmanical reaction against the dalits. However, scholars like Christopher Jeffrelot have shown that this was only a distant secondary reason and the primary reason was the fact that far more dalits were standing behind Gandhi instead of Ambedkar.

In 1930, another important incident happened that warrants our attention. Some people from Nashik wanted to start a Satyagraha for untouchable's right for temple entry. They approached Ambedkar for the request of assuming the leadership of the Satyagraha. First Ambedkar declined due to the experience of Mahad Satyagraha and also due to his lack of enthusiasm for any kind of direct action that might lead to confrontation with the government. However, following much persuasion from the organizers he accepted the invitation to

assume the leadership of the Satyagraha, which began in March 1930. Around 16 thousand Satyagrahis marched to the Kalaram temple and staged a sit-in dharna outside the closed gates of the temple. The British administration openly took the side of caste Hindus and started threatening the Satyagrahis. Ambedkar tried to appeal to the governor for intervening as the temple was a public place. However, the governor refused. The collector even refused to meet any of the organizers and even threatened to remove the Satyagrahis. When one of the organizers Gaikwad reported this to Ambedkar, he said, **“My view is not to face a conflict with the government if it can be avoided.”** Again, when in April of the same year on Ramnavami Day a chariot procession was being taken out, Ambedkar went there in person and appealed the Police officers on duty to be impartial when the Untouchables would try to participate in pulling the chariot. However, when the dalits actually tried to do this, the Police attacked them and beat them badly. Ambedkar wrote to the Governor about this issue. He wrote, **“But the immediate cause of the fight was the action of the Police Sepoys, a great majority of whom were caste Hindus, they at once started to assault those Untouchables who were struggling to hold a bit of the rope. The fight was started by the caste Hindu Police who openly took the side of the touchable Hindus.”** Ambedkar went further and clarified beyond any doubt that he is not complaining against the district magistrate and even the British Police officers who were “just performing their duties” but only against the Hindu Policemen. Once again one can see that Ambedkar at any cost wanted to avoid any conflict with the colonial government, even when it was openly clear that the colonial government was siding with the Brahmanical forces. **The strong conviction of Ambedkar in the principles of Deweyan pragmatism alone can explain this.** Those who do not understand it have charged Ambedkar with opportunism and dishonesty. However, these charges are baseless as Ambedkar never did anything in his political life for personal gain or as *quid pro quo*. He did what he firmly believed in.

After the Poona Pact, Ambedkar realized that in the case of reserved seats he must establish himself not as a leader of the Untouchables only, but as leader of broad masses. This led him to establish the Independent Labour Party in 1936. The ILP in its manifesto declared that the working masses of India have two enemies *brahmanashahi* (Brahminical domination) and *bhandwalshahi* (Capitalism). The manifesto never mentions dalits separately but as a part of the working masses of India. The economic program proposed by the ILP was akin to the state welfarist and state capitalist (what Ambedkar terms 'state socialist') program of the likes of the Fabians and the Labour Party of Britain. The impact of Fabianism is unmistakable. It calls for nationalization of key industries, but allows for private capital. The ILP presents a liberal petty-bourgeois critique of capitalism and presents the model of a state-regulated welfarist capitalist economy. **However, at the same time in his speeches, Ambedkar makes it pretty clear that caste hierarchies for him were the most important ones and they had nothing to do with access to economic resources, as Christopher Jaffrelot has shown.** In a way, Ambedkar was the first to assert that caste belongs to the Superstructure, if we interpret this claim of Ambedkar in Marxist terminology. It was incorrect when some Marxists claimed that and it was equally incorrect when Ambedkar claimed that.

The contradiction in the program of the ILP and the speeches of Dr. Ambedkar are understandable. The ILP was primarily an electoral strategy. **The formation of the ILP was in no way showed inclination of Ambedkar towards Marxism, as some Left Ambedkarites/Ambedkarite Left want us to believe.** In the process of organizing the ILP and during the period of existence of the ILP, Ambedkar initiated many activities involving the working class and also formed an alliance with the Communists briefly. However, all these activities were part of a pragmatist electoral strategy and do not at all reveal Ambedkar's attraction towards Marxism. Had Ambedkar been alive, he would have been the first to vehemently refute this argument. In the provincial elections of 1937, the ILP fared badly. ILP fought on 17 seats. Out of 14 reserved

seats, 12 tickets were given to Mahars and only 2 tickets were given to non-Mahar dalit castes. Even Chambhars were not represented. Only one Mang and one untouchable from Gujarat got the ticket, apart from Mahars. After the electoral debacle of the ILP in 1937, Ambedkar returns to his identity of dalit leader and forms Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) in 1941-42.

The SCF argued that the dalits constituted a communal minority just like the Muslims and Sikhs and they are not only entitled to separate electorate but also separate territories. The SCF proposed to the Cripps Mission of 1944 that no constitution would be acceptable to them that did not have the approval of dalits. This approval was based on **three major demands**: first, separate electorate for dalits; second, representation of dalits within the executive power (state apparatus); and third, toll taxes for separate dalit villages. The first two proposals are understandable. However, the third proposal was bizarre and showed the desperation of Ambedkar after so many failed experiments. He wrote to a British official Beverley Nicholas about this demand. He urged that the British must establish separate dalit villages before they leave; this will constitute dalits as territorial majority in these villages, who are presently minority in most of the territories. Ambedkar says in his letter that if the Britishers “allow” that, it can happen; he goes on further and argues that even if the British have to resort to forcible mass scale exodus, they must do it. Obviously, it was an impractical and desperate proposal and was bound to be rejected.

The SCF lost miserably in the 1945-46 elections due to two reasons. The SCF had no organizational structure and only a few cadre. It could not field candidates in most of the reserved seats. Finally, it won only two seats. The second reason for the defeat, as Jaffrelot has shown, was the immense popularity of the Congress due to its anti-colonial stance and the collaboration of Ambedkar with the British. After the defeat of the SCF, Dr. Ambedkar was peripheralized in the national politics as he himself admitted later. He was brought back into limelight by the Congress at the insistence of Gandhi. It was a masterstroke of the Congress and especially Gandhi to co-opt

Ambedkar. And there is no denying the fact that the Deweyan pragmatism of Ambedkar made him a perfect candidate for such co-opting. Ambedkar was made member of the Constituent Assembly and the chairman of the Drafting Commission. In his speeches, Ambedkar thanked the Congress repeatedly for this gesture, though he himself had written to his lieutenant Dada Saheb Gaikwad that no person with self-respect can ever collaborate with the Congress. **However, this too, was not opportunism.** This again must be explained by the pragmatist outlook and politics of Ambedkar. There is the need to have a critical discussion on the extremely limited democratic character of our constitution also and how it was heavily based on the Government of India Act of 1935, how it incorporated a number of draconian colonial laws; however, the space does not allow that. Nevertheless, this much can be said that Ambedkar was to function in the space given by the state following the political exigencies of the state, which for Ambedkar was 'the most rational actor', 'the Great Mediator' and not an instrument of class rule. The liberal bourgeois political theory along with its American outgrowth, that is, Deweyan pragmatism, was the guiding thought for Ambedkar. Towards the end of his life, he attempted to return to a broad mass-based party with the idea of Republican Party of India, though it did not see the light of the day in the life-time of Ambedkar.

It is often said that in one of his last letters to Dada Saheb Gaikwad, Ambedkar asked him to join the communists if the experiment of the RPI fails. Some people claim that this shows Ambedkar's growing attraction towards Marxism. Again, this claim does not hold water. It was part of a series of experiments in the progressive experimentation of Ambedkar, in other words, just another pragmatist experiment, rather than his inclination towards Marxism. This brings us to his third strategy.

The **third strategy** implemented by Ambedkar was, what Christopher Jaffrelot calls, collaborating with the rulers. This begins openly with the participation of Ambedkar in the Defence Advisory Committee for war effort by the British in order to involve Indian soldiers in the conflict. This council was boycotted by the Congress.

Hindu Mahasabha and Ambedkar were part of this council. Later, he was inducted into the Viceroy's council as Member of Labour. **As member of labour, Ambedkar made a number of important contributions.** For instance, he introduced an Indian Trade Union (Amendments) Bill which obliged all owners to recognize a trade union in their enterprises. This step was in full congruence with Deweyan idea of labour-capital relationship. Moreover, he secured reserved seats for dalit students in the technical colleges of London and also secured representation of dalits in state apparatus. This shows the limits of what Deweyan pragmatist method can yield. Whatever could be achieved within this ambit, Ambedkar strove to achieve. Again, when Ambedkar was peripheralized in the national politics and then brought back on to the centre stage by the Congress, he continued his strategy of collaborating with the rulers. In drafting of the constitution, he on the one hand made a number of contributions and on the other made a number of compromises also. On the one hand he tried his best to make the Hindu Code Bill a progressive legislation, tried to ensure right of inheritance for women though the reactionary feudal landlord elements watered down the Bill and Nehru did not support Ambedkar in this contradiction, which irked Ambedkar a lot and later became one of the reasons of his resignation; on the other, in the Constitution, right to live was not included as a fundamental right, Ambedkar argued against confiscation of land without compensation in the case of feudal landlords and princely states, many draconian laws from the colonial period were included in the Constitution. These contradictions of Ambedkar also can only be understood in terms of his pragmatist politics. He was trying to utilize the space available to him and at the same time his commitment to the idea of private property was unshakeable. That is why he was against confiscation without compensation.

The **last strategy** of Ambedkar was conversion. Ambedkar mentioned conversion for the first time in Jalgaon Depressed Classes Conference in 1927. At that time, he had said that we will try to reform the Hindu religion, but if it is not possible we will leave it. In

Yeola Conference of 1935, he declared his intention of conversion for the first time. Just before that, some dalits had converted into Islam which prompted the caste Hindus to allow dalits access to some new water wells. However, Ambedkar never considered Islam for conversion. The first religion that he considered was Sikhism. Few people know or remember that this choice was made on the suggestion of Moonje, the leader of Hindu Mahasabha. He urged Ambedkar to adopt Sikhism because by this the dalits will only be leaving the fold of Hindu religion and not Hindu civilization and society. Even Ambedkar made this statement that by this dalits will be repaying their debt to the Hindu civilization and they will remain within its fold because it was advisable **“to have some responsibility as for the future of the Hindu culture and civilization.”**

However, two factors changed the mind of Ambedkar. First, when the British government told him that the converts will not get the rights to which the minorities will be entitled, he was taken aback. Secondly, some early converts to Sikhism told him that there is no respite from caste-based oppression in the fold of Sikhism. The Jatt peasants were equally oppressive. Moreover, Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Akal Takht, was against the idea of dalits converting into Sikhism because the Jatt Sikhs would become a minority within Sikh population if all or majority of dalits converted into Sikhism. So Ambedkar abandoned this idea by 1937. He did not mention conversion for many years. Then in 1950s, he came back to this idea and proposed Buddhism for conversion. Though he was influenced by the figure of Buddha from his younger days, but it was in the 1940s that he got more interested in Buddhism. At Buddhism, his search for an egalitarian religion ended, though institutionalized Buddhism itself had become plagued with a number of vices. Moreover, the conversion did not result in the liberation of converts from caste-based humiliation and oppression. Even Ambedkar understood that mere conversion cannot deliver the Untouchables from caste based oppression. He obviously had the option of materialist and atheistic propaganda just like Periyar. However, in

this too he was firm in his Deweyan pragmatism which insisted on the need of religion as an ethical and humanist code for endosmosis in society.

These were the four main strategies of Ambedkar. All these four strategies were driven by the Deweyan pragmatist outlook of Ambedkar. Those who attempt to explain the inconsistencies in the political practice of Ambedkar by personal traits or charges of opportunism, miss the simple point that the question was not of personal honesty or integrity; rather the question was of philosophy and politics of Dr. Ambedkar. Whether you agree or disagree with Deweyan pragmatism, you cannot charge Dr. Ambedkar with opportunism and dishonesty. Within the liberal bourgeois framework of Deweyan pragmatism, Ambedkar continuously strove to work for the cause of dalit upliftment. However, this very framework is not sufficient for annihilation of caste.

The Need of the Hour: A Class-based Anti-Caste Movement

We must raise this pertinent question: **can we fight for the annihilation of caste without assuming a confrontational attitude towards the state? Doesn't the state in India have a caste as well as a gender? Wouldn't it be a tomfoolery to assume that the State is an impartial actor, unbiased by class and caste prejudices? Can we expect for the annihilation of caste through the "affirmative action" of the state or social advocacy or by going into government jobs to change the way the government thinks and acts? Is a mere social program enough for annihilation of caste, without having a revolutionary program for political and economic transformation?** In my opinion the answer to all these questions is a resounding 'No'. The reason for that is that **the social superstructure is sustained and defended by the political superstructure.** Even the experiences of the political experiments of Ambedkar clearly demonstrate that Brahmanism had the patronage of the colonial state, despite its dilemmas of modernity and rationality. These dilemmas were also

reflected in the debates among colonial rulers, for instance, between the Utilitarians and the Physiocrats. However, ultimately, the policies and actions of colonial government were decided by the economic and political interests of the colonial ruling class.

Ambedkar was mistaken when he argued in 'Annihilation of Caste' that social revolution always precedes political revolution; he even quotes Ferdinand Lasalle to justify his claim. However, in that quote, Lasalle was actually talking about political constitutions and the real socio-economic power rather than political revolution and social revolution. Lasalle argued and correctly so that the real question of power is not decided by political constitutions but by real socio-economic power. By 'socio-economic power' Lasalle meant the real control over the means of production. However, Ambedkar interpreted him in his own way. Anyhow, the real relation between social revolution and political revolution is not simplistic. **It is true that without a certain level of social awakening of the oppressed classes and without the socio-political preparation of the vanguard of oppressed classes there can be no political revolution; however, this too is perfectly true that without smashing the political superstructure which sustains all exploitative and oppressive relationships in the society with force and violence, no social revolution is possible.** Social revolutions cannot be consummated or achieved by the actions of the 'Great Mediator', i.e., the State. No where in history it has happened and nor shall it happen. Drawing such a Great Chinese Wall between social revolution and political revolution on part of Ambedkar was only due to his ideological position of liberal bourgeois reformism and Deweyan pragmatism. In nutshell, I intend to iterate and reiterate this simple fact: **Any ideology or politics which prevents the anti-caste movement from going against the state cannot fight effectively against caste.** As shown earlier, social oppression and economic exploitation seldom exist in their archetypal form; they are almost always intertwined and have a symbiotic relationship. Political superstructure (the State) is the main bulwork and defender of social and cultural superstructure that

definitely have relative autonomy. Any political superstructure that serves an economic base based upon exploitation and oppression cannot do away with different forms of social oppression, including the caste-based oppression and the entire caste system because caste is not simply a part of superstructure but also a part of the economic base, as a partial regulator of distribution, labor division, surplus extraction and appropriation of the surplus by different caste factions of the ruling class. Any system based on exploitation will only adapt these forms of social oppression to their specific needs. **That is why, *in the long run*, the question of annihilation of caste is the question of revolutionary transformation of society.**

However, here is the main riddle: the class mobilization and organization necessary for such a revolutionary transformation is not possible without simultaneously erecting a powerful and effective anti-caste movement. But of what kind? In my opinion, an anti-caste movement not based on identity. The reason is that the basic logic of identity is *othering*. Any identity formation is based on the process of *othering*. No identity can consolidate itself without at the same time consolidating, in general, other identities and, in particular, the polar opposite identity. **Thus, any identity-based dalit movement, rather than a class-based anti caste movement will defeat the purpose.** In my opinion, need of the hour is a class-based anti-caste movement. As I mentioned earlier, social oppression is intertwined with economic exploitation in a relation of relative autonomy and symbiosis. Almost all dalits face some form of social discrimination at some point of time in their lives, however, the working class and poor dalits are the victims of the most barbaric anti-dalit atrocities. Secondly, all workers are exploited but dalit workers are super-exploited and worst paid due to their vulnerable social location. **Who are or can be the most militant fighters against these atrocities and discrimination?** In my opinion, despite their lip service, the small elite section among the dalit population, as a *class*, is not going to fight radically against this injustice because despite their complaints they have vested interests in defense of the political *status quo*. They will raise a hulabaloo on

symbolic issues like the cartoon controversy and naming a university, etc. However, when the killers of Laxmanpur Bathe and Bathani Tola are let go scot free, they do not bother to speak against it. When something like Khairlanji, Mirchpur, Gohana, Bhagana happens their activities never transcend hollow symbolism. Experience has shown that the small elite section among dalits has become navally linked with the system.

It will be the class-based anti-caste movement which can really and radically fight against not only the most barbaric forms of atrocities against dalits but also against the casteist humiliation and different forms of Brahmanism. The political, social and economic priorities of such a class-based anti-caste movement will be decided not by the symbolist discontents of the elites but by the working class and poor dalit population. There should be a specific anti-caste organization and all progressive mass organizations must have a separate agenda for annihilation of caste.

What should be the priorities of such a class-based anti-caste movement? In my opinion, their most important priority should be the fight against the anti-dalit atrocities. That is the form of discrimination faced by the working class and poor dalits. As we have mentioned earlier, almost in 95 percent cases the target of anti-dalit atrocities have been rural and urban dalit workers. 89-90 percent of dalit population is still living in abject poverty in rural as well as urban areas and form an important and most exploited portion of the working class of India. Our class approach should be clear about it and we must organize the workers and youth of all classes to fight against the anti-dalit atrocities. We also must fight against the caste prejudices prevalent among the working masses belonging to non-dalit castes and make them understand that anti-dalit atrocities actually strengthen the same socio-economic system and oppressive apparatus that exploits and oppresses them too.

It is true that all dalits irrespective of their class position face caste-based humiliation at some point in their lives; even Mayawati, Athawale or Udit Raj have to face this (though, often it proves to be a

boon for them as it helps them in consolidating their caste vote bank). However, experiences of the past have shown that despite paying lip-serving to the anti-caste agenda, the elite sections of dalit population in general and as a class do not have either the will or the intent to fight against Brahmanism in a radical fashion. The reason for this is the fact that they have become the beneficiaries of the system in certain ways and are afraid that assuming a radical position might jeopardize this status. Therefore, even against the caste-based humiliation of the elite sections of dalits, it is only the class-based anti-caste movement that has the potency and will to fight. For a class-based anti-caste movement this is essential too in order to wage an effective struggle against the hegemony of Brahmanism as an ideology and system of values.

The **second important agenda** is the fight against patriarchy. We know that caste endogamy can be broken by love marriages only. Only in exceptional cases, we can come across inter-caste arranged marriages. In general, arranged marriages are “arranged” with considerations of caste and class in mind. Clearly, the emancipation of women must become a part of agenda of the anti-caste movement so that women are free to choose their life partners. Only then we can strike a severe blow to the tradition of caste endogamy. It is true this alone will not suffice because the deeply entrenched caste mentality is such that youngsters even in the metropolitan centres do not “fall” in love but arrange love with caste and class considerations in mind. Still, emancipation of women is extremely important to weaken the caste endogamy. And therefore, the question of gender also must be raised along with the issue of caste. The postmodern NGO logic to raise these issues in isolated fashion and along identitarian lines leads all of these struggles in a blind alley. The answer to their logic of “intersectionality” is an integrated class-based approach.

In today’s time, the **third priority** is clear to everyone: the fight against communal and brahmanical Fascism has become an intrinsic part of any anti-caste agenda. The recent incidents in Una and elsewhere have shown that Fascism builds its social hegemony

by attacking the vulnerable and oppressed communities by constructing them as the enemy. The basic majoritarian logic of Hindutva Fascism is constructing Muslims and Dalits as the enemy, as the figure of 'the other'. It is true that the strategy of Hindutva Fascism towards dalits cannot be reduced to this because the RSS has also adopted the strategy of creating a syndicate Hindutva identity for dalits also and co-opting the dalits in the political fold of Hindutva. However, this strategy has its own limitations and therefore ultimately Hindutva politics cannot do without the oppression of dalits.

Fourth important demand is making free and equal education for all and employment for all as a fundamental right. It is important to fight against the corruption of bureaucracy when it does not fill the reserved seats in educational sector and government services. It is a fight against corruption and for civil rights of dalits. However, we must not engage in the false binary of support or opposition to reservation as panacea for caste problem. Especially, when there are no new government jobs and since the introduction of neoliberal policies, the government jobs are actually decreasing, there is no point fighting for something which is not even there. The opposition to reservation is mostly plagued with casteist prejudices and those who cry for meritocracy never resist the management quota or NRI quota or privatization. On the other hand, those who believe that increasing reservation or introducing reservation for new oppressed communities will provide any solution, are either deceived or are deceiving. We have seen how this politics of reservation led to clashes among the dalits and so-called mahadalits, among tribals like Meena and OBCs like Gurjars; some Valmiki dalits have demanded hundred percent reservation for Valmikis in the profession of sanitation work. It shows the detrimental impact of the politics of reservation on emancipatory politics. Fighting for something which does not even exist has only led to further internecine fights among different oppressed communities and breaking the class unity of the working class. So it is essential to understand that support or opposition of reservation is a binary of false alternatives. Rather,

such an anti-caste movement should raise the demand for making equal and free education for all and jobs for all as fundamental rights in the Constitution.

Fifth important priority of the class based anti-caste movement must be fighting for the right of state housing, free health services, and other civil and democratic rights. The working class and dalits should never leave their claims on their rights as equal citizens of India. This is not only essential for consolidating the fight for the civil and democratic rights of dalits and workers, but also for bringing the system to a point of impossibility by over-identifying with the formal constitutional promises of the bourgeois state and also in raising the level of political consciousness of the common dalit masses.

Sixth, such a class based anti-caste movement must engage in extensive and intensive propaganda of rational and scientific worldview especially among the working masses, besides the continuous cultural propaganda against caste. The propaganda against patriarchy forms an important part of this propaganda.

Finally, we must fight against the casteist character of the State and the media which is reflected quite often. For example, we still have pages of caste-based matrimonials in all newspapers, which is blatantly anti-democratic and anti-constitutional. However, there is no hue and cry over this. I cannot go into further detail as to what the agenda of a class based anti-caste movement can and should include. The emphasis on class is an approach. This approach might entail different agenda in different regions of India. However, this approach must be clear if we intend to fight effectively against caste.

In the end, I would like to add an caveat. Some people and movements have suggested redistributive land reforms for dalit landless labour, like the movement led by **Jignesh Mevani** after the Una incident. The movement led by Jignesh Mevani achieved one thing for sure: it contributed to take the anti-caste movement beyond the ambits of symbolism and raised a material issue, i.e., the demand for land distribution to landless dalits. However, in my opinion, this is not a solution. Why? For many reasons. First, one

cannot demand land reforms only for dalit landless (who form 47 per cent of all landless agricultural population) but for all landless. Not only will it be politically wrong and divisive but also impractical. Secondly, if we distribute land to all the landless in India, every landless will get less than 1.25 hectares. What is happening to the peasants at present who already own 1.25 hectares or less land? They are getting ruined and getting self-exploited, or 'exploited by their own landholding.' Most of these marginal peasants have actually become wage labourers because principal means of their livelihood is not agriculture anymore, but wage labour. **The age of redistributive land reforms is over.** At present, it would be a reactionary and backward slogan.

In the conclusion, I would like to say that irrespective of the fact that the communist movement in India could not understand caste in its historicity and contemporaneity, despite empirically fighting against it, we cannot deduce that Marxist analytical method is insufficient to understand the caste question and provide a workable solution for it. In my opinion, it is only the Marxist approach that can and does provide a scientific understanding and solution of the caste question. The problem is that the communist movement in India has remained unable to work out this solution and as a result has fallen prey to opportunistic ideological surrender before the identitarian and pragmatist politics. Some honest revolutionary communists are in the mode of Christian confession and penitence and arguing that Marxism is not sufficient for understanding caste; Marxism is for class struggle and economic exploitation and Ambedkarite thought is for annihilation of caste and social discrimination. Such aggregative logic only shows that these people neither understand economic exploitation nor social discrimination. The question of any revolutionary change in society is primarily a question of understanding the laws of social dynamics, not sentiments.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CASTE: SOME CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS AND SOME METHODOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

In almost all the cases, the entire gamut of writings, research papers and various other kinds of essays on the caste-system, begin with some sentences or phrases that have been so overused as to be rendered into cliché, and since even after getting thoroughly worn out these clichés present the reality to a certain extent, as such I would also use a few similar sentences to begin with.

Caste/Varna is one of the main realities of the Indian social life. No historian, sociologist, anthropologist, or even a political economist, can afford to ignore this reality. Certainly, the influence of casteist mentality over the Indian social psyche goes deep. However while emphasizing upon the caste system and casteist mentality, many a times common people and even the academicians and political activists have this tendency of declaring it to be the only and the single most important aspect of the Indian life and society. While doing so, in essence, they do not actually put the problem of caste and casteist mindset on the agenda of resolution, rather turn it into a meta-reality that cannot be transcended. In fact, what is inherent in such conclusions is an ahistorical view towards the caste system. Somehow caste-system is turned into a system that does not have any beginning or end, a system that is perpetual and eternal. Undoubtedly, this is not the motive of those giving such kind of statements. However, objectively, such utterances lead to such conclusions only. If we do not adopt a historical view on the caste-system, a sense of defeat sets in, which presents the caste-system as invincible. By rejecting all other struggles, “identities” and class-struggles, such an outlook makes the caste system as an integral part of Indian life and people, it converts it into its organic characteristic and thereby it is made as a touchstone for defining Indian psyche. Recently, due to existence of such primitive and

totalitarian consciousness (!) some intellectuals have declared the Indian people themselves as a 'totalitarian community'! According to them, as the project of modernity remains unfinished, there exists an undercurrent of all sorts of totalitarian trends in the society 'from below' (that is among the common people), which manifest themselves in the form of casteism, Khap Panchayats, communalism, etc. Therefore, these intellectuals consider that the first priority is to complete the unfinished project of modernity in India, and until this project of modernity is carried to a decisive stage, the task of bringing in a revolutionary change in the whole socio-economic structure should more or less be suspended! They are not the only ones who think this way, there are many more intellectuals expressing such and similar views. These statements are usually governed by a pre-conceived notion; the preconceived notion that it is for capitalism to complete the tasks concerning the project of democracy and modernity and in case it does not do so, it becomes the main task of the progressive forces to complete these tasks, and so long as bourgeois democracy and modernity are not fully realized, proletarian tasks may be suspended. Whereas on one hand it is true that in every struggle of making capitalism more and more democratic, a revolutionary will take part always without fail, however, on the other hand she/he would do it precisely to make the soil more fertile for proletarian class-struggle, she/he does not put on hold the pure and concrete proletarian tasks until this process gets accomplished.

However, there are those intellectuals too, who take a diametrically opposite stand vis-à-vis the stand point of the aforesaid intellectuals. These other intellectuals consider the caste-system or at least the caste-system as we recognize it today, a construct of the colonial state. These academics feel that all the identities including caste were there all along in the Indian society before India was colonized, and they co-existed (harmoniously). The colonial state under its hegemonic design constructed caste, using its ethnographic state apparatus to oppress and crush the Indian masses. Armed with the logic of Western Enlightenment, they wanted to know India better, to

rule it in a better way. The type of colonial understanding that emerged about India was the product of the fusion of brahminical and other hegemonic groups with the ethnographic machinery of the colonial state, and this is what gave birth to the caste system in its contemporary form. There existed the fetish, born out of the Enlightenment mindset, of enumerating and categorizing things, due to which the Indian populace was also classified into “logical” categories, in which caste became the foremost category. The use of caste in the Census gave further impetus to this process.

Both the viewpoints neglect the historicity of the caste system. We will deliberate on both of these viewpoints further onward in this essay.

Our foremost aim in this essay is to humbly put forward a historical understanding of the genesis of the caste-system and the changes it has been undergoing through centuries. It is not our goal to present only a critical account of different trends of the historiography of caste, simply because that can be found in any standard textbook. Neither is our goal to demonstrate that the caste system has always been in flux, because that is also an established fact amongst serious academics. Historians of ancient and medieval India have repeatedly revealed it, that the caste system has undergone significant changes during different historical periods; historians of modern India have also shown how the colonial state as well as the nationalist politics has used the caste identity and in this process how they have brought changes in the hierarchical sequence of these identities and their interrelationships. Various sociologists have brought our attention towards the mobility persisting within the caste system. So if someone in our times claims that she/he has discovered the mobility existing within the caste system, is as if they have claimed to have discovered fire or wheel all over again! It has also been said that in different ages the socio-economic context or milieu is responsible for the changes occurring in the caste system, and it is through *articulation* with this alone that the changes take place in the internal structure of the caste system.

Thus, it is not our endeavor here to rediscover things that have already been discovered. **One of the objectives that we have in this essay is to analyze this *articulation* more specifically.** While arguing that socio-economic factors have been affecting and changing the caste-system, it should also be clarified that, what these socio-economic factors are, and what are the characteristic features of what we are, in general, terming as socio-economic milieu and context. In our opinion, it is **the dominant production relations and the dominant mode of production** of any period, with which the *articulation* of the caste system takes place. The second proposition, that we want to put forward in this essay, is that **in this mutual interaction, in the final analysis, the aspect of development of the production relations and productive forces, and class struggle plays the main role.** That is to say that in the mutual interaction between the caste system and the dominant mode of production prevailing in the society the material factor of the mode of production plays the predominant role. However, this in no way means that the caste system is being determined mechanically at each moment by the changes taking place in the mode of production and production relations. That is why we have clarified at the very outset that it is in the ultimate analysis that these changes play determining role. Then it does not also mean at all that caste and class are essentially one and the same, or that class is caste indeed. Definitely, any such concept is not really talking about any *articulation*, rather about the complete overlapping of two distinct phenomena, and evidence from the Indian history show that except at the stage of its inception, there has never been any stage in the entire history of caste, when there was any kind of complete overlapping between caste and class. But subsequently the gap which was produced between the caste system and class division has continued in the history till date, and in different systems of production a **correspondence** between the two has existed whose form has been changing according to these very different production systems. The third point that we want to make in this essay is that **the caste system, during every historical period, has been**

playing the role of a useful ideology for maintaining the hegemony of different ruling classes.

In this way, one must accept the peculiarity of the caste system, because in the history of other societies, we do not come across such an element of continuity in the ideologies according **legitimation** to the dominance and hegemony of the ruling classes. Generally, in other societies, with the arrival of a new ruling class, the main aspect in the new ideologies legitimizing the rule of the ruling class has been the aspect of change. But in the history of Indian social formation, despite various fundamental changes in the ideology of caste, the core element that determines and represents it, has remained the same. Of course, while the variables on which this ideology has been applied in different social formations have completely changed, and the execution of this ideology itself has undergone fundamental changes.

Later, we will consider the origin of the caste system, the changes that it has undergone in the historical epochs of ancient and medieval India, as well as the changes in the production relations that were the fundamental reasons behind these changes and then we will also underline some basic changes in the caste system in modern India, especially in the latter half of the colonial period and in the post-independence India, and on that basis would try to substantiate our aforesaid propositions.

Interpretations of the Origin and Development of Varna/Caste System: Main Problems of Historiography

There is a lot of controversy among the historians regarding the development of the Varna system in its embryonic form during the last phase of the Rgvedic period (also known as the Early Vedic Period) and about its consolidation in the Later Vedic Period. There are several opinions prevalent among historians as to what were the main factors behind the emergence of varna system and also about the factors which played the main role in the emergence of caste

(jati) later on. We will present the main views in brief, and also our opinion about them. We will also discuss later on the differences between *varna* and caste (jati). **But the analysis of historiography must also be done in a historical manner, because the history of historiography is also indispensable for understanding the appropriate ideas, interpretations and propositions about history.** Therefore, we will begin with the colonial period. The discussion about the ideas which were put forward by the native and foreign observers about the varna/caste system in the earlier periods is outside the scope of this paper. Moreover, at present such an analysis is also not needed, because systematic studies on the process of social differentiation of the Indian society broadly began during the colonial period only. In what follows, we will give a brief account of the main studies of the caste system and their interpretations during the colonial period.

Main Interpretations during the Colonial Period

In a way, it were the colonial administrators and scholars who initiated a systematic study of the social structure of ancient India. The foremost among the initial representative works was “*A Brief View of Caste System of North-western Provinces and Awadh*” by **J.C. Nesfield**, which was published in 1855. Nesfield, on the basis of his studies, proposed that the determination of occupations on the basis of heredity, is the basic foundation, on which the edifice of caste system stands. According to Nesfield, it were the earlier guilds of artisans and craftsmen in ancient India that got metamorphosed into various castes. The hierarchy among them was determined by the oldness or newness of the occupation. The newer an occupation was, the higher would be its position in the hierarchy. After this, several colonial administrators and the western scholars of that era tried to define and interpret the caste system. Among them French Indologist **Charles Emilie Marie Senart** played a significant role. Senart was the first person to make a distinction between varna and caste. He considered the motion of varna to be more akin to that of class, while caste was an autonomous entity to a certain extent.

Later, however, the castes got assimilated into the varnas. Whereas the hierarchy of castes was a real phenomenon for him, he considered the hierarchical organization described in the *varnasharma* system to be unreal and conceptual. Senart thinks that the brahmins included the various Indo-European lineages in the varnashrama system and had given them a subordinate status, so that their own hegemony remained intact. However, this opinion of Senart was rejected by most of the historians. But the greatest contribution of Senart was that, he made a distinction between the varna and the caste system, which was to a large extent adopted in the later day historiography.

Herbert H. Risley, the colonial administrator who started carrying out the Census in India, gave his own idea on the caste/varna system. According to him, the predominant factor in the evolution of the castes, was the racial factor. He used the nasal index (the length of nose) in order to distinguish between the Aryans and non-Aryans. The caste system got considerably consolidated after Risley started a caste-based Census, besides, it got ossified as well in its contemporary form. The influence of Risley's racial interpretation continued till much later period, however, in the historiography of the post-independence India, the archaeological and literacy evidences have rejected this racial interpretation decisively.

After Risley the western scholar who left a marked influence on the studies of the caste-system, was the French sociologist **Celestin Bouglé** who also collaborated with **Emile Durkheim**. The interpretation of the caste system which Bouglé gave, had a major influence on another French sociologist **Louis Dumont's** thoughts which we will discuss later. Louise Dumont is considered to be the most authoritative scholar on the caste-system, although his ideas face intense criticism by the later historians and sociologists. For now let's return to Bouglé's thoughts. Celestin Bouglé opined that caste-system can be identified by its **three characteristic manifestations**. Firstly, a hereditarily-determined occupation; secondly, hierarchy and thirdly, repulsion, i.e. the alienation of one caste from another. Bouglé did not subscribe to the idea that it were

the Brahmins who framed the caste-system. On the contrary, the caste-system came into being due to the socio-economic changes, the Brahmins gave it a legitimation only. The idea of purity and pollution was the main factor behind the hierarchy present in the system. Thus, Bougle completely rejected the racial interpretation of the caste-system given by Risley. Bougle's study on the caste-system can be counted among the most serious and effective studies of his time. Bougle also accepted the idea of Senart that the varna-system is an idealized concept, while caste is a reality.

J. H. Hutton, whose book '*Caste in India*' came into print in 1946, was the last among the foremost scholars of the caste system before 1947. Hutton considered the existing theories interpreting the caste-system inappropriate, as these did not properly grasp the reality of caste. He enumerated fifteen characteristic features of caste, prominent among them were environmental segregation, magical beliefs, totemism, idea of purity-pollution, the doctrine of *Karma*, clash of races, the prejudices concerning complexion of skin, and the tendency to exploit by dint of hierarchy. But there were numerous inconsistencies throughout Hutton's theory. On one hand, he does not put any causal explanation about the emergence and development of the caste-system and on the other hand, for him caste becomes an aggregate of different social groups. Hutton was altogether unsuccessful in comprehending their interrelationships. Dumont, **Pocock** and all the later sociologists rejected Hutton's theory. It was a kind of an eclectic theory that made a compilation of the different apparent manifestations of caste.

During the colonial period, some Indian scholars also made sociological studies of the caste-system. But they were somehow similar to the interpretations that we have discussed above. In 1911, **S.N. Ketkar** published his book '*History of Caste in India*', in which he gave thoughts similar to those of Celestin Bougle and rejected the racial theory. In 1916, **D. Ebetson** published his book '*Punjab Caste*' which deals with the castes of Punjab. In it he stressed on the role of tribes in the emergence of castes. But the main interpretative

frameworks which existed before independence were mentioned above.

Before proceeding it is important to clarify here that **Ronald Inden**, **Nicholas Dirks** and many **Subaltern Historians** such as **Partha Chatterjee** have put forward the view about the studies of the colonial administrators that they invent or imagine the caste system. It was the colonial ruling class which established the caste system in its ossified form. In order to break Indian people's resistance, the colonial state also used knowledge and culture apart from economic and political means. According to them, the use of knowledge and culture was even more important than the economic and political factors. As per their view, caste becomes a construct of the colonialists. This entire viewpoint faces two problems. On the one hand, if you agree to it, that the caste system is a construct of the colonialists, a specimen of colonial knowledge, which was prepared to establish their dominance over the Indian people, then you become uncritical towards the pre-colonial India without saying so. Attributing each and every wrong to the Enlightenment rationality and modernity, you declare everything including imperialism, communalism, caste system, etc as colonial constructs and knowingly or unknowingly glorify the pre-British India. For example, Nicholas Dirks admits that caste existed before the arrival of colonialism in India but it was just one among various other social identities. But colonialism constructed caste as the only effective identity and classified the whole Indian population accordingly. Doing so, the Occident successfully degraded the Orient, made it appear as an inferior civilization, and projected the entire Indian population as backward and primitive. Caste was presented as a natural peculiarity of the Indian people and was condemned. But on this whole outlook it can be said that while on the one hand the colonialism did indeed play an important role in ossifying the caste system and it increased the rigidity of caste divide, it is also true that even after the establishment of colonialism there were multiple identities in the Indian society. For example, the linguistic and tribal identities, which were also used as instruments of identity politics.

Secondly, political and economic hegemony was not at all secondary in the project of colonial domination; on the contrary, the efforts that the colonialists made to understand the Indian society, in order to be able to rule it, were made precisely to make the political and economic domination possible and more effective. It was no conspiracy. In fact, the colonialists really believed that to rule India in a more effective manner, it must be understood properly. The process already began with **William Jones** establishing the **Asiatic Society** in 1784 and it continued thereafter. We may indeed argue that the colonialists tasted both success and failure in this endeavour of theirs, and they were not fully successful in understating India “in the proper way”! But to term their failure as a conscious conspiracy and a construct is to forcibly impose anti-modernity and anti-Enlightenment ideas of postmodernist, postcolonial theory and Orientalism on the Indian history. **Susan Bayly**, in her book *‘Caste and Politics in Eighteenth Century India’*, has criticized this line of thought of Nicholas Dirks from her point of view (which we can definitely criticize), and has argued that Brahminism and its hegemony were not a product of colonialism, though they were certainly strengthened by it. The brahmins played a significant role in construction of this colonial knowledge, and the collaboration of the colonial state and native elites could be discerned throughout this entire process. The collaboration between the colonial state and the native elites and feudal classes was neither an imagination, nor a construct, but was a stark reality.

So, it is a futile effort to present the caste-related studies of the colonialists as a machination of the rationality of Enlightenment, and to show “**Oriental innocence**” (**Ashish Nandy**) as a ‘*passive victim*’. The celebration of the pre-colonial past by historians of Subaltern Studies and the academics motivated by Orientalism of **Edward Said** and post-modernism in the name of opposing modernity and Enlightenment, is a flight of imagination and a mental construct of these historians. **Sumit Sarkar** in his book *‘Beyond Nationalist Frames’* has shown that this cultural critique of colonialism, ultimately aligns itself with the revivalism of the extreme

Right, though it superficially terms communalism also as a colonial construct (which is more accurate in this context as compared to caste). This whole logic is a circular and a self-defeating one.

Post-Independence Sociological Studies: Disregard of History and Essentialization of the Caste System

Suvira Jaisawal while commenting on post-Independence sociological studies in her book *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimension of Change*, states that these studies, in a way ignore the aspect of history. The whole stress goes into the study of the intricacies of the contemporary nature of caste, but they do not venture to delve into its origin or at least do not do so sincerely. To a great extent, this analysis seems to be correct. Since, while studying the caste system these sociologists ignore its evolution and origin, and see it in its contemporaneity only, they arrive at extremely divergent and incomplete conclusions. Undoubtedly, these studies provide several insights regarding the contemporary caste system. But, while they are unable to use these insights, historians use them.

Among these sociologists, the most renowned was **Louis Dumont**, whose book *Homo Hierarchicus* has a Biblical eminence for sociologists studying caste system, irrespective of whether they are in concord or discord with it. One of the reasons is that, Dumont's interpretation is chiseled with great sophistry. No sharp contradiction is apparent in it. Different concepts have been made to fit in a precisely sculpted structure. As the name of the book suggests, it is about those people or communities, who do not follow the principle of equality. According to Dumont, the Occidental man has faith on the principle of equality by virtue of his individualism (**Homo equalis** or **Homo economicus**). But every society needs hierarchy. Dumont says, the moment you imbibe a value, you are in effect accepting a hierarchy. The greatest peculiarity of the Hindu society lies in that, its hierarchy is harmonious. This hierarchy, namely the caste system, has nothing to do with material and economic factors. The element

that determines the caste system and even builds it up, is the **ritualistic hierarchy**. This ritualistic doctrine is the basic structure (as **Levi Strauss** means it) that is determining the reality here. Brahminical ritualistic ideology constructs the social reality in the Hindu society. The most fundamental element of this ideology is to build up an entire social hierarchy based on the logic of purity and pollution with the Brahmin at its apex, and the untouchables, at its bottom. Every caste is defined on the basis of its relationship with other castes, and consequently we get a complete structure of castes organized in a hierarchical manner. Dumont has answer also for the question about the origin of the idea of purity and pollution! He contends that this idea is that structure of fundamental values that builds reality, and it is pre-given. Such a set of values exists in every society. Hierarchy is an essential value, and every society needs it. In this sense, the caste system endows the Hindu society with such a hierarchical structure, which is uncompetitive, harmonious, unchangeable, and makes the society stable. Dumont repeatedly places these peculiarities vis-à-vis the Western society, and in a way subtly asks the question, what have the values of equality and individualism given to the Occidental Civilization? Thus, Dumont, in the words of **Gerald Berreman**, adopts a brahminical view of caste. It is in a way equivalent to justifying the caste-system. Dumont fails to explain the fact, in any way, though he is obliged to admit it, that with the development of industries and capitalism, caste restrictions on occupation and commensal prejudices have been weakening steadily, as demonstrated by **G S Ghurye** and **E K Gough**; the only characteristic feature that persists is endogamy. Dumont thinks that these political, social and economic changes have no bearing on the caste system, rather they get absorbed within the caste system. Dumont does not draw any conclusion from these changes. For him the Hindu society, along with its caste system and hierarchy, becomes an ideal, unchanging society. Obviously, we need not spend many words to refute Dumont's thesis.

Javeed Alam has remarked somewhere rightly indeed, that most of such sociological ideologies are in reality designed to enter into a **shadow-boxing** with Marxism and the materialist dialectical historical methodology. In fact, Dumont does criticize **Marx** for predicting the elimination of caste with the arrival and development of railways and large-scale industries. Actually, Marx was talking about the disintegration of caste-based hereditary division of labour, and in this aspect Marx's prediction has been proved more or less correct. Dumont thinks that since the Indian social structure is unchangeable, eternal, hence its history cannot be written. This point of view aligns markedly close with the old colonial viewpoint, to which **Edward John Thomson**, father of **E P Thomson**, has given a remarkably wonderful expression. Thomson said, India is a country singularly bereft of history. On this idea of Dumont, **Irfan Habib** has aptly written:

“If such is to be the history of India, to fit a contemporary western sociologist's image of the caste system, is it not more likely that there is something wrong with this image rather than with Indian history? It may, in fact, well be that there is a good historical explanation for Dumont's excessively narrow view of caste. During the last hundred years and more, the hereditary division of labour has been greatly shaken, if not shattered. As a result, this aspect has increasingly receded into the background within the surviving domain of caste. The purely religious and personal aspects have, however, been less affected. (One can see that this is by no means specific to India: religious ideology survives long after the society for which the particular religion has served as a rationalization has disappeared)” (Irfan Habib, 1995. *Caste in Indian History*, 'Essays in Indian History', Page 164, Tulika Books, New Delhi)

A whole lot of sociologists have studied the caste system after Dumont. They have drawn attention towards the use of casteist consciousness by the affluent elite classes born in every caste in post-Independence India, and have shown the way the caste equations are being used in electoral politics. Two aspects can be

discerned as we go through these studies, that remain today as the characteristic features of caste politics. One is that, in every caste, dalits also included, there has emerged an affluent class which, in order to garner votes or to have usufruct of the resources, or to establish its monopoly over the access to them, invokes the caste-consciousness of the plebeians of their own caste. This aspect can be prominently seen in the politics of BSP, SP, RJD and parties of their ilk, and all the electoral candidates, even of the BJP and the Congress, who use their caste identity at the grass-root level, and frame caste-based equations. Eventually, when the election results are out, the different caste elites enter into mutual bargaining, deals, and negotiations, and on the basis of these exchanges, the ruling alliance is put together. In other words, in its mutual rivalry, the ruling class makes use of the caste equation. The other aspect which is the more significant, is that the electoral parties which claim to represent all the castes, the dalit caste included, are the electoral parties of elites of these castes, and these elite classes of the different castes join hands to oppress the masses and to keep the people divided and foment caste consciousness among them. Notwithstanding these important insights, the greatest shortcoming of these sociological studies is that they do not pay serious attention to the history of caste system. Leaving aside some cursory mention, the understanding of these people about the emergence of caste system and its subsequent development is inappropriate. This is the reason why they cannot give any explanation of the changes that take place in the phenomenon of the caste. Their total attention is focused on the study of the dynamics of the contemporary phenomenon of caste. But the irony is that, a balanced understanding even about this dynamics can be reached only when, one has a clear view on the emergence and development of the caste system.

It is the lack of a historical vision that does not allow the whole lot of sociologists to comprehend the dynamics of the caste-system and often the sociologists see the caste system as a static system, which consequently becomes the identity of the Hindu/Indian society, and its fundamental characteristic or logic. Something which has always

been there and will be there forever. Many a times, such theorization goes to the extent of justifying the caste system, as is done by **P. A. Sorokin**. Sorokin has made the persistence of the caste system through ages, that is, its sustainability, the basis for its justification. His logic goes like this, the reason that the caste system still exists is that, it gives the people of the society a satisfactory hierarchy. Here also one can notice the inherent preconceived notion, that the caste system is an unchanging phenomenon that has been providing the Hindu society with a semblance of stability. In a similar vein, **Nirmal Bose** has also considered the caste system to be an unchanging factor which provides stability. He thinks that, in the society the caste system saves people from getting uprooted, since it ensures them, their right over their occupations. Monopoly over occupation gives people a sense of security.

In order to look for the reasons behind the trend that is there in these sociological studies, of viewing the caste system as a static one, we cannot refer to this entirely diverse lot of sociologists. We must understand that this lacuna is actually the lacuna of the very academic discipline of sociology. The discipline of sociology was designed precisely to disprove the dialectical and historical materialistic outlook of Marxism. For instance, the sociological method of viewing the hierarchy as an indispensable necessity of every society, gives a legitimacy to the caste system also, and puts a question-mark on the goal of an egalitarian society itself, as propounded by Marxism. Afterwards, on the face of the riposte made by Marxism, the branch of sociology has also undergone through a number of changes and there have appeared a number of Marxist sociologists, who placed even **Marx** along with **Weber** and **Durkheim** as the founding father of the discipline of sociology. The basic prejudice or preconceived notion of sociology is a positivist prejudice, whose roots can be seen in the ideas of **Auguste Comte**. In this essay we cannot write a critique of the entire discipline of sociology, but this much is clear that the discrepancy present in the sociological studies of the caste system has its roots in the absence, rather a kind of conscious negation, of a

historical outlook in this entire discipline. As a result, studies made, divorcing contemporaneity completely from history, gives us some valuable fragmentary insights, but fail to provide us with any consistent approach or methodology of explaining the caste system.

Other than these sociological interpretations, the study on caste system done by **G. S. Ghurye** also made a significant contribution. On the whole, Ghurye put stress on the racial origin of the caste-system. Besides him, there were some other sociologists also, such as **N. K. Dutt**, **D. N. Majumdar** and **R. P. Chandra** who supported this idea of racial origin. These people are of the opinion that, the Aryans invaded the Indian subcontinent at its north-western area, and subjugated the people of Dravidian origin. To keep these subjugated people under a structural subordination, the Brahmins constructed the theory of purity/pollution. With this theory at the base, the caste hierarchy was designed according to relative purity/pollution in comparison to the Brahmins, and thus came the caste system into being. But as Suvira Jaiswal has argued, there are no evidence to substantiate this theory. Sociologists have also debated a lot over the difference between caste and *varna*. **Max Weber** saw *varna* as a phenomenon akin to the European 'estate'. **Trautman** declared caste to be a real phenomenon while *varna* was a phenomenon similar to the 'estate'. There are sociologists who are of the opinion that *varna* system gives a bookish description of the caste system, which provides an idealized categorization. Castes are a real phenomenon, which, as they were born, got successively ensconced within these varnas. That is why we can witness different localized patterns of co-option of castes into the *varnas*, while the latter have a pan-Indian character. But one thing is common everywhere. The scale, or definition of purity of every caste or the unit of its measurement is the highest purity of the Brahmins. Which means that all the castes get their places within the caste system (hierarchy) depending on their relative distance from the Brahmins. The difference determined between caste and *varna* by the sociologists is also only and only the difference decided on the basis of the contemporary caste system. Nobody disagrees with the fact

that these notions are different. But the way the sociologists, without developing any understanding of the evolution and development of these categories, have presented the *varna* system as '**book view of caste**' and the *jatis* as '**field view of caste**' is totally ahistoric. Ancient history reveals it, that at those beginning phases, *jati* and *varna* were used synonymously. But when the word *varna vyavastha* was used, the implication was that the classic, idealized system of the four *varnas* was being discussed, which was mentioned for the first time in the '**Purushasukta**' of the later part of **Rgveda**, according to which the Vedic society was divided into four *varnas* – *Brahman*, *Rajanya*, *Vis* and *Śudra*. Using the word *jati* meant that we were talking of those tribal groups which were assimilated into the Vedic society, and depending on different influencing factors, were considered as a part of one or the other of the four *varnas*. But so long castes were yet to emerge, the words *Jati* and *Varna* were used synonymously. We witness use of the word *jati* for the first time in the period prior to circa 200 BC. **Suvira Jaiswal** considers that it was the period when the large-scale proliferation of castes was yet to be a wide-spread phenomenon, and the use of the word *jati* in the literature of the period immediately after the Vedic period, especially during the time of Buddha, was not itself a sign of a full-fledged caste system coming into existence. In effect, the word *jati* was still used to mean *varna* only. Historians are divided in their opinions about how the transition from *varna* towards *jati* took place, and to have a fair understanding, we must observe briefly the historiography of ancient India.

Origin and Development of the Caste System: Problems of Historiography

Suvira Jaiswal tells that both the words *varna* and *jati* are used in '**Ashtadhyayi**' of **Panini**. Panini belonged to the period around circa 200 BC. In '**Brhatsamhita**' of **Varnamihira** also *jati* and *varna* were used synonymously. But in '**Yajnyavalkyasmriti**' there is one instance where *jati* and *varna* come with different connotations, but, several times they are used synonymously also. Clearly, till 200 BC

the development of the system of castes did not reach a decisive stage.

Among the historians of ancient India, both **Iravati Karve** and **Romila Thapar** (notwithstanding having different opinions on numerous occasions) agree that the origin of caste system should actually be explored in the Harappan civilization before the arrival of the Aryans. Romila Thapar is of the opinion that, some basic elements of the caste system such as groups divided on the basis of heredity which controlled the institution of marriage, the idea of purity/pollution, and the elements of the *jajmani* system, were all incipient in the Harappan civilization itself. Romila Thapar concludes that the Great Bath of Mohen Jo-daro was actually meant for some ritual connected with purity/pollution. But this seems to be more like a flight of imagination based on a blend of fractured factums and evidence. Aryans are exonerated from the crime of introducing the caste system and varna system, and the caste-system becomes a natural endowment of the Indian subcontinent. That is, there is something (which is) completely Indian in the caste system. This becomes a prominent feature of the Indian way of life and system of ideas. Similar notions were forwarded earlier also. It is certainly not the motive of Romila Thapar to make an Indianized essentialization of the caste system, but on the objective plane, her thesis supports this conclusion. And the most significant thing is that, it has no evidence in its support, rather there are several contra-evidences.

If we make a perusal of the emergence of the caste system in the history of ancient India, we observe that it is inseparably linked with the emergence of classes, state, and patriarchy in the society. A consistent understanding of this history is essential because without it, the historicity of caste and the mindset connected with the caste system cannot be understood, and to us also the casteist mindset and the caste system will become a natural trait of the Indian people. A dialectical and historical materialistic interpretation of ancient Indian history, can be considered to begin with **Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi**. According to Kosambi one can find evidence of the beginning of the varna system at the end of

the R̥gvedic period. But, the system of castes does not grow simultaneously with it. When the Vedic civilization spread eastward from the north-western frontiers, caste emerged along with the assimilation of new tribes into the Vedic society. We will present our views on this interpretation in detail in the coming pages. **Morton Klass** also studies the origin of the caste system. Klass comes to the conclusion that castes originated right in the prehistoric era with the beginning of agriculture. The tribes having access to cultivable lands turned into high castes, whereas the tribes coming into this region from other areas became the lower castes. These castes voluntarily accepted their subordinate status vis-a-vis the other castes that already had the access to arable land and practised agriculture. But we can find no evidence in history to support this theory. The notion working behind this theory is that the caste system came into being with the beginning of surplus production i.e. with the beginning of agriculture. But surplus production cannot on its own create the caste system unless a Brahminical ideology also is present there. This Brahminical ideology was the ideological apparatus to institutionalize class division in the form of the system of varnas. This is the reason why caste system emerged in the north-east long after the stage of surplus production was reached and classes came into existence, when the Brahminical ideology gave this division of classes, its casteist form. Moreover, Morton Klass's theory of the transition from clans/tribes to castes can explain the emergence of those castes only who are engaged in production. In his schema, the origin of the brahmin caste itself, remains unexplained. Besides, Morton Klass is also incorrect when he opines that caste system emerged almost simultaneously in the entire Indian subcontinent. Historical evidence now reveal it clearly that caste system spread in the southern and eastern India afterwards, and it acquired an form vastly different from the caste system of the north and north-western India.

Besides this, there is also a **theory of the Dravidian origin** of the evolution of castes, according to which, the Dravidian civilization had some elements which gave birth to the caste system. One such

theory puts stress on the concept of *tinai*, in ancient south Indian Sangam literature. According to this, *tinai* is a word used to connote a region. Five *tinais* are mentioned which were occupied by different communities. The socio-economic conditions in these *tinais* were altogether different. In some places agrarian society was coming into existence, while in others, elements of the pastoral society still existed. Fishing was the mainstay of the economy in the *tinais* of the coastal areas. When fusion started between these societies, then people of *tinais* with advanced production relations started to construct higher castes. But this theory cannot properly explain the origins of the caste system. This is due to the fact that the *tinais* mention five different geographical-ecological regions, and the communities inhabiting these areas did not belong to a society divided into classes. The society whose characteristic feature is the caste system, is in reality a unified society with definite property relations.

Another reason that gave birth to the theory of Dravidian origin, is the theory of untouchability of the sacred communities in the Dravidian civilization. According to this theory, a holy man is actually a carrier of all sorts of impurities, and these deadly impurities resident in him are contagious. But here the relation of the pure and the polluted is just opposite to the one found in the caste system. Historical evidence have now demonstrated that the doctrine of purity/pollution can originate in many nomadic and pastoral societies, where often, according to a sociologist named **Bruce Lincoln**, rise priest and warrior classes. In this era of magical world outlook one class performs its role by sacrificing animals for enhancing the cattle wealth through rituals, while the other class performs the role of leadership in the process of capturing the cattle wealth of other tribes by attacking them. Other remaining classes formed the common plebeian masses. The first class forms the class of priests, and often constructs the doctrines of purity/pollution. But this class cannot by itself become the cause of the origin of the caste system. Thus, the theory of Dravidian origin also is a scheme only for which no historical evidence exists.

Kosambi's theories on the emergence of the *varna* system are significant. Many ideas of his theory were later found to be inappropriate. However, his methodology presents a consistent interpretation of the existing evidence and makes on its basis, extremely logical simulations about the unknown aspects. According to Kosambi, an Aryan community had already settled in the Indian subcontinent before the coming of the Vedic Aryans. Chances are there that this group got assimilated with the remaining elements of the Harappan Civilization. When the Vedic Aryans came, the people of this group clashed with them. In Ṛgveda these very people have been called *dasyu* or *dāsa*. A few positive comments have also been made about some powerful chiefs of these tribes/clans of *dasyus* or *dāsas*. The term *asura* has been used for them. But it seems that, at that time the word *asura* was used to mean a deity. Because we see that it has also been used for *Indra*, who was the chief *this-worldly* (*ih-laukik*) deity of the Vedic Aryans. For the deities of the *other-world* (*parlok*) the word *deva* was used. It has been said about these *dasyu/dāsas* that their complexion (*varna*) was nigrescent or dark which shows that they had undergone intermingling with the residual elements of the Harappan civilization, and this is quite possible that they mixed with the other aboriginal people as well. Many references of the clashes of the *dasyus/ dāsas* with the Aryans are found in the Ṛgveda. Eventually, these Vedic Aryans vanquished the *dāsas*. The meanings of the words '*asura*' and '*dāsa*' changed with the defeat of the *dāsas*. Since the word '*asura*' was used for the *dāsa* chieftains, so later the word '*sura*' came to be used for the Aryan chieftains/gods. When the *dāsas/dasyus* were completely brought under the subjugation of the Vedic Aryans, the modern meaning of the word '*dāsa*' i.e. a slave, came in use. These subjugated *dasyus/ dāsas* got transformed into the Śūdra caste. According to D. D. Kosambi, new production relations came into existence along with the Śūdra caste coming into being and with the Vedic Civilization reaching the Gangetic plains. With the expansion of agriculture and beginning of the use of iron, the stage of surplus production was attained. During the introduction of this stage, new tribes were getting assimilated in the society of Vedic Aryans. According to

Kosambi, with this, castes based on principle of endogamy came into being. Romila Thapar opines the same but in a slightly different manner. According to her, the vanquished tribes became the lower castes, whereas the victors became the upper castes.

According to Kosambi, the reference of the system of four *varnas* that we find in the '**Purushasukta**' of the **tenth *mandala*** of **R̥gveda** at almost the close of the earlier Vedic age, was in reality manifesting class-division only. According to him, the *varna* system in that primitive stage of production was indeed a symptom of class division, and what we are calling by the name *varna* in this stage, was actually class and nothing else. There is ample amount of historical evidence in support of this argument of Kosambi. For instance, the system of four *varnas* that is described in '**Purushasukta**', does not yet mention endogamy and hereditary division of labour. That is, none of the basic characteristic features by which we identify the caste system today, were in existence yet. Ramsharan Sharma has also confirmed it.

Kosambi has considered the birth of slave labour also, as one of the origins of the emergence of class division in the later half of the period of Vedic society. Definitely, in the Indian subcontinent slave-labour has never been used to that scale in productive activities, as the scale on which it was used in the ancient Greek or Roman civilizations. But the logic put forward by Kosambi in this context, and which seems to be correct, is that the emergence of slave labour, in a primitive tribal or a nomadic pastoral society has a significance in itself, and it makes no difference, that to what extent it was used in production activities. The moot point is that, whatever be the extent to which slave labour is put into use, it is a symptom of disintegration of communal relations. The coming into existence of the Śūdra *varna* in the later half of the R̥gvedic period and especially in the post-Vedic period, their use as slaves, the collusion of Brahmins and the Kṣatriyas to oppress and exploit the *Vaiśyas* to a certain extent, and to oppress and exploit the śūdras to the hilt, were the signs that class society had arrived. But we must present sufficient arguments

to show that, at this primitive stage of production, there was basically and mainly, an overlapping present between *varna* and class.

This aspect was elucidated by the excellent historian of ancient India **Ramsharan Sharma**. Sharma makes it clear that a stratification/categorization was in existence, there in the R̥gvedic age, but that could not be given the name 'class' yet. Slave labour was also present in the form of female slave labour only, who were not only engaged in domestic labour, but many a times they were used to replenish the depleted number of women in the victor tribes; i.e they got assimilated into the victorious tribe/caste. But neither was there surplus large enough yet, that these categories could transform into classes, nor did they acquire the traits of *varna* or caste, such as endogamy, hereditary occupation (division of labour), and rigid hierarchy. In the form of slave labour, there were Śūdras, who were none other than the subordinated *dasyus/dāsas*. Their children sired by the higher *varnas* used to be absorbed in the Vedic society without any discrimination. The social categorization between the four *varnas* that came into being in the later half of the R̥gvedic period, was not yet a *varna*/caste system as such, rather it was a manifestation of the embryonic class-division in the society. Ramsharan Sharma called it 'small scale non-monetary peasant society', in which inequity in distribution had already started, but powerful elements of tribal society (nomadic pastoral society) were still present. Around Circa 1000 BC to 700 BC, with the beginning of use of iron, the Gangetic plain was cleared off forests, use of iron plough was started, that enhanced productivity, and the amount of surplus production crossed the threshold, creating conditions conducive for the formation of class and state. Another historian **B. N. S. Yadav**, submitted some new evidence in support of Ramsharan Sharma's interpretation. He showed that this process of consolidation of class-society continued during the period extending from the 7th century BC to the 1st century AD. In this very period, new tribes got assimilated in the *varna*-based society and new castes came into being as a result of it. In this period another phenomenon also appeared on the scene. The hold of the Kṣatriyas

and the Brahmins on the Śūdras got weakened to a certain degree and the latter gradually started getting transformed into a dependent agrarian population in which previously, the vaiśyas were the majority. The vaiśyas who still pursued agricultural activities, were on the decline on the ritualistic plane and many of them started descending into the śūdra varna. The rest of them went on to take trade as their occupation. Thus, there was a fall in the population of the vaiśyas and they made trade their principal occupation.

What was the fundamental cause behind this change that appeared in the *varna*/caste system? The principal reason behind these changes was the emergence of a new mode of production and new production relations. We have evidence of land grants from the first century AD. Brahmins were the principal beneficiaries of these land grants. However, they were not the exclusive beneficiaries and sometimes it were the kṣatriyas while in the other cases it could be the vaiśyas as well. The brahmin-kṣatriya alliance had the main sway in the state authority. During the Maurya period, this feature was clearly visible in the state power. The main function of Brahmins was still priestly activities but with the emergence of feudalism in its embryonic form and with Brahmins becoming the recipients of land grants, changes appeared in their character. They were now also emerging as landlords. The character of the kṣatriya *varna* was already that of warriors and landlords. The brahmin-kṣatriya alliance still assumed the role of ruling class. However, during seven hundred years from the fourth century to eleventh century AD to mature, when feudal production relations kept developing, there appeared fundamental changes in the roles of the four *varnas*. We would discuss more about it afterwards.

Suvira Jaiswal agrees with the description of the feudal mode of production as given by Ramsharan Sharma and B.N.S Yadav. According to her, the objection raised by **Harbans Mukhia**, that the then prevalent social formation could not be called feudal because serfdom did not have any significant presence, as inconsequential. Indian feudalism did not need serfs as a separate class. The subordinate status of the śūdras and the untouchable castes fulfilled

this need. Many times, the śūdras became sharecroppers. Actually the partial overlapping that can still be seen to this day between the landless labourers and the lower castes has its roots in the times of feudalism itself. Jaiswal argues that ignoring the class functions of the caste system would be tantamount to ignoring its economic and political aspects. And if these fundamental economic and political aspects of the caste system are neglected, then nothing remains of it other than endogamy and hereditary division of labour. In such a case, caste system would become an ahistoric part of the Indian life, history and society, without any beginning or end, and hence also a natural element of Indian life, history and society. It is known to us that many ideologues and organizations who talk about dalit liberation, say similar things on this question and unwittingly naturalize the caste system. This leads towards the idealization and, in a way, legitimization of the caste system. According to Suvira Jaisawal, in the context of Indian society before the arrival of colonialism, we can find numerous evidence showing that whenever there was a relation of **correspondence** between the caste system and class division, the caste hierarchy got reinforced and became more rigid; on the other hand, wherever and whenever the ritualistic hierarchy present among the castes stood in opposition to the dynamics of class division, a process of fusion and fission was engendered within the caste system, which brought in significant changes in the caste hierarchy in a gradual process.

Suvira Jaisawal has criticized Kosambi, Ramsharan Sharma and Irfan Habib for making an external factor, viz, assimilation of new tribes into the folds of the Vedic society, responsible for the emergence of castes within the *varna* system. Whereas it is true on the one hand that the eastward expansion of the Vedic Civilization and the assimilation of new tribes within it gave birth to the castes, concurrently it is also true that if the elements of caste division (namely, the hereditary division of labour and *varna* division on the basis of the elements of endogamy) did not already exist within the *varna* system then the mere induction of new tribes will not by themselves give rise to new castes. According to Suvira Jaisawal,

this belief that the pre-Vedic tribes used to follow endogamy while there was no such culture among the Vedic Aryans is false. She has given evidence to the contrary that with the emergence of patriarchy, the tradition of clan endogamy was on the way out, and with the imposition of subordinate status on women, the seeds of caste endogamy were sown. Moreover, we can find evidence of existence of such pre-Vedic tribes, where the tradition of endogamy was still absent. Therefore, it cannot be argued that castes based on the practice of endogamy emerged only with the assimilation of new tribes within the fold of the Vedic society. On the other hand, it was in the Vedic society along with the origin of the caste of śūdras only that the process of treating certain forms of manual labour as inferior had begun. In such a scenario, when the tribes having expertise in the new kinds of productive labour were included in the Vedic society, they were included in the form of different castes and at the same time the hereditary division of labour also began. This was the reason why the entire tribe did not get transformed into a single caste. Rather what happened was that the upper priest class got assimilated with the Brahmins and other classes with the other varnas of the Vedic society. A lot of people from several tribes also got assimilated with the kṣatriya varna. In a nutshell, it can be said that the ground for castes based on endogamy and hereditary division of labour had already been existing in the Vedic society and that is why the assimilation of the new tribes into the Vedic society could become as a factor in the origin of castes. The assimilation of other tribes into the vedic varna system continued right up to the later half of the middle ages. This could not be in itself the main force behind the creation of castes. In this context the position taken by Subira Jaisawal appears to be more balanced. In all these developments, it was the internal process of class division within the Vedic society which was mainly responsible. The inclusion of the external tribes into the Vedic varna system was continued till the latter half of medieval era. It on its own could not have become the reason for the emergence of caste. Suvira Jaiswal's stand on this subject appears to be more balanced.

If we look into the history of the period from the end of the Vedic period to the beginning of the period of ancient republics, one thing clearly emerges out. Origin of the *varna* system and the coming of castes into existence was an extensive and complex historical process. Several aspects of that period still remain untouched and do not have enough evidence related to them. But this much is certain that the *varna* system was constantly dynamic right from its inception. Even the form which the caste system assumed after the emergence of castes was also dynamic. The *prime mover* behind their dynamism was the changes that occurred in the mode of production and the production-relations. The *varna*-class overlap is clearly visible at the time of emergence of the class society. However, this overlapping could not last very long and it was bound to be ultimately transformed into a relation of correspondence.

The reason behind this is that the *varna* system at the moment of its inception was the ideological legitimization of the existing class relations, but it was an ideological legitimization which was peculiar in itself. In all the societies of the world, with the emergence of class rule, there evolved ideologies to legitimize the rule of the ruling class. But in India this ideology had not only taken a religious form, but got ossified into a ritualistic form. Obviously, when a ruling class under its rule uses its ideology to ossify the prevalent structure of class divisions in the society ritualistically then that ideological legitimization fails to keep itself in conformity with the motion of development of production relations and mode of production. In such a situation a gap will arise in the old ideological legitimization or the ideologically ossified form of previous class divisions and the new class divisions. Surely, this gap does not mean that there will be co-relation or correspondence between the class divisions prevailing in the society and its ideological ritualistic legitimization. What it means is that whenever a radical change in the class divisions takes place, there will be tremors in the old ritualistic structure and it will need some corresponding adjustments.

Such changes abound in the entire history of caste system and caste ideology. And these changes have taken place spatially as well as temporally. That is to say in the same era the caste hierarchies have been different in different regions. For instance, by the time the Vedic Civilization reached the societies of southern and the eastern India, the agrarian economy was already considerably developed and the status of the agrarian castes within the caste system too underwent changes. Consequently, we do not find kṣatriya and vaiśya varnas in these regions. We will discuss these later. But at present it is sufficient to point it out that one can find radical changes and diversities in the caste-system, spatially as well temporally. There is just one feature in the *varna*/caste-system that persists. What is it? It is that the ritualistic caste divisions which take place on the basis of class structure of any region depends on the brahmanical ideology, which in turn based on the doctrine of purity/pollution. However, the consequent caste hierarchy which arises out of it, varies in different regions based on the prevailing production relations and the production system. This becomes still clearer if we look at the changes which have taken place in the entire *varna*/caste system and the status of different *varnas*/castes along with the changes in the production relations.

Changes in the Status of Different *varnas*/castes with the Changes in the Mode of Production and Production Relations

Suvira Jaisawal has drawn our attention towards the changes in the status of the Brahmin *varna*/caste in the caste system. It could be clearly seen that the changes taking place in the production relations and class structure were the main cause behind these changes as well. **Romila Thapar** has shown that in a nomadic pastoral society the main source of income of the Brahmins was in form of gifts presented to them. This source was declared as the only permitted source of income even in the contemporary religious *samhitas* (codes). However, with the transition to agriculture, land grants replaced gifts of things. This practice of land grants transformed the

Brahmins, who were earlier priests only, into landlords also. This brought in a significant change in the status of Brahmins. When we move onwards from the Vedic period to the history of the *janapadas* and then to the Mauryan period, we see Brahmins assuming the positions of the rulers also. Many such states developed whose rulers happened to be Brahmin. Now the functions of kṣatriyas, who were earlier believed to be inferior to Brahmins, were no longer treated as prohibited or lowly for Brahmins. On the contrary the status of such Brahmins was elevated in the caste hierarchy. What is surprising is that by the early medieval era those Brahmins began to be treated as inferior who used to take alms or do priestly work, and the status of those Brahmins got rose in the rank who had become rulers-administrators or landlords. Why did these changes take place? Clearly, the transition from a pre-feudal social formation to a feudal social formation, brought in fundamental changes in the status of the Brahmins. Besides, a lot of new castes came into being within the Brahmin caste. The emergence of the caste of brahm-kṣatriya, as mentioned by Suvira Jaisawal, can have three probable sources; first, matrimonial relations between the Brahmins and kṣatriyas; second, the function of kṣatriyas viz., governance-administration, being adopted by Brahmins, and third, the prior existence of the root of such a caste (brahm-kṣatriya) in the form of the Puru clan.

The way in which the status of brahmins in the caste hierarchy and their functions as determined by caste ideology underwent changes, we can observe similar changes among the kṣatriyas as well. New castes emerged from within the kṣatriyas which had diverse sources. For instance, we have now sufficient historical sources regarding the formation of *Rajput* caste which show that this caste did not possess the status of kṣatriyas *varna* from the beginning. This caste was formed by the fusion between the Indianized foreign elements that conquered other tribes and established their rule and the members coming from other *varnas* and some native tribes. This was a warrior landowning caste formed by the amalgamation of the elements coming from different sources. This caste established matrimonial alliances with the kṣatriyas and other upper castes as well which

elevated their ritualistic status. In this entire process the people of this community adopted the name of *rajputra* which subsequently turned into Rajput.

In south India there existed no such warrior tribes. There the emerging land-owning peasant castes performed the functions of the warrior tribes. Consequently, no *kṣatriya varna* appeared there. When the process of state formation among the agriculture-based tribes reached a decisive stage, big regional states came into being. The kings of these states came from the peasant communities only. And then the Brahmins from north India were in a way imported into these states. These Brahmin elements also got fused with the priestly elements within those tribes and they formed the Brahmin castes in south India. The ruling peasant castes were assimilated in the *varna* system as *śūdras* by these Brahmins. However, the status of *śūdras* here was not the same as that in north and north-western India. They were included in the *śūdras varna* as castes because by then, *śūdras* had become the main peasant caste in the core regions where caste system had emerged. The status of the *śūdras* in south India was much better because they were not only an agrarian caste, but they were the ruling class as well. Thus, for instance, one such caste, *vellala* in south India has been referred to as the patrons/protectors of Brahmins. Since, Brahmins had the ritualistic “power”, therefore, no other caste could perform their functions. But the character of the conventional power of the *kṣatriya* was not other-worldly, but this-worldly, and hence the tasks which were traditionally reserved for them could be carried out by any other caste. In south India, this task was carried out by *Vellala* caste which enjoyed quite a high status in the south Indian caste hierarchy. Here those who were dependent, exploited and having slave-like status were termed as *asat śūdras*. It was easier for brahmins to put forth such a proposition because long ago a distinction had been made between ‘hīna’ and ‘ahīna’ *śūdras* in Brahman Samhitas. There were some *śūdras* whose pollution could not be rectified, whereas there were others whose pollution was not contagious and could be remedied. It was on this basis that the *Vellalas* were termed as **Sat**

śūdras whose position was quite high up in the caste system while the *adi-dravid* castes were termed as **Asat** śūdras whose position became similar to the serfs and extremely poor artisan castes, much like that of the śūdras in the Vedic period in north and north-western India.

In Eastern India, too, such peasant castes came into being that reached the position of the ruling class. There too, no separate vaiśya & kṣatriya varnas came into being. Therefore, in Eastern and Southern India, we come across only two *varnas*—brahmin and śūdra. In the coming centuries new castes were born within these very *varnas*—sometimes with the assimilation of new tribes and at other times, owing to the process of disintegration and fusion among the already existing castes. In this way, vaidyas and kayashtas came into existence in Bengal.

Ramsharan Sharma has shown how cultivation, which was originally an occupation of the vaiśyas, became the principal occupation of the śūdras. According to him, as the feudal practice of land grants started, the migration of brahmins to new areas led to the assimilation of new tribes into the *varna* system. These new tribes were assimilated in the śūdra *varna* and agriculture became their main occupation. However, according to Suvira Jaiswal, with the advent of feudal mode of production, manual agricultural labour gradually became an ignoble occupation. And with this, the new peasant castes were inducted into the Vedic society as śūdras and not as vaiśyas. Besides, those vaiśyas also who remained attached with agricultural occupation gradually turned into śūdras. Those vaiśyas, who took to trading on the basis of accumulated agricultural surplus, succeeded in retaining their vaiśya status. Thus, with the emergence of the feudal mode of production, and the concurrent induction of new tribes into the Vedic society, the pattern of traditionally-determined occupation for vaiśyas and śūdras changed. Earlier the vaiśyas were mainly engaged in farming, and a section of the poor śūdras too were attached to the land as dependent cultivators. Both **Ramsharan Sharma** and **Suvira Jaiswal** have shown, how the connotation of the word '**Gr̥hapati**' was originally

used to mean the chief of a tribal clan, but went through a gradual change and came to be understood as the head of a peasant family in the era of Buddha. By following the gradual evolution of this term, we can get a complete description of how the division of labour, between the vaiśyas and śūdras (agriculture and trade) evolved.

Suvira Jaiswal also describes how the four varnas appeared in Maharashtra and Gujarat and how the new tribes got assimilated in all the four varnas. The reason behind it was that the spread of brahminical society, culture, and ideology had already begun before the rise of feudalism in those regions, i.e. between 500 BC & 200 AD. The change that came into the status of different *varna/jatis* brought in significant changes in the entire caste hierarchy as well. There are sufficient evidence to substantiate that the changes that took place in mode of production and production relations have time and again exerted pressure to usher change in the *varna*/caste system from within. **A gap between caste and class always remained, but only a blind can claim that there is no clear correspondence between them. There have been times when this gap appears wider, and there have been times when it appears less.** At a particular moment in the dialectics of production relations and development of productive forces, untouchability was born. It is imperative to understand that process too.

Development of Untouchability: The Highest Stage of Development of Relations of Feudal Exploitation

With the emergence of *asat śūdras* in southern and eastern India and with the transformation of the *śūdras* into mainly peasant castes in northern and north-western India, the Untouchables (*achūt*) came into existence as the most subjugated, most oppressed and exploited section of the society, who later came to known as dalits. We have already mentioned that the religious codes had made a distinction between the *hīna* and *ahīna śūdras* long ago. For example, chandal caste was counted as *śūdra* in the *varna* system,

but it was placed in the category of hīna śūdras. On the one hand untouchability came into existence among those who were at the lowest rung among the śūdras, while on the other hand, when some forms of manual labour were declared to be of extremely inferior kind during the process of the development of feudal production relations, then the element of untouchability was appended to the castiest ideology of purity/pollution. We can see that the idea purity/pollution has been present in the brahminical ideology as a variable. That is why many castes were declared to be untouchables much later. For instance, nowhere in the Vedic sources, occupations connected with leather work, or the caste of tanners and cobblers (*charmakar*) who did these jobs, were declared lowly or inferior. Just the opposite, it was customary to carry various materials required for the Vedic rituals, only in leather bags. It was in the 8th and the 9th century that the *charmakaras* were declared untouchables.

According to the thoughts of **Bhimrao Ambedkar** regarding the origin of untouchability, it was a conscious and deliberate act of the brahmins to make some castes untouchable; especially those who had been involved in resistance, still indulged in beef-eating and also adopted the Buddhist religion. But **Vivekananda Jha** has refuted this line of argument with evidence. Jha has demonstrated that the rise of untouchability had no relation with beef-eating and adopting the Buddhist religion. It was closely connected with the development of the feudal mode of production, which in order to make the exploitation and oppression of the exploited and the oppressed castes structural, gave this exploitation and oppression the extreme expression of untouchability. Some other scholars have also worked to explore the origin of untouchability, for example **G.L. Hart** who opines that untouchability was a product of the ancient Tamil society; **N. K. Dutta** considers the attitude of the Dravida communities towards the non-Dravidian communities to be the origin of untouchability; the German scholar **Fürer-Haimendorf** sees the development of urban civilization as the reason behind untouchability. However, Vivekanand Jha's work on this subject is considered to be the finest. He has shown that it was not the notion of purity and

pollution which made certain tasks so inferior that people performing these tasks were declared untouchables; rather, the exploitation of some classes became so naked and barbaric, that the concept of pollution was attached to their occupation and the people in these occupations were declared untouchables. As it is its wont, the brahminical ideology has given the class division and exploitation a ritualistic form. Needless to reiterate, we are not talking about overlapping of class and caste here, but religious ritualistic legitimation and ossification of the relations of exploitation and oppression that are inherent in the entire socio-economic formation. In this entire structure, as we have already mentioned, a relation of correspondence exists between caste and class.

Ramsharan Sharma, has clearly shown that the casteist restrictions and stereotypes pertaining to commensality, matrimonial alliances and untouchability too, have undergone a process of evolution and development. **Suvira Jaisawal** and **D.D. Kosambi** also have shown that there is indeed a history of the development of the idea of purity/pollution. The task of framing and propounding these ideas was done by the brahmins, both as a part of the ruling class as well as its ideologues. The function of these ideas was to provide permanence to the dominant relations of exploitation by ritualistically ossifying them. Whenever the old ritualistic structure became suffocatingly restrictive for the changes taking place in the class-equations, necessary adjustments and modifications were done in this structure. In this entire process, by the medieval period, among brahmins too, such divisions were created that some brahman castes were pauperized. In particular, there was a decline in the material and ritualistic status of those brahmins who used to live on alms and donations (*dān-dakshina*). **Declan Quigley** has mentioned the case of untouchable brahmins in his book '*The Interpretation of Caste*'. Thus, the status of the entire brahmin population too was not fixed and impervious to any change.

Vivekananda Jha has mentioned **four stages** in the origin and development of the untouchable castes, for which historical evidence are available. The first stage was the Vedic period. There is no

mention of untouchability in the R̥gvedic period. Even in the later Vedic period the Chandalas are mentioned as hīna śūdras and a sense of repulsion is expressed towards them but there is no mention of untouchability in clear terms. The second stage was from 700 BC to 200 AD. Some castes clearly emerged as untouchable castes in this period. This is the period when slave-labour was extensively used in the economy, and the first century AD saw the rise of feudal mode of production. The third stage was from 200 AD to 600 AD. In this period, some new tribal groups were inducted in the Aryan Vedic society as untouchable castes. And the fourth stage was from 600 AD to 1200 AD which is the high period of feudalism, and this is when untouchability appears on a large scale as a phenomenon. B.N.S. Yadav has drawn attention towards the fact that villages gained significance with the development of feudal economy, and there came a system of stable and static, which did not permit any mobility to the oppressed and exploited castes, especially to the artisanal castes. For Yadav, this factor also gave impetus to untouchability since it further degraded the lowest sections of the population.

While Buddhism and Jainism challenged the hegemony of the brahmins, they failed to pose any serious challenge to the varna/caste system; rather, these religions strengthened the varna/caste system in certain respects. **Irfan Habib** writes that Buddhism and Jainism have rejected the religious legitimation of the caste system, but have accepted the caste system as a reality of the society. This seems to be correct because the prejudices that exist in these religions against slaves, farmers under debt, and along with them against women, is explicitly clear. When the vaiśya trading castes with their rising economic might opposed the brahmin hegemonism and entered into the fold of Jainism, elements of the caste system also in a way penetrated Jainism, because the vaiśya castes there too continued to follow the rigid conventions of caste-based occupations and endogamy. It would not be incorrect to say that today Jainism has to a large extent been transformed into an appendage of Hinduism. Irfan Habib also remarks that the emphasis

on the principle of *karma* and non-violence by Buddhism in fact proved to be an anathema for the untouchable population, because while laying stress on these values, the occupations which were declared as lowly were generally the occupations of the untouchable castes. Buddhism also largely became irrelevant with the emergence of *Vaishnava* and *Shaiva* sects in the Hinduism and also due to the fact that it showed even more enthusiasm in prohibiting cow-slaughter. It was not due to the reason that Hinduism had re-established its claim on the notion of purity, as claims Louise Dumont; rather due to the fact that Hinduism had once more got into step with the production relations of the changing times. Seen in this way Hinduism is a remarkably flexible religion, and as Weber has said, it is actually not a religion at all in the classical sense (however, this idea is incorrect as, according to **Weber** whereas a religion thrives on **dogma**, **doxa** prevails in Hinduism); **Ambedker**, in a way was right to remark that the core value of Hinduism is the caste system. In fact, this caste system too enhances the flexibility of Hinduism. The ideology of caste has given a useful instrument to the ruling classes through all the ages. It is such a flexible ideology, which, in all ages and especially in the pre-capitalist societies, provides the ruling classes with an instrument to consolidate their rule. It gives religious legitimation to the naked and barbaric exploitation of the ruling classes, and assumes the form of ritualistic ossification. Definitely, due to this ideology there persists a difference between caste and class. But until all the economic and political registers of caste essentially disappear (as it happened with the rise of the capitalist mode of production), a profound correspondence remains between caste and class. At least the history of India stands as a testimony to this fact. The caste ideology remains autonomous from the system of class in a certain sense. And it is essential for the caste ideology to exist in that way, if it wishes to remain really effective.

If the caste ideology were to reflect the class division, then it would lose all its divinity and aura. We should not forget that caste ideology is a religious ideology, which obtains its

authority from religion, through occupational and matrimonial restrictions, and on the basis of purity/pollution, to justify its hierarchy. Obviously, if we comprehend this, then it becomes easier for us to realize that caste can never perfectly overlap with class. They can have a relation of correspondence only. But definitely, caste ideology from the time of its inception to this day has been providing an enormously powerful instrument to the ruling class in different forms. On the one hand it keeps the poor toiling masses under structural subordination, and at the same time it keeps them divided among themselves in so many castes. But the caste ideology performs this task in different ways, keeping itself in conformity with different modes of production.

It is this utility of the caste ideology that made it tolerable to the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, or rather we should say that it made itself desirable to them. **Irfan Habib** has shown that the Muslim rulers have not only kept themselves away from tampering with the caste system, they never even mouthed a couple of bad words against it. The only Muslim observer who has made a mild criticism of the caste system was a scientist namely, Al-Beruni. But if we leave this exception, then the Muslim rulers per-se have never objected against caste oppression and repression. On the contrary, when the Arabs conquered Sind, the commander of the army sanctioned the terrible casteist oppression of the Jatt population. Islam criticizes the Hinduism only for idol worship and polytheism. But it views the caste system with jealousy! The Quran only mentions the distinction between a slave and a free man; had it not been so, the religious leaders and administrators might have tried to co-opt this system in their own way! And in practice, the caste system has successfully made inroads into the Islamic society. The people from the dalits and the lower castes who adopted Islam came to be known as *kamins*, which means inferior and lowly. All of this does not mean that the caste system possesses some deadly but divine weapon that pollutes everything that comes into its contact, but itself never perishes. It only means that, in all ages the

casteist ideology has presented itself to the rulers who came to India, as a readymade, extremely flexible, and useful tool for the legitimization its exploitation. In such a case, why should any ruling class shy away from putting it into use? This is the reason why the caste system remained intact as a useful ideology providing religious ritualistic legitimization to class exploitation throughout the medieval era.

Historicity and Contemporaneity of Caste in Modern India: A Brief Note.

With the start of the colonial era, the caste system went through a few significant changes. The principal factors behind these changes can be observed on different levels.

At one level the contemporary form of the caste system and caste hierarchy itself was consolidated with certain changes. For instance, in 1793 when Permanent Settlement was implemented, it provided a base for the exploitation and oppression of the landless dalit castes. At the same time, the Ryotwari land settlement made one section of peasant castes, which was already showing upward mobility, owners of land. Mahalwari settlement in a way passed the control over the land to the chief of the village community. The land reforms brought by the British did not make any appreciable change in the casteist hierarchy and equations prevalent in different areas. If anything came out of it, it was that, that a thorough arrangement was made to keep the dalit population in a perpetual state of structural oppression, exploitation and repression even in the future. In some places their oppressors were the old upper castes viz. the brahmin and the kṣatriya castes (e.g. in the United Province and Northern India) and in others they belonged to the emerging peasant castes which although had the status of śūdras in the ritualistic hierarchy, but economically and politically their condition had improved.

Yet another level at which the British had influenced the caste system was development of industries to a certain extent and their role in bringing in the railways. Marx had foretold that the hereditary

division of labour, which prevailed in the caste system, would begin to break with the development of railways and industries. Broadly this formulation proved to be correct. The British did not develop the industries on very large scale. In a way the old industries were destroyed and some new industrial centres had developed whose task was to supply the raw material. But among the proletariat which had grown in the industrial centres such as Calcutta, Bombay, Surat, Ahmedabad etc. the rigid hereditary division of labour was obviously not possible within it. It is true that this proletariat was largely composed by dalit and people from lower castes. But there happened to be a rigid occupational divide among these castes themselves. The process of disintegration of this rigid hereditary division of labour had begun in the British period. Surely, after independence and with the capitalist development, this process unfolded with much rapidity. However it is an undisputable fact that its seed were sown in the colonial era itself.

The third level at which the British colonial state left a profound impact on the caste system is the one which we have already discussed above. The colonial state reconstructed the whole concept of the caste system. The belief of Nicholas Dirks and other followers of **Subaltern Studies** like him, that caste is an Orientalist construct of the colonial state, would be a kind of subjectivism. No state can ever make a construct of any such divide from the above, unless that division has a history of its own. It must certainly be accepted that the fetish of the the British ethnographic state to count, enumerate, classify and systematize the castes did indeed shake the division and hierarchy in the castes once and made it rigid in a new way. Historians like **Arjan Appadurai**, **Bernard. S. Cohn**, **Susan Bayly**, and **Nicholas Dirks** have written profusely on this whole process. The criticism of people like Dirks by Susan Bayly, **Sumit Guha** and **Richard Eaton** is correct that he fails to see the the collaboration between the colonial state and the native elites, including the brahmins also, which led to the reconstruction of the caste system in its modern form. Nor the Subaltern historians are able to understand that the theory of construction of caste by the colonial state for the

oppression of the Indian people is like a conspiracy theory which fails to explain that in reality the archives of colonial knowledge, that the colonial state had been building up, was its own necessity, i.e., the necessity of ruling in more effectively. This whole exercise was not for the project of cultural domination rather definite political and economic factors were at work behind it.

Declan Quigley has rightly termed this approach as Idealist. Quigley says that the outcome of the ideas of people like Nicholas Dirks, **Ronald Inden**, etc is that caste becomes a mental construct, a linguistic jugglery. This point of view a moral 'crusade' born out of a kind of imperialist guilt-conscience, which holds imperialism guilty of those crimes, which it simply did not commit. But these of kind of ideologies which work behind this entire exercise end up strengthening imperialism itself. Because in the present era, imperialism is in a direct alliance with the revivalist Fascist forces. They have also the same argument that it was the British who created caste and before that, in Hinduism, we had a division of labour which was based on *karma* only, not on birth.

It is evident that with the development of capitalism and large scale industries and with the further development of urbanization, the two aspects of caste system are moving towards an end. First, the hereditary division of labour. Determining the occupation or job on the basis of birth is now a thing of the past. The caste character still manifests itself in some occupations in the field of self-employment, for example, washermen, barbers, etc. But this is no more a rigid division of labour, which cannot be transcended. Moreover, commensal prejudices too have been broken to a large extent, because it cannot be continued in the same way in the new kinds of villages, and in the cities and towns their complete disappearance is inevitable. We may say that these two registers of caste have weakened to such an extent that in the near future they will become extinct. These two aspects are not congruent with the capitalist mode of production and production relations, therefore, with the advent of capitalism they were bound to meet this fate. We will not say it in the words of Irfan Habib that the social and economic

registers of caste are fading away. But surely the two aspects of caste which we mentioned above, namely, commensal prejudices and hereditary division of labour, are heading towards the end.

There is yet another aspect which is still intact and that is the practice of caste endogamy. It is so because it does not have any conflict with the capitalist mode of production. Actually it is better for capitalism, and is in conformity with it. Even the persistence of patriarchy in a new form in capitalism is due to this very reason. And both these factors reinforce each other; that is to say, the patriarchy reinforces the capitalist system based on caste endogamy and the capitalist caste reinforces capitalist patriarchy. And these two join hands together to allow the capitalist system and the bourgeoisie to streamline its machinery of oppression and exploitation. In one aspect capitalism stands apart from all other pre-capitalist systems. It does not look for any other-worldly power to obtain the legitimation of its rule. It gets the legitimation of its rule from the 'consent' of the masses. This is what **Gramsci** names as hegemony. The rule of the capitalist class is based on hegemony and not on the direct domination. In this system the capitalist class manufactures 'consent' for its rule. In such a system the ideology of caste cannot be the ideology that provides legitimation to the ruling class and its rule as it used to do earlier. In fact, no religious ideology is any more able to perform this task because the legitimation of the rule in its entirety is, by its own nature, no more other-worldly, but has become this-worldly. However, the question of caste system is not linked with the state only. Over the centuries the casteist mentality and ideology, with the various changes it has undergone, has been made to permeate every pore of the Indian psyche. The core of the casteist mentality and ideology is the hierarchy determined on the basis of purity/pollution, and not a particular caste hierarchy, that prevailed during a particular historical era. This casteist ideology works in subtle forms and it does not always require invocation by the ruling classes. No capitalist ruling class can draw its legitimation from the caste ideology, but can use the caste ideology in two ways. One, to

keep sections of the exploited working masses divided on casteist lines, and along with it, as a instrument to construct hegemony in its favour. We can see the naked run of this entire process during the bourgeois elections. Besides, as we have mentioned elsewhere, different factions of the ruling class in their mutual rivalry use caste equations, albeit rulers of every caste without fail, stand united against the people.

The capitalist development of agriculture has brought in many significant changes in the caste structure during the last fifty years. We can see these changes in the upsurge of the middle peasant castes. Over the whole region from South India to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Punjab right up to Gujarat, it is a well-recognized phenomenon. Most of these middle castes are backward castes whose ritualistic status is that of Śūdra. However, in their own areas they have become economically and politically powerful, dominating castes. All other castes, which include the brahmins and *thakurs* remain under their domination. We may call these castes kulak castes as well. Sociologists like **Gloria Raheja**, **McKim Marriott** etc have made considerable efforts to theoretically formulate this entire phenomenon. Raheja while making a study of a village Pahansu of Uttar Pradesh tells that in this village Gujjars are the dominant caste with all the other castes surrounding it. Here Raheja presents the theory of '**centrality of the dominant caste**' and tells that it is the Gujjar caste that gives gifts and donations to all the other castes, but apart from *kanyadaan* (a ritual of donating girl performed during wedding) it does not accept any donation. Giving donations is symbolic of their elevated status. The relation of the Gujjars with other castes is the relation of authority and power, but no such mutual hierarchy is seen in the rest of the castes.

There is yet another phenomenon which we can consider as an outcome of the domination of the capitalist mode of production. It is the decline in the status of the brahmins living on alms and donations. In some places, their status has become just like that of the dalits. In our opinion, the reason behind it is that, in a capitalist society only exchange gets recognition or it is the practice offering

gifts among people of equivalent status (of course, we all know that this also is a kind of exchange only, and nothing else!). With the emergence of capitalist social formation decline in the material and ritualistic status of brahmins who live on alms and donations is quite normal and it can be understood.

Epilogue

All sorts of phenomena can be enumerated which have occurred in the caste system with the emergence of the capitalist mode of production; the capitalist system of production would definitely not put an end to the caste system. The caste system provides it with continuity of property relations in the form of caste endogamy and also a powerful political instrument to divide the masses. With capitalist development and emergence of a massive class of proletariat, the aspect of gap in the correspondence between class and caste has increased considerably. This correspondence becomes visible only with incisive study. For instance, in the present times, this correspondence between class and caste can be seen more strongly among the class of landless peasants. But the population of the other backward castes and the middle castes has rapidly grown in the entire proletariat. But the weakening of the correspondence between caste and class has created an opportunity for capitalism to use caste ideology. While on the one hand, conditions of spontaneous breaking up of caste bonds in the working class arise; on the other hand, the ruling classes also get an opportunity to divide the proletariat on caste lines. Had this gap been small and had 80 to 90 percent of the proletariat come from the dalit castes, the scope of use of the caste ideology to divide it would have been less.

Therefore, the caste ideology is providing a powerful weapon to capitalism to divide the proletariat and, through caste endogamy, maintain the continuity of the sacred bourgeois property. Therefore, it would be foolish to expect capitalism to put an end to the caste system. But at the same time it is also essential to understand that the caste system has not remained the same from its inception; it has been continuously changing, and the principal factors behind these changes have been the changes in production relations, mode of production, and class contradictions. It is also evident that the caste system has come into existence along with class, state and patriarchy and has become an instrument for their legitimation.

Therefore, till class, state and patriarchy exist in any form, the caste contradictions, ideology and mentality too will continue to exist. Only a struggle for a classless society can be a struggle for a casteless society. This certainly does not mean that the question of caste should be pushed under the carpet till the time, the struggle for a classless society reaches completion. On the contrary, it means that from this day itself the proletariat in its struggle against capitalism, has to wage a war against all these ideologies, identities which break it, divide it and disintegrate its resistance. Without a relentless, untiring propaganda against caste and casteism the proletariat cannot be organized against capitalism and without the establishment of a socialist state under the leadership of the proletariat and without marching forward to a classless communist society, caste and casteism can never be destroyed.

Certainly, it was not a comprehensive and complete account of historiography of caste, nor is it proper to expect this from an paper. More than just presenting historical facts, our objective was to reject every kind of reification of the caste/varna system (be it done by the post-modernists, Orientalists etc., be it done by the state, or then, done by the religious authorities, or else, by those who themselves practice identity politics on the basis of caste), every kind of its *valorization*, every kind of idealization, essentialization, and naturalization; to understand the caste system in its historicity and dynamism; to comprehend the essential character of this historicity and dynamism, that is to say, to understand the dynamics of production relations, mode of production, and class contradictions; and to grasp the fact that if the varna/caste system which, through its origin and development over some thousands of years, determined by its socio-economic context and background has reached this juncture, then the same would happen in future as well.

To say that, 'caste determines everything' would be reductionism to the same extent, as it is to say that 'only economic factors determine everything', and Marx and Engels have rejected determinism of all shades in the characterization of a social phenomenon and have advocated a dialectical and

historical materialist method. If it is understood that the caste/varna system has a beginning, then we can think about the projects to put an end to it in a more meaningful way. Without understanding it in its historicity, we will be either a victim of defeatism or pessimism, or else, of a pseudo-optimism which is always more dangerous than pessimism. The only objective of this essay of ours was to present in all humility, a historical understanding of the caste system, and if we have been able to present even a hazy portrait, we will consider ourselves successful.

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THE TRAGIC REGRESSION OF ANAND TELTUMBDE – FROM ‘MAHAD THE MAKING OF FIRST DALIT REVOLT’ TO ‘BRIDGING THE UNHOLY RIFT’

A year ago, I had read Anand Teltumbde's book 'Mahad: The Making of the First Dalit Revolt'. I found it to be a research work of the first degree and probably the best on the subject so far. Though the book never directly criticizes the Deweyan Pragmatism of Dr. Ambedkar, yet, through the comprehensive account of his political practice in the 1920s and early-1930s, the book reveals the extent of the impact of Deweyan Pragmatism on Ambedkar, especially for those who know what Deweyan Pragmatism is. For me, the book was extremely useful and I have prescribed the book in my talks and presentations throughout the country and outside the country as well. I considered it a commendable and rigorous fact-based research, despite the fact that the portion of historiography of caste was weak in the book. Therefore, when I came to know that Teltumbde has written the introduction of Dr. Ambedkar's unfinished manuscript 'India and Communism', I bought it immediately in the hope that Teltumbde would have presented an objective account of Ambedkar's relation with Marxist philosophy as well as Indian communists.

However, reading the introduction, which is named 'Bridging the Unholy Rift', came as a shocker to me, indeed a tragic one.

This 'Introduction' named 'Bridging the Unholy Rift' is not only full of factual and logical mistakes but also shows that Teltumbde understands the least about Marxism. He distorts facts about Ambedkar's attitude towards communist philosophy, his attitude towards Indian communists (howsoever ideologically weak they were!) and makes a shame-faced attempt to make Ambedkar a sympathizer of Marxist philosophy. Anyone who has read Ambedkar

knows that such a claim would be nothing less than a travesty of facts, a mockery of history. This attempt leads Teltumbde, first, to make a liberal appropriation of Marx, Engels and the entire Marxist philosophy and then show the vicinity of pragmatist liberalism of Ambedkar to Marxism as a science of revolution. Such wilful distortion of Marxism was not expected from Teltumbde. Also, he has revealed his “understanding” of Marx’s *Capital* as well as his stand towards the use of parliament and establishment of socialism, not to speak of Lenin’s theory of Imperialism and the strategy and general tactics proposed by Lenin in the imperialist stage.

In the present essay I will attempt to show these serious shortcomings of this ‘Introduction’ written by Anand Teltumbde, mostly in chronological order.

Hollow Claims, Shallow Arguments

The essay starts with the claim that Dr. Ambedkar was never against Communism and rebukes the middle class Dalit intelligentsia who has projected this anti-Communist image of Ambedkar due to their own vested interests; this is one of the consistent *motif* of the essay. In order to prove this hypothesis, Teltumbde has done the following: first, show that Ambedkar is sympathetic to Marxist philosophy and was against only the practice of Indian communists; second, since Marxist philosophy, as it is, cannot be made up into a close ally of Ambedkar’s Deweyan pragmatism and bourgeois liberalism, he attempts a bourgeois liberal appropriation of Marxism, Marx, Engels as well as Lenin (which is comparatively more difficult); finally, Teltumbde attempts to show that there is no big gap between Ambedkar and Marxist philosophy, in fact, they are natural allies.

In the present essay, I will demonstrate how all the above claims of Teltumbde are baseless and his understanding of Marxism itself is in want of a serious study of Marxist classics. We all acknowledge the contributions of Ambedkar to the anti-caste movement, especially, as someone who established a sense of self-dignity among the Dalits and who established the caste question on the agenda of the national movement. In order to comprehend and acknowledge these

contributions, however, there is no need to first undertake a Marxist misappropriation of Ambedkar and then a liberal misappropriation of Marxism in order to what Teltumbde has called 'bridging the unholy (?) rift.' One can acknowledge the contributions made by Ambedkar to the anti-caste project without undertaking a Leftist appropriation of Ambedkar by showing him sympathetic to Marxism or making Marxism a left-liberal philosophy akin to some sort of Fabianism or Labour Party-brand Leftism or Kautsky-brand social democracy.

Teltumbde begins by claiming that certain Dalit intellectuals due to their vested interests have made Ambedkar 'an enemy of communists'. This has thrown Ambedkar into the camp of exploiters and oppressors, according to Teltumbde. However, since Teltumbde by heart knows that Ambedkar, ideologically and philosophically speaking, has nothing in common with Marxism, he immediately, though not so skilfully, introduces a *caveat*. Let us see how, "They *stretched* this antipathy between Ambedkar and communists *to such an extent* that they would discard anything even remotely associated with Marxism." (Teltumbde, 2017, *Bridging the Unholy Rift, India and Communism*, Leftword Books, New Delhi, p. 10, *italics mine*) As one can see the issue of rift now becomes an issue of "extent". This is how shame-faced Teltumbde manoeuvres through in this essay.

Teltumbde also claims that Ambedkar makes the use of category of 'class', though not in the Marxian sense and yet it becomes a problem for the middle-class Dalit intelligentsia, that has become a beneficiary of the system. We will show later how the concept of class used by Ambedkar is not only not-Marxian, but is opposed to the Marxist idea of class and is akin to the pragmatist idea of class, which was introduced precisely for a shadow-boxing with Marxism. However, first we should say a few words on the trenchant attack of Teltumbde on the Dalit identitarian politics which has conjured up (according to Teltumbde!) the anti-Marxist image of Ambedkar.

Teltumbde shows how the RPI was divided between the Kamble-faction, which was against communism and agitational methods, and the Gaikwad-faction, which led agitations on the question of land.

While it has a grain of truth that the Gaikwad-led faction led some protests on the question of land, it would be inappropriate to claim that Ambedkar was ever in support of agitational methods against the State for demands of working masses, including the Dalits. **Christopher Jaffrelot** in his book 'Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability', **Eleanor Zelliot** in her book 'Ambedkar's World' and, interestingly enough, **Anand Teltumbde** himself in his book 'Mahad: The Making of the First Dalit Revolt' has shown with clear evidence, Ambedkar's aversion to agitational methods. **Whenever he experimented with agitational methods he took care to keep the movement within the limits of bourgeois legality most rigidly and in the strictest sense.** Generally speaking, he always avoided any conflict with the government. The experience of Mahad Satyagraha and temple entry movements of the early-1930s had made it clear to him that agitational methods were to be avoided. Only under mass pressure he sometimes lent his support to mass demonstrations or agitations, but in all those cases, he was not the chief organizer or planner of the agitations, as Zelliot has shown (Zelliot, 'Ambedkar's World', Navayana, p. 200-201). Therefore, it would be erroneous to claim that Ambedkar was a big supporter of agitational methods.

Besides, to claim that Ambedkar, throughout his political life considered capitalism to be one of his enemies, is a gross misrepresentation of the facts. It was only the interregnum of the Independent Labour Party, which was nothing more than an electoral strategy as Teltumbde himself embarrassingly accepts, during which Ambedkar declared capitalism to be one of the enemies. Sometimes he has critiqued the vagaries of free-market private capitalism in the economic sense; however, this is not to be taken as a political criticism of capitalism. The reason for Ambedkar's declaration during the ILP-period that capitalism is one of the enemies, was that under the political electoral conditions of reserved seats, the best strategy was to expand the political appeal by inducting workers into one's political constituency and this could be done only by using an anti-capitalist rhetoric. But even in the documents of the ILP, capitalism is not criticized as the political rule of the bourgeoisie (an analysis

which will automatically lead to the political conclusion/program of overthrow of the capitalist rule), but only the free market private capitalism has been criticized. That is why the panacea suggested by the ILP is state capitalism. However, except this period, neither before 1936 nor after 1941-42, we find capitalism as a declared enemy of Ambedkar. Speaking half-truths like Yudhhishthir (*Ashwatthama hato naro vakunjaro*- Ashvatthama died, but either human or animal) is essentially telling a lie. **Teltumbde should have refrained from such Brahmanical practices.**

Also, Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar was disappointed with his educated followers, whom he had hoped, would become 'an armoured shelter above the Dalits' (from Ambedkar's Mahad Conference speech, quoted by Teltumbde himself in his last book 'Mahad'!) but who ultimately 'betrayed him', as Ambedkar himself lamented towards the twilight of his political career. But Teltumbde did not answer why it happened, though I suspect that he knows that answer! **The policy to create a class of middle class intelligentsia who would become 'mamlatdars, magistrates, etc' (from Ambedkar's Mahad conference speech) and thus would enable the Dalits to become a 'governing community' (Narake Hari, ed, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, op. cit., vol17, part-3, p.332.), because it is the 'government servants who are the mind of the government' (from Ambedkar's Mahad Conference speech), was bound to end up in a big disappointment.** Ambedkar neither understood the dynamics of class nor did he understand the class nature of the state/government. His idea of class as well as state was totally a Deweyan pragmatist idea, as we will show later. Therefore, Teltumbde should also have answered why Dr. Ambedkar's hopes were dashed regarding the role he thought the middle-class intelligentsia or the small elite within the Dalits would play. The reason was that the hope itself was unreasonable. The small elite created within the Dalits were bound to play the role, which first Ambedkar lamented and now Teltumbde is lamenting. It is the class nature of this small elite section, which obliges them to play the role

that they are playing. Though Teltumbde understands it, but he hides the fact that Ambedkar failed to understand this fact.

Teltumbde discusses the splits within the RPI due to the influence of Kamble-faction and later splits in Dalit Panthers also for similar reasons. However, he fails or rather pretends to fail to capture the correct reason for these splits. He just wonders how Ambedkar, Ambedkarite path and Ambedkarism became the rhetoric by which different opportunists (like Kamble-faction of the RPI, or, the Buddhist faction of Dalit Panthers, etc. who were against Marxism and agitational methods) justified their opportunist stands. Question again may be asked: why did it happen? The reasons for the rise of these “opportunist” trends and the splits they caused must be mentioned. In my opinion, the truth that Teltumbde fears to utter, is that the reason for these trends (opportunistic or not) were present in the pragmatist politics of Ambedkar himself. **In fact, in one sense, these Ambedkarites who opposed agitational methods and anti-establishment approach and method were closer to the political and ideological stand of Ambedkar.** Despite the contributions of Dalit Panthers and the Gaikwad-faction for a brief period, these factions in fact were, in one sense, the ‘deviators’ from Ambedkarite praxis.

Dr. Ambedkar was firm throughout his life as an honest Deweyan pragmatist that State is the ‘Great Mediator’, ‘the most rational agent’ which brings the change in a gradual incremental process from above; change is always gradual in society as well as nature and any attempt to bring changes by leaps through collective effort ‘from below’ will involve the use of force, and will end in waste and destruction. That is why Mahad Satyagraha ended in an anti-climax, as Teltumbde himself had shown in his previous book, though he refrains from going to the philosophical roots of Ambedkar and show why Ambedkar withdrew the Satyagraha. He stops at naïve wondering! Teltumbde just wonders why the Satyagraha ended up as a non-starter! Here too, Teltumbde tries to hide the philosophical roots of Ambedkar by arguing that Ambedkar was in favour of anti-establishment politics or agitational methods. In fact, ample evidence

can be produced (a lot from Teltumbde's last book 'Mahad' itself!) which show that Ambedkar never wanted a confrontation with the government or State, due to his Deweyan pragmatist ideological prejudices. **The truth is that the splits which took place in RPI and Dalit Panthers were not due to opportunism of certain individuals or factions.** There were two co-ordinates of these splits: one co-ordinate was the pragmatist politics and ideology of Ambedkar himself and the other dimension was the assertion of the subaltern elements within these organizations, expressed in the desire to use radical agitational methods and take up the issue of caste oppression from a class standpoint, whatever were their weaknesses. **The constant tension between the Ambedkarite ideological and political positions and the radical class assertions within these organizations ultimately led to these splits. These splits were bound to take place.** Teltumbde condemns the opportunist middle-class and elite Dalit politicians claiming to be Ambedkarites in the following terms: "They wish to broker the interests of the Dalits to the ruling classes, who would do whatever it takes to thwart the germination of a radical consciousness among the Dalit masses." (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 13) One is tempted to ask: Wasn't Ambedkar doing the same, though without the individual degeneration of certain post-Ambedkar Ambedkarite organizations? When did Ambedkar go beyond brokering the interests of Dalits to the State? Whenever, the State took a confrontational stand to the agitations led by Ambedkar, did he not retreat? Politically speaking, when was he radical, because radical means 'going to the root of things', being subversive? In the end of the present subhead of this lengthy essay, Teltumbde comments rhetorically, "...even if Ambedkar arrived today and took up cudgels for the Dalit masses, he would be condemned as anti-Ambedkar." (ibid, p.13) Though it is true that the current Ambedkarite and identitarian organizations have descended to a level which makes even Ambedkar look like a radical, yet, Ambedkar himself, despite his genuine concerns for annihilation of caste, was never a radical in the political sense of the term. Secondly, what Ambedkar would do today had he been here can only be hypothesized on the

basis of what he actually did when he was alive. **This is something that Teltumbde must understand, that in his imaginary world Ambedkar would not do what he (Teltumbde) as a self-referential radical wants, but would do what he (Ambedkar) as a pragmatist deems fit.**

Now we will present the critique of the rest of the essay by Teltumbde under the same subheads that he has used in order to show the factually and logically incorrect and misrepresentational character of his essay.

Ambedkar and Marx: or How Teltumbde Hides the Ignorance of Dr. Ambedkar Regarding Marxism – I

Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar's relationship with Marxism was "enigmatic" (!) and he claimed that he was a socialist, though never a Marxist. Everybody knows how liberally this epithet 'socialism' has been used in the political history of the modern world since the time of post-Enlightenment utopian socialist thinkers, petty-bourgeois socialists, Fabians, Labour Party of Britain, syndicalist traditions of Europe as well as America, and in our country, from Nehru to Subhash Chandra Bose (both of whom had their own notions of "socialism"), from Lohia to Jai Prakash Narayan and from Madhu Limaye to Malayam and Lalu. We shall see shortly what "socialism" of Ambedkar was. Teltumbde claims, "Ambedkar was not unimpressed by the élan of the Marxist tradition." (ibid, p. 14) However, he never presents a single quote where Ambedkar has expressed this impressed-ness. Agreeing with the ultimate aim of communism as a noble wish, but then discarding it as being 'impractical' and a fool's paradise or 'pig philosophy' is certainly not a sign of being impressed! Secondly, this kind of agreement with the 'ultimate aim as a noble wish' is something that even the most reactionary bourgeois economists and thinkers have expressed. Even a Paul Samuelson or Nordhaus, or Mises could say that 'the aim is noble, but cannot be achieved because it is impractical and

opposed to the 'human nature' and 'common sense". In fact, a number of bourgeois economists and political scientists have said such things.

Next, Teltumbde moves to the caste humiliations faced by Ambedkar and wonders what Ambedkar had felt about the epochal event of October Revolution in the context of the hardships that he faced as a Dalit. Teltumbde accepts that he does not find any reference in Ambedkar's writings of this period about the October Revolution. The first reference to October Revolution is from 1929, when Ambedkar criticizes communists for trying to create a revolution in India "without worrying about the class consciousness of people." This is a gross misrepresentation of facts. Teltumbde should have shown by evidence that Ambedkar was bothered about raising the class consciousness of the people. In fact, the one quote that he presents shows that Ambedkar was more disturbed by the fact that communists were trying to become the hegemonic force in the labour movement and the strikes organized by them led to adverse impact on workers' conditions. Ambedkar himself writes: "The main aim behind the strike is not to improve the economic condition of the workers but *to train them for revolution.*" (quoted in Teltumbde, 2017, p. 14-15, *Italics mine*). Now, first of all, in this quote Ambedkar is not criticizing communists for not raising the class consciousness of the workers. Quite the contrary, he is opposed to communists' efforts to raise the class consciousness. If by 'class consciousness', Teltumbde means the same thing that Marx and Lenin meant then it means progressing from trade union consciousness to what Lenin called 'class political consciousness', which simply means that even in economic struggles, exposing the limits of capitalism to the workers and preparing them for revolutionary political class consciousness. However, as we can see from the quote of Ambedkar himself, he is happy as long as the strike is limited to the economic demands of workers and does not transcend the trade unionist class consciousness. This is in congruence with the economism of the Fabianist and British Labour Party-style as well as Deweyan pragmatism: the question of the state should not be raised

and the strikes should confine themselves for the economic betterment of the workers through collective bargaining by the media of trade unionist struggles. Economism is an important component of the concept of labour-capital relation advocated by the Fabians as well as pragmatists like Dewey. Ambedkar is simply reiterating that idea. **He is not at all concerned with the efforts of communists to raise the class consciousness of workers to the level of class political consciousness; he is rather opposed to it.** This is a different issue whether Indian communists succeeded in this endeavour or how far they were even serious about making this endeavour. In fact, more evidence can be produced that they themselves were prisoners of some sort of Left militant economism. However, to the extent that the communists tried to politicise the strikes, any such attempt on the part of communists is regarded as sacrificing the economic interests of the workers by all liberals. Therefore, the objection of Ambedkar was not simply to the practice or methods employed by communists to bring about revolution because the “majority of people were not ready for the *ideal* society the communists wanted to create” (ibid, p. 15) but the objection was the very ideal of such a society (Teltumbde is mistaken to think that communism is an ideal for communists; in fact, Marx clearly said that communism is not an ideal to be achieved but the *real movement of history*). Teltumbde himself quotes Ambedkar in a footnote on page 10, where Ambedkar talks about his concept of class but negates the rationale or necessity of ‘class conflict’. His idea of class was a Deweyan pragmatist idea, according to which society is a collection of disparate groups and these disparate groups do not have *real* contradictions but only *perceived* contradictions; these contradictions are to be resolved by the intervention of the ‘Great Mediator’, i.e., the government or the State. **Raising class consciousness tantamount to the sharpening of class conflict, to which Ambedkar was categorically opposed. Therefore, Anand Teltumbde, in order to show that Ambedkar was only opposed to communist practice, not the communist *ideal*, creates a myth about Ambedkar.**

Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar opposed the communists because the communists attacked Ambedkar for collaborating with the Simon Commission and also advising the Dalit workers to break the strike in 1929. On both these accounts, Teltumbde defends Ambedkar's position. Let us take both these questions separately.

On the question of separate electorate and communal award, Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar was fighting for 'autonomous' Dalit voice. We will come to Teltumbde's support to 'autonomous voice'-theory later. First look at the support and opposition to separate electorates from different quarters. The Congress and mainly Gandhi, obviously opposed the separate electorate for all the wrong reasons, the most important being Gandhi's concern with the 'unity of the Hindu society'. However, just because Gandhi and the Congress opposed separate electorate for wrong reasons does not make this demand a correct one. Moreover, the communists were least bothered by the unity of the Hindu society, but opposed it for their concern with the unity of the working class (which is not out there, but has to be constituted through constant political class struggles; however, the separate electorates would have closed any such window). Bhagat Singh and his comrades also opposed communal award and separate electorate as a device used by the British to 'divide and rule'. Teltumbde should also have criticized Bhagat Singh and his comrades for this. However, for Left Ambedkarites like Teltumbde, it is the communists who are always the punching bag and soft target.

There is no doubt about the fact that this intention of 'divide and rule' precisely was the motive of the British colonial state. (See, Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*) On the one hand, Teltumbde opposes the identitarian politics and at the same time, in the same breath, supports Ambedkar's demand for separate electorate, which shows his lack of understanding of this whole issue. Separate electorates definitely would have broken the potential unity of the working class (though there was no by-default unity of the working class). Every Marxist knows that class unity is not something which is out there, a given, but has to be constituted by constant political struggles. It is

true that the CPI could not understand the caste question in its historicity as well as in its contemporaneity. However, this was part of a broader failure. The CPI since its foundation did not have a program of Indian Revolution till 1951. In 1920 formal declaration of foundation was announced in Tashkent, its first All India Conference took place in 1925 in Kanpur. However, both of these events do not qualify to be regarded as the formation of the party. The first real milestone of formation of the party was 1933 when following the letters from CPs of Germany, Britain and China, a provisional nucleus of the central committee was formed; the next milestone was 1936 when this body assumed the shape of central committee and P. C. Joshi was elected the first secretary of the party and the most important and third milestone was 1943 when the first Congress of the party was held. However, even then a systematic program of Indian Revolution was not adopted. Only in 1951, a program was adopted, following the visit of a delegation of the CPI to Moscow which met with Stalin and Molotov. However, by the time, the CPI adopted a program of Indian revolution, it had progressed on the path of becoming revisionist parliamentary Left party, so that the program was good only for cold storage. The program of revolution is the document based on the concrete analysis of concrete conditions in a country and identifies the enemy classes and the friend classes, that is, the basic question of revolution in any country and the strategy and general tactics of revolution, including the path of revolution. **Had the communists taken up this task, the question of caste also would have been understood historically as well as politically.** However, since the CPI failed to work out the program of Indian revolution till 1951, its struggle against caste was at best *empirical* and *positivist*. We will come to the question of the failure of communist movement later in detail.

However, this much is certain that opposing Simon Commission and separate electorate was not among the numerous failures of the communist movement in India. On one instance, in the early-1940s, they supported the creation of Pakistan on the basis of a false understanding of nationhood based on

religion. From the Marxist-Leninist theory of *nation* (not 'nationalism' as Teltumbde thinks), religion is not one of the basis of constitution of a nation. However, the mistake was so glaring that it was corrected within a couple of years. This only shows the poor foundations of the Marxist understanding of the CPI. Still, opposing Simon Commission by the CPI on the one hand and Bhagat Singh and his comrades on the other, was not at all an incorrect political position. One can oppose Simon Commission not only from the caste Hindu concerns of Gandhi, but also from the class stand point of Bhagat Singh. However, Teltumbde vindicates the position of Ambedkar in an erroneous fashion and calls it an attempt to build 'autonomous voice' of the Dalits. The question that can be asked is: autonomous from what? As we remarked above, we will come to this question in detail later in this essay.

Now a few words on the Textile mill strike of the late-1920s. The strike had started on the issue of introduction of a machine by mill owners which would lead to retrenchment of workers. Ambedkar did not get involved on his own initiative, but was invited by the owner of E.D. Sassoon Mill, Frederick Stones, as Teltumbde himself has mentioned. If he had his main concern towards the discrimination against the Dalit workers, he should have gone to the striking workers and their leadership on his own, rather than on the invitation of a mill-owner. Secondly, the way to introduce and fight for the demands of the Dalit workers was definitely not by advising the Dalit workers to stay away from the strike and break the strike, but rather to struggle to introduce these issues in the charter of demands of the strike and also struggle against the caste prejudices of caste Hindu workers. Did breaking the strike help in doing away with the caste prejudices of caste Hindu workers? It is highly unlikely. Rather, by making a contradiction among the masses (non-antagonistic contradiction) as the contradiction between enemies (antagonistic contradiction), Ambedkar's strategy only helped the owners. Teltumbde claims that at the insistence of Ambedkar, the communists-led trade union included the demand of Dalit workers into the charter, unwillingly (though no evidence is provided of this

unwillingness). To this the mill-owners “rightly responded” according to Teltumbde that they do not have any responsibility in this discrimination. However, since the union had included this demand in the charter and expressed the willingness to fight to do away with this discrimination, Ambedkar should have supported the further strikes. Yet he actively campaigned against the strike when it broke out again. Such kind of ‘autonomous voice’ did not actually give any autonomy to the Dalit workers, as history showed. **The best way to fight against the caste prejudices of the non-Dalit working class is in the thick of the struggles. Only in the process of class struggle, can the working class fight against casteism and patriarchy prevalent among themselves. The separation of Dalits from the general class struggle of the working class is no way to resolve this question.** This is a different issue altogether whether the communists, given their ideological weaknesses, would have been able to wage a political and ideological struggle against caste prejudices within the working class movement or not. The empirical evidence shows that their struggle against caste never went beyond empirical struggle due to complete lack of a theoretical understanding of the issue at stake. Nevertheless, breaking the working class movement by separating the Dalits was definitely not the way. Given the fact that objectively Ambedkar did play the role of strike-breaker, it was not unjustified to criticize him for it. It must be understood that Ambedkar was firmly opposed to communism. He believed that strikes and communism are “inseparable twins” and communists “use” strikes for their “political aims” (which is true and there is nothing to be apologetic about it!). Secondly, as Gail Omvedt has argued in ‘Dalits and Democratic Revolution’ that Ambedkar was not opposed to strikes as long as they were not led by communists.

Teltumbde claims that the Indian communists were too enthusiastic about the prospects of Indian Revolution and believed that India is past the stage of feudalism through a non-revolutionary path and the main task was to organize industrial workers. This, according to Teltumbde, led the communists to ignore the land question and caste question in the villages. The sole evidence for the communists

holding this line is M. N. Roy and his thesis presented in the book *India in Transition*. However, it seems that Teltumbde has not read the history of communist movement in India and the statements regarding program that CPI adopted. The CPI never adopted the thesis of M. N. Roy and later expelled Roy. Secondly, he also seems to be unaware of the radical agrarian struggles for land led by the communists in the colonial India. Let me draw readers' attention to this history very briefly.

It is true that before 1951, the Communist Party of India failed to draft the program of Indian revolution and consequently also the agrarian program, which constitutes one of the most important parts of the program of democratic revolution. However, it would be a mistake to think that before 1951, the CPI had adopted the program of a socialist revolution. On the basis of the line of Comintern, the Indian communists had accepted the task of National Democratic Revolution to be the principal task, though no creative independent study of Indian concrete conditions was carried out. Mostly, there were some articles, essays and statements which talked about the line of National Democratic Revolution, based mostly on the cut-copy-paste of Comintern positions and documents. Therefore, first thing to be made clear is that the CPI accepted a program of anti-colonial anti-feudal National Democratic Revolution, though it failed to undertake a serious creative Marxist analysis of the agrarian question and program of revolution in India, which also led them to the failure in understanding the caste question and its articulation with class struggle in India. Secondly, it is sheer ignorance on the part of Teltumbde to claim that the communists did not organize peasantry and focused on industrial labour only. Empirically, they did. M.A. Rasul, a veteran communist leader and a prominent figure in the peasant movement has written about the early attempts as well as later attempts of the communists to organize peasantry on the land question. Rasul in his book 'A History of the All India Kisan Sabha' has shown that the first attempts to study the agrarian question and organize peasants were made in the late-1920s itself in Punjab, Malabar, Andhra, Bengal, and United Provinces, i.e., a

couple of years after the First All India Conference of the CPI in 1925. Some movements and organizations were organized. After the breaking out of the Great Depression, the economic impact on the peasantry was noticed by the communists. Communists working within and outside the Congress felt the need for an all India peasant organization at this point. In October 1935, the South Indian Federation of Peasants and Workers called an all-India peasants' and workers' conference. The Congress thoroughly opposed the idea of an All India peasant organization as it could lead to the radicalization of the peasantry. In fact, Sardar Patel ridiculed and attacked the idea of such an organization sharply. Nevertheless, in April 1936, the first All India Kisan Congress was held in Lucknow, which was presided over by Bihar peasant leader Sahajanand Saraswati. The communists under the leadership of P.C. Joshi persuaded the Congress to give recognition to AIKC and AITUC. This was the period of 'popular front' line to oppose bourgeois reaction as well as forming alliance with representatives of bourgeoisie, so long as they show their anti-colonial and anti-feudal credentials. Now, it is a different matter whether this mechanical implementation of the line of 'popular front' was correct in the Indian conditions by the CPI or not. This much, nonetheless, is certain that CPI was a strong force within the peasant movement. An intelligence report of the British colonial government from 1937, says, "the communist leaders are developing a stranglehold upon any future agrarian movement as well as inspiring this with their special methods and outlook, of which by no means the least is the belief in mass violence and the violent overthrow of the British rule." (Quoted in H. Surjeet, 1986, 'What AIKS stands for', NBA, Calcutta, p.8)

The years from 1937 to 1939 saw a string of peasant movements in different parts of country, often under communist leadership. The period between 1945 and 1947 saw Telangana peasant revolt, the Tebhaga movement and Punappra-Vylar peasant uprising and many other peasant movements. All of them were either under the leadership of communists or were under influence of communists. In nutshell, from the late-1920s itself, the communists had become

active in the peasant movement. From AIKS to Telangana, the communists did participate in the peasant movements, often in the leadership capacity, though they did not have a clear program of agrarian revolution and committed blunders in the 1930s as well as in the period from 1942 to 1947 due to the lack of a program of Indian revolution, including the agrarian program, a program on annihilation of caste, and other particular questions. This does not mean that they did not participate in or led the struggles of peasants and landless Dalits. This is what I have called *empirical involvement* in all these struggles by the communists, despite the lack of a positive program based on the concrete analysis of concrete conditions of India. **However, to claim that the CPI ignored peasantry and focused only on industrial workers is gross misrepresentation of facts on the part of Anand Teltumbde and that too in order to prove that the critique of CPI by Ambedkar was correct! Ambedkar had no concern whatsoever whether the CPI is raising the class consciousness of Indian people before becoming over-optimistic about Indian revolution.** Making such a claim is not only a gross distortion of history but also politically outrageous. Even Teltumbde seems to be a bit aware about it and therefore in passing he comments, "However, his (Ambedkar's) use of a moral scale for judging the Marxist methods smacks of his liberal obsession and lack of appreciation for the alternate epistemology of Marxism." However, in the end, Teltumbde makes a shame-faced attempt to give some validity to Ambedkar's attitude to communists.

Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar was only antagonistic towards the practice of Indian communists and not Marxism itself. Later, I will show that this too is a gross distortion of history. It will be shown in this essay that Ambedkar as a consistent Deweyan Pragmatist had a natural anathema to Marxist philosophy itself. There should be no attempt to make this ill-fated bridge between Ambedkar's political thought and Marxism, philosophically speaking. Needless to say, that the revolutionary Left and the genuine Ambedkarite organizations should make joint-fronts and alliances on the basis of the pertinent

issues of anti-Dalit atrocities and other important anti-Dalit measures of the State. However, to talk about philosophical vicinity of Ambedkar's Deweyan Pragmatism and Marxism would be a travesty of science and history.

Next, Teltumbde embarks upon his project to prove that Ambedkar not only believed in the concept of class, he employed it in his political and historical analysis, though later like an act of intellectual burglary Teltumbde accepts that through a continuum Ambedkar's notion of class was closer to Weber's than Marx's! Though this statement too is inaccurate, because there can be no continuum, stretching from Marx's notion of class to Weberian notion of class, as the two concepts are fundamentally opposed and their theoretical basis is completely different. A continuum can be made between concepts of the same genus. Still, Teltumbde is forced to concede in an intellectual sleight of hand, that Ambedkar's concept of class was not a Marxist one. And yet, he persists in his endeavour to prove Ambedkar's belief in the concept of class as opposed to liberal bourgeois emphasis on individual. It must be reminded here that liberal bourgeois philosophy has its own notion of class and it had this notion much before Marx and Marxism. **To claim that liberalism does not have a concept of class and only a concept of individual, and how Ambedkar, by having a concept of class and going against liberalism, drew closer to Marxism is a shameful attempt of Teltumbde to fool his readers.** Different bourgeois liberal ideologies have different notions of class. Moreover, the trend of British political economy even developed an economic notion of class which was critiqued and *sublated* by Marx to develop the dialectical materialist notions of class. In fact, Marx categorically said:

"... And now as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of [classes](#) in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists, the economic economy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the *existence of classes* is only

bound up with *particular historical phases in the development of production* (historische Entwicklungsphasen der Production), (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the [dictatorship of the proletariat](#), (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society* .

“Ignorant louts like Heinzen, who deny not merely the class struggle but even the existence of classes, only prove that, despite all their blood-curdling yelps and the humanitarian airs they give themselves, they regard the social conditions under which the bourgeoisie rules as the final product, the *non plus ultra* [highest point attainable] of history, and that they are only the servants of the bourgeoisie. And the less these louts realize the greatness and transient necessity of the bourgeois regime itself the more disgusting is their servitude....” (Marx to J. Weydemeyer, March 5, 1852)

In the above quote, Marx has also expressed his disdain for people who do not acknowledge the existence of class struggle.

Firstly, the claim that Ambedkar, by emphasizing the notion of ‘class’ and by undermining the bourgeois liberal notion of society as collection of ‘atomistic individuals’, moved closer to Marxist position is wrong because (1) liberalism *does* have a concept of class, though it is a purely sociological categorization which has nothing to do with production relations; this categorization varies according to the different schools of liberal bourgeois philosophy from occupation and income to intellectual categories; (2) Ambedkar still believed in the primacy of individual over society, though he accepted the existence of different groups of individuals existing in the society and stressed upon the need of internal communication (Deweyan idea of *social endosmosis*) between them; (3) Ambedkar’s concept of ‘class’ is akin to the Deweyan concept of society as a collection of ‘disparate groups’, a concept which has not only nothing to do with Marxism, but in fact, was invented to do ‘shadow-boxing’ with Marxism; according to this concept there are no *real* contradictions between these groups but only *perceived* contradictions and it is the duty of the ‘great mediator’, i.e., the State, to resolve these

perceived contradictions by intervention from above. Ambedkar always clung to this idea. If you read 'Annihilation of Caste', you will find that Ambedkar paraphrases this Deweyan idea of society as a collection of disparate groups: "nowhere is human society one single whole. It is always plural. In the world of action, the individual is one limit and society the other. Between them lie all sorts of associative arrangements of lesser and larger scope—families, friendships, co-operative associations, business combines, political parties, bands of thieves and robbers." (Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*) As one can see, this idea of class/social group has nothing to do with Marxist notion of class.

The quote that Teltumbde presents as the proof of Ambedkar's belief in the category of class clearly shows that Ambedkar uses 'class' as a generic term which might be formed on the basis of "economic or intellectual or social." In this quote from his famous paper from Columbia University, **Ambedkar makes it clear at the very outset that he considers the theory of class conflict to be an exaggeration. This once again makes it clear as day-light that Ambedkar not only has nothing to do with Marxian concept of class but is actually opposed to it because according to Marx, classes came into existence precisely due to contradiction and conflict of interests between the groups of people, based on production relations, that is, relations of ownership, relations of distribution and relations of labour division. It is not as if classes first came into existence and then class contradiction developed. Just the contrary, it is contradiction inherent in the process of production and reproduction of life, which leads to the emergence of classes.** Therefore, if we accept the Marxian concept of class, or even if go near to the Marxian concept of class, we will be obliged also to accept class struggle because it is contradiction itself that leads to the formation of classes. This clearly shows that Ambedkar's use of the term 'class' had nothing whatsoever to do with Marxist notion of class and rather it was diametrically opposed to it, as an incorrigible pragmatist liberal idea.

Further.

Teltumbde argues that Ambedkar had no guiding philosophy or ideological frame of reference to fight against caste when he entered public life. This too is incorrect. By the time Ambedkar returned from Columbia University, he had begun his philosophical journey as a Deweyan pragmatist. In fact, a number of scholars have shown that John Dewey was an overriding philosophical and political influence on Ambedkar right since his days in Columbia University. Teltumbde claims that the only point of reference that Ambedkar had was Jyotiba Phule's writings and fight against caste. In this process, Teltumbde makes a claim that is, if not wrong, is certainly inaccurate, namely, that Phule saw the British rule as a boon for the lower castes; while it is true that Phule began his political-philosophical career with this idea, we must realize that Phule's political life had a trajectory which shows that he was becoming increasingly critical of the British towards the end of his life. His *Cultivator's Whipcord* is the best example of this trajectory. In fact, Phule's disciple Lokhande had edited the last few chapters of *Cultivator's Whipcord*, because he thought Phule had become too critical of the British in these sections of the book. Phule was extremely irked with Lokhande for this unsolicited editing job. Later, the book was published in its full form. Coming back to Ambedkar's philosophical frame of reference, whatever the case may be, this fact is irrefutable that after his stint at Columbia University, it was only through the glass of Deweyan Pragmatism that Ambedkar saw everything, including Phule, the British colonial state, the communists, role of intellectuals and role of education. It can be proven with fairly conclusive evidence that in his writings on all these issues, Ambedkar shows strong shadow of Dewey, even when he does not quote Dewey by name. Teltumbde wants to project the image that when Ambedkar entered public life, he was in want of a worldview and was at loss to analyse caste. This is factually incorrect and the real intention here is to show that communists were at a vantage point, politically and philosophically, as compared to Dr. Ambedkar because they had the most developed analytical tools in the shape of Marxism. I do not think that even Dr. Ambedkar would agree to such a preposterous claim! Ambedkar

certainly had a method and approach when he entered political life with his testimony to the Southborough Committee.

About Marx and Marxism, Teltumbde has made a number of incorrect and inaccurate, if not totally ignorant claims, to which I will later come. However, here it must be pointed out that the claim that Marx thought that development of railways and limited industrialization would lead to the collapse of the Asiatic mode of production, the village community and with it, the caste system is wrong. Marx talked about the hereditary labour division, which would slowly be broken with capitalist development and railways, not the caste system itself. He did not say anything about the fate of caste system in its totality in event of industrialization and development of railways. Moreover, Marx's views about Asiatic mode of production, its internal stagnation and the presumed need of an external force to break it had changed towards the end of 1870s itself. Marx acknowledges that the village community and its institutions were breaking from inside and class differentiation had set in. Those who are interested in Marx's changing views on village community and caste system might look at the notes of Marx from his reading of the Kovalevsky's book *Communal Landholding* and his notes from his reading of Elphinstone's book *History of India*. One can also read Shlomo Avineri's book *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* and Irfan Habib's introduction to the anthology *Karl Marx on India* published by Tulika Books. However, Teltumbde glosses over these details about changing views of Marx regarding Indian social formation, village economy and caste system and makes a sweeping generalization. More on Ambedkar's and Teltumbde's views on Marxism later.

Further, Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar, though not aware of Marx's views on caste (Ambedkar was not aware of Marx's views about anything from primary sources, that is the writings of Marx and Engels, as we will show later), nonetheless believed in struggle against caste as class struggle, though his idea of class was not Marxist. This is a strange argument. **If he does not believe in the Marxist idea of class then how come he believed in class**

struggle? Moreover, Ambedkar clearly rejects the very notion of 'class conflict' categorically, while accepting a generic liberal bourgeois notion of 'class', as shown clearly by the quote of Ambedkar that Teltumbde himself has used. Still claiming that Ambedkar saw struggle against caste as class struggle is gross misrepresentation of Ambedkar and also a serious distortion of history by Teltumbde. In fact, Ambedkar clearly believed that caste is the appropriate category to analyse Indian society as opposed to class. Clearly enough, Ambedkar saw an anti-thesis between the caste and Marxist notion of class. Even in the period of Independent Labour Party, when according to claims of many, including Teltumbde, Ambedkar was drifting towards class politics, he categorically rejected such an illusion. **Christopher Jaffrelot** in his pioneering study *Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability* has shown beyond doubt that even in the period of ILP, Ambedkar categorically rejected Marxist notion of class as a useful category in the context of India and emphasized that caste as such has nothing to do with the access to the economic resources (see Jaffrelot, 2005, 'Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability', Permanent Black, Delhi, p. 75-77). Therefore, Ambedkar without using the Marxist terminology argued that caste belongs to ideological superstructure!

In fact, the argument of Ambedkar against socialists in his 'Annihilation of Caste' clearly shows how less he understood of socialism. For example, at one place he argues that individuals will join a revolution for 'equalization of property', only when they are assured that they would not be discriminated against on the basis of caste or creed: "Men will not join in a revolution for the equalisation of property unless they know that after the revolution is achieved they will be treated equally, and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed." (Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*) Ambedkar argues at three places in this essay that socialists fight for 'equalization of property'! Teltumbde cannot say that he is talking about non-Marxian socialists. Ambedkar is clearly referring to Marxists here. Evidently, he did not understand what Marxists fought for. First of all, socialists do not fight for 'equalization of property', but

the common ownership of everything and eventual withering away of property, class and state. Slogans of property or wage equalization have nothing to do with Marxism, which Ambedkar utterly failed to understand. Such claims are nearer to different forms of petty-bourgeois socialism, including Proudhonist idea of socialism. Even a XIIth standard humanities student knows it today that Marxism gives no such ridiculous slogan! Secondly, Ambedkar's claim (that he makes in his 'Annihilation of Caste' for which he even invokes the authority of Lasalle, a close associate of Marx; however, if you read the quote of Lasalle that Ambedkar uses, you realize that Ambedkar had totally misunderstood it and quoted him out of context to prove his point) that religious and social revolutions always preceded political revolutions is a faulty one (which Teltumbde quotes in approval). The revolutions that Ambedkar calls 'religious revolutions', for instance, the Reformation, Mohammed's revolution in Middle-East, or the Sikh movement led by Guru Nanak, were not simply religious and social revolutions, but thoroughly political movements or revolutions. If one reads the works of Christopher Hill on Reformation and Puritanism, of Hodgeson and Rodinson on the advent of Islam under Mohammed or the works of J. S. Grewal on Sikh movement, it becomes clear that it was not the emergence of an idea that led to material historical change, but it was the movement of real contradictions within the relations of production and reproduction that led to the rise of certain ideas at certain conjunctures of history. Otherwise, one would not be able to tell why a certain social or religious movement or idea emerged at a particular moment in history. It would become completely an issue of chance based on the emergence of certain individuals. Evidently enough, Ambedkar could not understand the political essence of such movements and saw them as simply social or religious movements, whereas these movements were primarily and predominantly political movements representing definite political class interests and they had their own definite socio-religious dimensions and articulations.

Subsequently, Teltumbde showers curse on Ambedkarites who “have vehemently rejected class politics in their antipathy to Marxism.” According to Teltumbde, they need to be reminded (a duty that Teltumbde has taken upon himself!) that Ambedkar interpreted castes essentially in class terms! To save humiliation, Teltumbde accepts a few sentences later the Ambedkar’s concept of class was nearer to Weber’s notion as compared to Marx’s “on a continuum”. **This too reveals that Teltumbde neither understands Marx’s notion nor Weber’s notion of ‘class’ because there can be no continuum between the two as we pointed out earlier.** Marx’s notion of ‘class’ is based on exploitation and relations of production, whereas Weber’s notion of class is based on what he calls ‘life chances’. We cannot go in the details here but can refer readers to writings of Erik Olin Wright, Henryk Grossman, and other Marxist critiques of Weber’s notion of class, which is a part of his tripartite theory of stratification based on class, status and party. This much is certain that there can be no bridge between the two notions and therefore no continuum. Secondly, the “sin” for which Teltumbde rebukes the Ambedkarites equally applies to Ambedkar himself and the contrast between Ambedkar and Ambedkarites in the context of acceptance or rejection of ‘class analysis’, that Teltumbde wants to conjure up, can safely be called a figment of his imagination. Ambedkar clearly rejected Marxist class analysis and class politics in the communist sense (objectively, every politics is a class politics in so far as it serves certain class/es) and, as we will show later with evidence, he had a clear antipathy to Marxism (not simply Indian communists!). We will return to the theme of Ambedkar’s views about Marxism and Communism later in the second part of this subhead, where we will show with quotations from Ambedkar’s work that he not only did not understand Marxism and did not read any Marxist classic, but also that his Deweyan pragmatist prejudice led him to oppose and detest Marxism, without even knowing it properly.

Ambedkar's Strategies of Conversion and Electoral Politics: The Selective Narrative of Teltumbde

Teltumbde also presents the history selectively regarding evolution of Ambedkar's views in relation to conversion as an emancipatory strategy. Let us see, in brief, how the views of Ambedkar regarding conversion evolved.

First reference by Ambedkar to conversion comes in Jalgaon Depressed Classes Conference in 1927 where Ambedkar says that if the untouchables cannot get rid of the injustice within the fold of Hinduism, they would not lose anything by abandoning this identity. After this proclamation a few Dalits converted to Islam. This scared the Brahminical orthodoxy and in some villages they opened up the wells for Dalits, as Christopher Jaffrelot has shown in his book *Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Consequently, he gave a number of allusions to his strategy of conversion. Jaffrelot also shows that Ambedkar had told G. A. Gavai, with whom he had represented the Untouchables at the third Round Table Conference, that he wanted to leave the fold of Hinduism **but Islam repelled him**. In an open letter of 1936, Ambedkar compared Islam, Christianity and Sikhism and argued that by converting to Sikhism the Dalits would not 'denationalize' and will continue to be the part of the Indian nation! This is what Ambedkar wrote, **"What the consequences of conversion will be to the country as a whole is well worth bearing in mind. Conversion to Islam or Christianity will denationalise the Depressed Classes. If they go to Islam the number of Muslims will be doubled and the danger of Muslim domination also becomes real. If they go to Christianity, the numerical strength of Christians becomes 5 to 6 crores. It will help to strengthen the hold of the British on this country. On the other, if they embrace Sikhism they will not only not harm the destiny of the country, but they will help the destiny of the country. They will not be denationalised."** (quoted in Jaffrelot, 2005, p. 122) In the course of the year 1936, a galvanization was taking place on the question of mass conversion of the Dalits.

Why Ambedkar chose Sikhism has an interesting story behind it, which Anand Teltumbde does not tell and I suspect that it is out of sheer innocence. Moonje, a leader of Hindu Mahasabha had a three day-secret talks with Ambedkar in which J. K. Birla, brother of G. D. Birla also participated. Moonje persuaded Ambedkar to convert to Sikhism because by this the Dalits will only leave Hindu religion but not Hindu culture and civilization. This idea was given weight by Shankaracharya of Karweer Peeth who supported this idea and thought that Sikhism is part of Hinduism as one of its protestant sects. It is noteworthy that Ambedkar accepted the advice of Moonje and expressed his choice of Sikhism and even explained it to the Dalits: **“to have some responsibility as for the future of the Hindu culture and civilization.”** (quoted in Jaffrelot, 2005, p. 129). It was only when it became clear that the benefits of minority would not be granted to the the Dalits converted into Sikhism, the evidence of anti-Dalit atrocities by Jatts within the fold of Sikhism and the resistance of the leader of Sikhs, Master Tara Singh, that Ambedkar slowly dropped this idea. The next time this idea emerged in Ambedkar’s discourse was the late-1940s and then came the manifest idea of choice of Buddhism in the 1950s. **However, Teltumbde smoothly slides over all this important history which only reveals the pragmatism of Ambedkar.**

Now let us see Teltumbde’s selective account of Ambedkar’s politics in the period of the ILP.

Teltumbde is obliged to accept that Independent Labour Party was basically a child of the Poona Pact. In view of the reserved seats instead of separate electorates, the strategy to form a broad mass-based party with transcendental appeal was better for Ambedkar, as compared to the strategy of establishing the image of a Dalit leader for himself. Jaffrelot has demonstrated this fact beyond doubt. Teltumbde’s section on ILP in this introduction borrows heavily from Jaffrelot’s analysis, but according to his own ideological and political exigencies and convenience. Let us see how.

It is true that during the period of the ILP, Ambedkar collaborated with communists on a number of issues including that of land and the Industrial Disputes Bill, which threatened the very right to strike. Though Teltumbde builds on Jaffrelot's analysis however he omits and edits at will. For example, Jaffrelot shows that the proposal for strike against this ID Bill came from the communists which Ambedkar accepted. However, Teltumbde's account shows that the communists and Ambedkar "*came together* for this strike" without mentioning the *origin of the initiative*. The communists had proposed for a one day strike against ID Bill and Ambedkar had readily accepted this proposal. Secondly, during the phase of the ILP, it was natural for Ambedkar to use class rhetoric. However, the class rhetoric that he uses never goes beyond the class rhetoric used by all "leftists" belonging to the breed of Labour-Party-style Leftism. **This rhetoric in and by itself had nothing to do with Marxism. Even where Ambedkar talks about the communist philosophy being nearer to him as compared to other philosophies, he makes it clear that he does not believe in the idea of class struggle. Jaffrelot also shows that even during the period of these joint fronts with communists, Ambedkar particularly ruled out any idea of revolutionary transformation and stressed upon the constitutional methods to win power.** (see Jaffrelot, 2005, p. 79)

The program of ILP was program of state capitalism with huge doses of welfarism. This is termed by Teltumbde as 'state socialism'. Lenin and later Marxists have shown that this term 'state socialism' is an oxymoron. There is no such thing as 'state socialism'. In transition to a socialist economy, there can be a period of 'state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat' (which tantamount to socialism itself), as Lenin called it. However, the nationalization of key and basic industries and land does not tantamount to socialism. There have been several cases of such State capitalisms under bourgeois dictatorship in the modern history of world, from Bismarck to the war-time economy of Germany during the First World War (called 'WUMBA' economy), economies of certain Scandinavian countries, etc. **For a Marxist, the first characteristic feature to determine**

whether a country is socialist or not, is the character of the state power. What is the class character of the state: is it a workers' state or a bourgeois state? This is the first and foremost yardstick to determine the character of a social formation. However, the model of welfarist state capitalism (a la Fabians and Labour Party) has been termed as 'state socialism', which actually is an empty term and can be filled up with anything. **This program of the ILP in no way shows any affinity towards Marxist program of socialism, as Jaffrelot has convincingly shown.** Moreover, there are specific provisions in this program which tend to accommodate the bourgeois principles of Ambedkar also. For example, due to his respect for private property, Ambedkar was against the agrarian program for confiscation without compensation. He argued that the feudal lords and landowners should be compensated for confiscation of their land. The quote that Teltumbde has presented mentions this element of the program of the ILP. In fact, it was Ambedkar who just before the Independence proposed that the feudal lords and erstwhile royals should be compensated by giving them government bonds and they will be paid the dividend for these bonds from the revenue collected by the Indian state from the peasantry. This is a travesty of, even, a radical bourgeois land reforms, and Teltumbde is busy striving to make a 'socialist' out of Dr. Ambedkar. Besides, the proposal of privy-purse to be given to the erstwhile royals and lords was made by Dr. Ambedkar. Even a bourgeois revolution of the late-18th century presented a program of confiscation without compensation! If a program is not even radical enough to match the program of a late-18th century bourgeois democratic revolution, what justification does it have to be called 'socialist'?

Despite accepting the fact that the ILP was mainly an electoral strategy for Ambedkar, Teltumbde claims that ideologically ILP as a model was closer to Ambedkar's disposition and closer to program of communists. However, both these claims are baseless. **First, if ideologically the ILP was closer to Ambedkar's disposition, why did he shifted to the strategy of SCF in 1942 and disbanded the**

ILP? May be Teltumbde would argue that the communists forced him to do so! Whatever be their intellectual mistakes and ideological-political weaknesses, we certainly cannot blame the communists for the different strategies employed by Dr. Ambedkar. It would be too demeaning for Dr. Ambedkar if we make all his strategies as a derivative of what the communists did or did not do. The truth is that the ILP was purely an electoral strategy and nothing in the theory and practice of ILP was communist or communistic. The program is thoroughly Fabian and the practice is totally in congruence with the ideals of Fabianism and Pragmatism.

Ambedkar's defence of workers' rights to strike or later his introduction of Indian Trade Union Amendment Bill as the member of labour of Viceroy's council is basically the defence of workers' right of collective bargaining, which is totally supported by the Fabians as well as the Pragmatists. One does not become a communist by defending these economic rights of workers. Different strands of liberal bourgeois thought totally defend these economic rights of workers, in fact, support them vociferously because they believe that if the workers are not given certain legal and economic rights, then their militancy or opposition to the establishment could not be *regulated*. Every serious social scientist now knows that laws in the bourgeois state have dual functions: rights and regulation, and they must be understood as such. Teltumbde is uselessly trying to drag Marxism and Ambedkar's Deweyan Pragmatism closer, which is bad for both. He laments that despite Ambedkar becoming so 'radical' the communists adopted an antagonistic stand towards Ambedkar! I would later show that the tension was mutual and even in the period of the ILP, Ambedkar never missed an opportunity to attack Marxism as well as Indian communists.

As soon as the political exigencies that led to the creation of the ILP disappeared, so did the ILP and Ambedkar shifted to the strategy of SCF. During this period, while attacking Ambedkar for his demand of separate electorates and collaboration with the British, the CPI protested the police crack-down on SCF units that demanded separate electorates for Dalits. However, according to Teltumbde,

the communists should have accepted this demand of separate electorates for the Dalits. Teltumbde should also critique Bhagat Singh and his comrades for their “presumed Brahmanical bias”, because they too opposed communal award and separate electorates. However, he would not mention Bhagat Singh and single out the communists for his attack. There is no doubt that there were leaders and cadre in the CPI who had casteist mind-set. Before 1951, the CPI took action against such elements whenever they came to light. That is what communists could have done. How can someone figure out, *a priori*, who has caste prejudices and who does not? Only through political practice such elements appear or rather surface in a communist party. The communist party accordingly takes action against such elements and expels them or tries to change them through the process of criticism and self-criticism. In general, the CPI did undertake this process at least before 1951-52. As we mentioned earlier the communist movement in India had been intellectually and politically weak due to its intellectual dependence on other big parties like the CPs of Britain, Russia, Germany and later China. Due to this, they could not even work out the program of Indian revolution till 1951 and were content with some scattered program-related statements, articles and essays. In such a scenario, they were bound to fail in understanding the caste question and how it is articulated with class struggle and adopting a particular program on the annihilation of caste. However, to claim that the CPI was a Brahmanical outfit, even before 1951, is a preposterous and outrageous claim.

Teltumbde presents a picture that since Ambedkar undertook class politics with ILP, the communists felt threatened! **This too is a ridiculous claim.** Teltumbde does not care to provide any documentary evidence to support it. In fact, Ambedkar felt threatened due to increasing appeal of communism among his followers, as he accepted to Field Marshall Wavell. We will quote that source later in this essay. The truth is that, subjectively and consciously, Dr. Ambedkar was never in favour of class struggle; even in the period of the ILP he had made it clear time and again.

Objectively, of course, every politics is a part of the overall class struggle that goes on in any society. In that sense, every political strategy of Dr. Ambedkar was always a part of class struggle. However, subjectively and consciously, he was always against the politics of class struggle and he never hid this fact. Teltumbde's claim that it was the communal atmosphere of 1940s that drew Ambedkar away from class politics has no historical evidence and is nothing more than a false speculation to prove his hypothesis of supposed vicinity of Ambedkar and Marxism. It would have been better had Anand Teltumbde saved his energy for a better intellectual enterprise, instead of performing endless ideological somersaults to prove that Dr. Ambedkar had any affinity with Marxism and it was the practice and behaviour of Indian communists that drove him into the arms of liberal bourgeois philosophy!

[Teltumbde on 'How the Indian Communists Made Ambedkar Anti-Communist!'](#)

The mistakes and weaknesses of the Indian communist movement apart, can we blame the shifts and transitions in the political career of Ambedkar on the deeds of communists, especially, his repulsion to communism? The central slogan of Anand Teltumbde is: whenever you cannot show that Ambedkar is friendly towards Marxism, blame it on Indian communists! Interestingly, this argument robs Dr. Ambedkar of all political autonomy and agency and his entire attitude towards Marxism becomes a derivative discourse stemming from what the Indian communists did. Isn't it ridiculous to make such an argument about an intellectual like Dr. Ambedkar? However, I would not simply speculate. I will show in a short while that Ambedkar as a firm and consistent Deweyan Pragmatist had a natural antipathy towards Marxism. But first, let us return to our eternal Leftist interlocutor between Ambedkar's pragmatism and Marxism, Mr. Anand Teltumbde.

The problem with Mr. Teltumbde is that he cannot decide which stool to sit on; he jumps back and forth from one stool to another and in the process falls in between the two stools. First Teltumbde accepts

that Ambedkar's interest in Marxism was thwarted by his religious upbringing, influence of pragmatism and Fabianism during his education in the US and Britain; he never accepted Marxist economics even when he used the term 'state socialism' in his 'States and Minorities'; he also accepts that the term 'socialism' has assumed many meanings over the centuries and it was only with Marx that theories of Scientific Socialism were propounded. However, here Teltumbde by mistake exposes his poor understanding of the difference between myriad forms of pre-Marxian socialism and the Scientific Socialism of Marx. Teltumbde argues that the *differentia specifica* of Marxian Scientific Socialism is that it wants to do away with State whereas the pre-Marxian or non-Marxian theories of socialism including theories of 'state socialism' believe that it is the state that will do away with exploitation and will promote general welfare. While it is true that the theories of state socialism did believe that State is the agent that will end exploitation and promote general welfare, this is not the main basis of difference between Marxist theory of Socialism and other theories of socialism. The most important aspect of Marxian Scientific Socialism is that Socialism is a result of class struggle and what Marx called 'liberation of the working class by the working class itself'; it is not the work of some enlightened and benevolent individuals; it is the dynamic of class struggle that leads, first to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat and then the eventual withering away of the state with emergence of a classless society; under socialism, state continues to exist but now it is characterized by dictatorship of the proletariat; this dictatorship of proletariat is only a transitional phase towards communism, when the classes and state will wither away in a long and protracted process. Lenin and Mao showed that during this period of transition the possibility of reversal and capitalist restoration continues to exist and it is minimized only to the extent that the continued hegemony of bourgeois ideology is decisively broken under the proletarian state. **The *differentia specifica* of Marxist theory of socialism is not the existence or absence of state, as such. It is the class nature of the process through which socialism comes into existence and the class nature of**

the socialist state, though this state strives and intends to become more of a *no-state* in the protracted process of socialist transition. Teltumbde's arguments in this regard are certainly lacking.

Teltumbde attempts to refute Gail Omvedt's argument that Ambedkar was opposed to communism. She has quoted Ambedkar where he clearly says that communism is like a forest fire and goes on burning and consuming anything and everything that comes in its way. However, Teltumbde wants to reduce this stand of Ambedkar to his antipathy to Nehru's foreign policy of creating a false impression of friendliness towards both countries, Russia and China! Any reader can gauge the extent of distortion of facts by Teltumbde here. The statement of Ambedkar has nothing critical about the foreign policy of Nehru as such, but a clear-cut antagonism towards communism itself. Later in this essay, we will quote the entire statement to expose the lie of Teltumbde.

Since, Teltumbde senses the weakness of his arguments, he comes up with a new argument: the Soviet Russia had lost its sheen after Lenin! So, this might be the reason for Ambedkar's antipathy, though Teltumbde does not say so. However, he mentions this "losing sheen by Soviet Russia" only to create the context that Ambedkar might have become critical of Soviet Russia like many had become during the Stalin years. Teltumbde argues that stories of persecution of political opponents by Stalin were pouring from Russia. This too is a ridiculous claim. The news of famous trials of 1930s did emerge from Soviet Union, however, the slandering based on these trials, what Teltumbde calls "stories" emerged from the American and British bourgeois and imperialist press, not from the USSR. Interestingly, a few sentences later, Teltumbde had the audacity to claim that Ambedkar also had a 'soft corner' for Stalin and arguably he maintained a one day fast when Stalin died, though there is no evidence of this! These anecdotes without evidence are produced here by Teltumbde in order to show that Ambedkar became anti-communist due to the misdeeds of the communists in the 1930s! However, the fact is that Ambedkar never expressed his admiration

for communism even in the 1920s. He deals with communists and communism mainly in the 1930s because that was the decade when he entered electoral politics. In the late 1920s itself, Ambedkar clearly believed that communism and strikes are twins and he would never support a strike which is led by communists, because communists politicize the strikes which lead to economic loss of workers! An incorrigibly liberal bourgeois idea, as you can see. In the 1930s too, he critiqued communism in a number of writings including 'The Annihilation of Caste'. Even during the phase of the ILP, he clearly declared that class analysis is not relevant in the Indian context and the Marxist theory of class conflict is something to which he cannot agree. In fact, Ambedkar had expressed his antipathy to Marxist theory of class struggle in his paper presented in Columbia University in 1916 itself, which Teltumbde himself has quoted. **Evidently, the claim of Teltumbde that Ambedkar became anti-communist only in the 1940s and that too due to the practice of Indian communists, is a gross distortion of historical facts.** Later, Teltumbde accepts in a shame-faced fashion that some responsibility of this antipathy also lies with Ambedkar who himself felt threatened by communism once he entered electoral politics. He concedes, "As these instances illustrate, his anti-communist statements mainly came out anxiety to defend his turf in electoral politics." (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 32) Afterwards, he immediately claims that this antipathy of Ambedkar was not to communist theory in general but the practice of Indian communists, which we have shown is a baseless claim.

Teltumbde fails to understand that the allegedly "trivializing attitude" of communists to the question of caste stems from their broader failure to understand concrete conditions of Indian society and their failure to undertake a concrete analysis of these concrete conditions. He claims that it was the Brahmanical mind-set of communists to follow the *vedavakya*. First they followed the word of the Brahmin *Samhitas* and later followed the word of Marxist theory but by turning it into a creed or religion. **The problem with this argument is that the Indian communists did not even follow the Marxist classics**

by word! Not that it would have been sufficient, but, the Indian Marxists not only failed to apply the universal truth of Marxism to Indian conditions, they also failed to understand the “word” of Marxist theory itself. We can see this failure in their support to the formation of Pakistan for a brief period when an anti-Marxist idea of nation based on religious identity was accepted uncritically, or the failure to understand the principal contradiction during the Quit India Movement and the decision not to participate in it and also in drafting and implementing a particular program on the question of caste as well as gender during the national movement. However, the issue of lack of understanding of caste question is singled out to prove that it was the Brahmanical bias of the CPI that prevented it from comprehending this question in totality. This is a gross injustice to the early communists, who despite their lack of understanding of the program of Indian revolution, including the program for annihilation of caste, fought and sacrificed more than any other political force during the national movement of India and also since the Naxalbari Revolt. It is often easy for armchair passive radicals to make such ludicrous claims.

Teltumbde's Account of 'Unmarxist Marxists': An Unmarxist History of “Unmarxist” Marxists!

Under the subhead 'Unmarxist Marxists', first Teltumbde repeats his allegation that Indian Marxists took the notions and categories of Marxism uncritically that had come into existence in the specific European context. This claim is incorrect on many levels. First of all, which categories Teltumbde is talking about? Is it class? Is it state and its class character? Is it class struggle? If yes, then he misses that these categories *are* universal categories and are applicable to all class societies, even the Indian class society. Secondly, **in all countries class exploitation is articulated with different forms of oppression from race, ethnicity, linguistic identity to caste and religion. All these forms of social oppression have their own particularity and they articulate with class exploitation in their own specific ways in different national contexts.** Communists in India undoubtedly failed to understand the *specificity of the*

articulation of caste-based oppression and exploitation with class exploitation. This led to serious mistakes on the part of communists. But to claim that the communists did not take up caste question is historically incorrect. They did take up the caste question, but in the lack of a proper understanding of the particular form of articulation of caste and class, which I have called the relationship of Correspondence (see, Abhinav Sinha, 'Historiography of Caste: Some Critical Observations', *Caste Question and Marxism*, Arvind Trust, Lucknow, 2014), they failed to devise a *particular* program of anti-caste struggles as part of class struggle. However, to conjure up an image of Brahmanical idea of 'following the *vedavakya* of Marxism' and impose it on this weakness of communists is preposterous. The truth is that Indian communists did not even follow the word!

Teltumbde again repeats the false claim that Indian communists believed that India had already become capitalist and therefore they ignored peasants and rural class struggle where the caste dynamics was being played out. We have shown above that this claim of Teltumbde is not based on the documents and practice of the CPI but solely on the works of M.N. Roy, which was rejected by the CPI. **Teltumbde is not well-versed in the history of communist movement and that is why he makes such a childish claim.** His argument that even the Congress understood the importance of Untouchability as early as 1916 and communists were "blissfully ignorant" about it, is inaccurate. First of all, proper formation of the CPI took place only in 1933, as we have pointed out earlier. The 1920 Tashkent declaration was just a formal event. The 1925 All India Conference was even more meaningless, when speeches were made which attempted to make a bridge between Islam and Marxism (for instance, the speech of Maulana Hasrat Mohani), and a constitution was adopted which said that every worker can participate in election of delegates to the party forums like party conferences and party congress. Evidently, it was a constitution that was even weaker than those of the Social Democratic parties of Europe. That is why, it must be understood that the first major

milestone in the process of formation of the CPI was 1933, when following the advice of CPs of Germany, Britain and China, a provisional nucleus of the CC was formed. To expect, therefore, that the CPI could have adopted a particular program on the Caste Question, when it did not even have a general program of revolution in India, is ridiculous.

Secondly, though the communists did not theoretically understand the caste question and therefore the question of untouchability, they were not “blissfully ignorant” about it. In 1930, in a document ‘United Front for Action’, the communist party discussed the caste system and untouchability in detail, linked anti-caste struggle with the struggle against feudalism and the British rule. It declared to fight against all forms of caste-based oppression and discrimination. In the Second Congress of the Party in 1948 also, the paper on political situation discusses the problem of untouchability and appeals to the toiling untouchable masses to struggle uncompromisingly against ‘the upper-caste bourgeois state’ and also carry out the struggle against the separatist leaders who want to isolate their struggles from the struggle of all working masses. The allusion here is to Ambedkar. The AITUC, in its fourth, fifth and sixth conferences, had made untouchability an issue, and even later, had included this issue in the ‘charter of the workers.’ Regarding the anti-caste activities and stand of AIKS, we have already talked. In the work of Andhra Mahasabha that prepared the prelude of Telangana peasants’ struggle, the communists actively raised the question of caste and untouchability. The CPI in many states of country was known as the ‘party of *chamars* and *dusadhs*’ due to its struggle for the Dalits, especially on the question of land but also on the question of caste-based atrocities. **Therefore, to claim that the communists were ‘blissfully ignorant’ of the caste question, again, is a distortion of history by Anand Teltumbde.**

It is true that the CPI even after independence failed to present a program for annihilation of caste. Teltumbde quotes Singaravelu and some other early communists who presented a mechanical and economistic understanding of not only caste, but also class struggle.

As we showed above, the intellectual weakness of communist movement was apparent from the very beginning. However, Teltumbde also claims that Indian communists followed Marx mechanically by word. If we look at Marx's and Lenin's concept of class, we can easily see that Indian communists failed to even mechanically follow the word of Marx! We have presented our detailed critique of how Indian communists failed to present a coherent and cohesive program of Indian revolution based on concrete analysis of concrete conditions and how this also led them to the failure in presenting a particular program for the annihilation of caste too. However, Ambedkar too failed to present such a program and all his remedies remained within the framework of Deweyan Pragmatist methods of collaborating with the rulers (irrespective of the fact who the ruler was!), identity construction, constitutionalism and legalism (see Jaffrelot, 2005). Why single out the communists only, then? Even Ambedkar reached the conclusion that tantamount to the statement that caste belongs to the sphere of superstructure as we showed above. The CPI at particular junctures claimed the same, though not always. There were times when another thesis of 'caste is class' also surfaced, which was equally erroneous. However, this error, namely, relegating caste to the sphere of superstructure, as we can see, was shared by the Indian communists and Ambedkar. The critique of communist movement on program of Indian revolution, caste question, gender and nationality is an important task and must be undertaken. We have actually undertaken this task (<http://anvilmag.in/naxalbari-retrospection/#.Ws4As4hubIU>). However, to claim that Ambedkar was driven to anti-communism due to the failures of Indian communists is a ridiculous mockery of reason and rationality.

“Metaphoric Madness” or Anand Teltumbde’s Derivative Discourse on ‘Base-Superstructure Metaphor’

Teltumbde rightly points out that the understanding of Marx and Engels regarding economic base and superstructure was a dialectical one in which economic base plays a dominant role in the final analysis because it is the production and reproduction of

material life that forms the basis of political, ideological, cultural superstructure. However, in the process of stressing upon this dialectical notion, Teltumbde proves too much! The reason for that is that after quoting Marx and Engels on this issue, he relies on secondary sources like Chris Harman (a Trotskyite)! It would have been better had Anand Teltumbde relied on the classic texts on the question of economic base, superstructure, forces of production and relations of production. He relies heavily on a secondary text from a Trotskyite instead and the shortfalls are evident immediately. If you read the essay of Harman, which Teltumbde almost paraphrases, you find that just like the master (Trotsky), the disciple is equally economistic. First of all, Harman argues that base is combination of forces and relations of production. According to Marx, economic base is the sum total of production relations. Secondly, in the dialectics of relations and forces of production, according to Harman, it is the forces of production that are the dynamic element, the independent variable. This is the economism which prevailed in the Second International led by Kautsky, Russian Marxism before Lenin including the "legal Marxists" like Struve as well as Plekhanov and the Soviet Marxism after Lenin, for example, the Soviet textbook of Political Economy and a few writings of Stalin to some extent; however, if one reads Trotskyite works on the issue, they find that Trotsky and Trotskyites are the worst victims of this kind of economism. Marx had showed clearly in *Capital* that some production relations themselves were forces of production, for example, simple co-operation between labourers constituted a relation of production (as a division of labour) as well as a force of production, as it increased productivity. Lenin steered clear of this mistake and Mao presented a thorough critique of this mistake, though the likes of Bettelheim and Althusser distorted him. The fact is that forces of production can develop in proper way only when the relations of production are in accordance with them. Historically, the forces of production develop with the interaction of human beings with the Nature. However, this interaction itself is shaped and modulated by the relations of production. Therefore, immediately after a revolutionary transformation it is the relations of production

that play the dominant role in its dialectic with forces of production by giving impetus to the development of the latter. However, as the productive forces develop, the relations of production become a fetter upon them and the forces of production represented by the revolutionary class becomes the dominant element in the dialectic. Therefore, one cannot make a simplistic statement that forces of production always play the dominant role or the relations of production always play the dominant role. The dominant and secondary aspects of a contradiction always transform into each other and it is this transmutability that actually makes it a contradiction, a dialectic. There is no such thing as a non-transmutable contradiction or a static dialectic. Had Teltumbde read the classic texts of Marxism on base and superstructure, his alleged corrective would not have been built on an equally vulgar economistic representation of the subject by Chris Harman. To prove this, what Teltumbde paraphrases from Harman (though he acknowledges his debt to Harman in a footnote, yet the paraphrased paragraph has not been put within quotes, which creates an illusion that the voice belongs to Teltumbde!) can be presented here, which is a motley crew of mostly stupid questions:

“Ever since then Marxists began interpreting this statement: What is the ‘base’? The economy? The forces of production? Technology? The relations of production? What is included in the superstructure? Obviously, the state, but what about ideology (and revolutionary theory)? The family? The state when it owns industry? Finally, what is the relation between the ‘base’ and the ‘superstructure’? Does the base determine the superstructure? If so, what exactly is the nature of the determination? And does the superstructure have a degree of ‘autonomy’ – and if so, how can this be reconciled with talk of ‘determination’ (even if it is only ‘determination in the last resort’)?” (Teltumbde, 2017, p.40-41)

This is the paragraph from Harman paraphrased by Teltumbde, *verbatim*! And Teltumbde is stupefied by the pertinence of questions! Apparently, any person familiar with the development of Marxist-Leninist thinking on base and superstructure would be surprised at

the misplaced character of these questions. For example, the question: "The state when it owns industry?" (!!) This is a stupid question. It does not really matter whether the state owns the industry or not! It still is the most important component of political superstructure. In fact, Engels said, "Force (that is state power) is also an economic power." (Engels to C. Schmidt, 27 October, 1890). This is why, in same letter Engels ridicules confused people like Harman and his follower Mr. Teltumbde, "What these gentlemen all lack is dialectics." (ibid) The very question itself, whether state is part of superstructure when it owns industry, is a non-question and shows how Harman is utterly confused about what base and superstructure means, not to mention the relation between them. And it is this Trotskyite fellow on which Teltumbde relies rather too heavily to introduce his corrective in the communist movement of India (!!), though we have seen how little Teltumbde is familiar with the positions of communists from 1925 to 1951, howsoever incorrect it was! In order to correct a mistake, one should first have a comprehensive understanding of what the mistake is!

Teltumbde after quoting oft-quoted excerpts from Marx and Engels to show the non-deterministic and non-economistic character of their use of the metaphor of base and superstructure, argues that what happened in the communist movement of India was just the opposite: a mechanical use of the metaphor which led the Indian communists to "denying the existence of the stark reality of caste." The first part of the statement is true that the metaphor was used too mechanistically, or rather, the Indian communists failed to understand that it was merely a metaphor. However, the second part that it led them to deny the existence of caste is definitely not true as we showed above. Secondly, the corrective presented in Europe as an antithesis to this mechanistic attitude, that Teltumbde refers to is the New Left of the late-1950s and Maoist Left of 1960s as well as Althusser. One wonders what he includes in the New Left of the late-1950s and the Maoist Left of the 1960s. If it is the French Maoist tradition which emerged from the Paris of 1968, then the less we talk about it, the better it is! In the name of eliminating the economism

and determinism of the Second as well as the Third International, they rather eliminated the revolutionary core of Marxism-Leninism. Either we take Young Hegelian idealism and voluntarism of the likes of Charles Bettelheim, or, the non-party revolutionism and pseudo-Maosim of the likes of Alain Badiou, Lazarus, etc; the one thing they share is that they eliminate or dilute the revolutionary analytical core of Marxism such as the notions of class, state, party and dictatorship of proletariat. Similarly, the anti-deterministic corrective of Althusser that Mr. Teltumbde talks about ends up in non-determination because according to Althusser “the last instance never comes!” I doubt whether Mr. Teltumbde has read anything original from Louis Althusser, or any other trend that he talks about. It appears that all his knowledge is coming from the poor source of Chris Harman. That is why Teltumbde ends up commenting, “Notwithstanding these interpretations, many among Indian Marxists even these days swear by this metaphor as profound theoretical tenet.” (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 43) So, for Teltumbde it is not the misuse/abuse of the metaphor of base-superstructure, but the metaphor itself is not a profound theoretical tenet. That is what we call “throwing the baby with the dirty water of the baby tub.”

Mr. Teltumbde does not stop there! He claims that this mistake has led to the split between the two branches of movement of Indian proletariat: the Marxist and the Dalit. This again exposes Mr. Teltumbde’s poor understanding of theory and ideology. A movement becomes proletarian or non-proletarian by the character of the hegemonic theory of that movement (“without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” – Lenin). A movement of workers dominated by reformist and pragmatic ideology is not a *proletarian* movement. Therefore, if by Dalit branch of the movement of Indian proletariat, Mr. Teltumbde means the movement led by Ambedkar, or by Gaikwad-faction and Dalit Panthers, then he is grossly mistaken. Definitely, the Dalit movement has radical potentialities in it and the possibility to become a part of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in India; however, on the one hand, Dr. Ambedkar never failed to keep the movement under

his leadership within the bounds of bourgeois legality (as Mr. Teltumbde himself has demonstrated beautifully in his last book 'Mahad') and away from political radicalization, and on the other, the communists in India could not organize a *class-based anti-caste movement* due to their own theoretical shortcomings and mistakes, though they organized Dalits in the land and agrarian struggles in many states. Therefore, the two movements, the Dalit movement led by Ambedkar and the movement led by the communists (which did include a large section of Dalits) remained separate movements from the very beginning and there is no question of split between them because they were never one. Moreover, Teltumbde like many identitarian writers uses Ambedkarite movement and Dalit movement as synonyms. On all questions, from separate electorates to conversions, there was a non-Ambedkarite Dalit movement from the very beginning. **It is mischievous of such writers to conflate the two and deny any existence to non-Ambedkarite Dalit movements, radical and reformist alike.**

Teltumbde claims that over the years Marxists have realized the mistake of ignoring caste and Ambedkar (again, the synonymity is conspicuous! If you talk about caste or its annihilation, it must be in the Ambedkarite vein, or else, you will be branded a casteist!). I would say it is not Marxists as such but certain "Marxists" who suddenly had this *moment of epiphany*! However, this epiphany has more to do with appeasing the Dalit masses by using the symbol of Ambedkar, rather than critically engaging with Ambedkar and his theories. As far as ignoring caste is concerned, it is certainly not true about revolutionary communists and **it is pointless to talk about revisionist parliamentary Left of India, because once you make a theoretical compromise on one point, your compromising attitude will be manifested in some form or the other on all issues including caste and gender.** Secondly, as far as ignoring Ambedkar is concerned, I believe it is true in one sense: there should have been a revolutionary dialectical materialist critique of Ambedkar, which the revolutionary Left failed to present. It moved between the extremes of phenomenal criticisms of the inconsistency

of Ambedkar or complete surrender to Ambedkar (as is happening right now in the context of Maoists and other revolutionary Left groups). The need was to go to the philosophical roots of Dr. Ambedkar and present a Marxist critique of his worldview and politics. In this sense, yes! The communists failed to critically engage with Ambedkar. One humble attempt at this can found here: (<https://redpolemique.wordpress.com/2017/05/04/caste-question-marxism-and-the-political-legacy-of-b-r-ambedkar/>).

Under the next subhead, Teltumbde critiques the stand of CPI on Ambedkar's demand of separate electorate and calls it casteist prejudice! I was surprised to see Mr. Teltumbde supporting Ambedkar's demand for separate electorates. Of course, Gandhi opposed it from reactionary casteist Hinduist standpoint. However, this cannot become the reason for supporting this reactionary demand. Just like, just because the Modi government for its own communal and divisive agenda attacks triple talaak and halala, we cannot support it! Secondly, if CPI's opposition to separate electorates can be ascribed to their caste prejudice, then Teltumbde should also criticize Bhagat Singh and his comrades for opposing separate electorates and communal award. However, Teltumbde safely steers clear of this!

Teltumbde gives a number of instances where the communist leaders or cadre showed a casteist attitude. First of all, let us be clear about one thing. There is no need to defend the communist leaders or the communist party after 1951-52, when the party was ideologically compromised and became revisionist. Revolutionary communists have no responsibility to defend the conduct of CPI or its leaders after 1951 or the CPM from 1964 itself. As I pointed out earlier, once you make an ideological compromise, this compromising approach is manifested on all questions and issues. Secondly, even before 1951, there were casteist tendencies, not so much on party forums, but especially on the mass organizational forums on which communists were a dominant force. For instance, on the platform of AITUC, etc. It must be understood that party exists in a class society dominated by a variety of forms of social

oppression. It recruits from this society and people come with all the birth marks of this society. The question is whether the party has the approach to fight incessantly against these tendencies of class society carried over into the party? On the one hand we find a number of instances where there are compromises on the question of caste, especially on mass organizational forums; and on the other, we also find the party taking action against such elements and sending their professional revolutionaries to live in Dalit *bastis* and become one with the Dalit masses. The question can be asked: can a Dalit leader or Dalit organization claim to be free from caste and religious prejudices? I do not think so. Ample evidence can be presented where towering Dalit leaders showed religious or caste-based prejudices or modernist prejudices against the tribals, for example, Dr. Ambedkar himself. The point is not to show that any organization is insulated from the society out of which it grew; that is impossible. **The point is to show whether the organization in question constantly and incessantly tried to fight against these reactionary tendencies or not. The CPI at least before 1951 did try to fight against caste prejudices within the party, though at a number of occasions it failed to do so. The reason for this failure was not simply the individual upper caste identity of the leaders, but the lack of a clear understanding of the issues at stake, as we showed above.**

There is no need to say anything about the writings of Dange especially after 1951-52. His right-wing position within the party was apparent from the very beginning. However, there had been a strong opposition to P.C. Joshi's and Dange's right-wing opportunism within the party even before 1951-52, about which Teltumbde is silent. **This is a kind of intellectual dishonesty to present only one side of the coin by selectively cherry-picking the instances where the party faulted to take firm steps against caste prejudices. There are equal counter-examples which Teltumbde silently passes over. On the other hand, regarding Ambedkar's positions on conversion, on separate electorates, about Islam and Muslims, about tribals, Mr. Teltumbde has assumed a convenient but**

shame-faced silence. Notwithstanding the contributions of Dr. Ambedkar, his political positions on the above questions were thoroughly problematic.

In the process of critiquing Dange, Mr. Teltumbde commits a serious blunder. He claims, “Dange stood in contradiction with Marxist scholars like D. D. Kosambi and a host of liberal anti-caste thinkers including Ambedkar who considered Krishna’s pronouncements in the *Gita* as the creator of the caste system providing ideological justification for this exploitative system.” (ibid, p. 50) As the readers can see, the statement is a confused one. First of all, Kosambi never considered the pronouncements of Krishna in *Gita* as the creator of caste system. Kosambi’s theory of origin of varna/caste system is far from this childish claim. The second part of statement says that these pronouncements provided ideological justification for the caste system. This is just the opposite of the first part of the sentence according to which these pronouncements created caste system! A pronouncement can provide justification for something only when it already exists! **The fact is that Teltumbde wants to bring the theories of Kosambi and Ambedkar regarding the origin of caste closer, which cannot be done. So he makes a contradictory statement that these pronouncements created the caste system and justified it! Such intellectual sleights of hand abound in this essay of Teltumbde.**

Teltumbde, in his next subhead ‘Volley of Abuses,’ takes the distortion of history to a higher level. Let us have a look at the kind of criticism that he makes of Indian communists, “Right from his coming to prominence as the leader of the independent Dalit movement, the CPI was angry with him.” (ibid, p. 52) What kind of political criticism is this? This is psycho-analysis. In political and ideological struggle, it is not important whether someone is angry with the other or happy with them. It is about the merits and demerits of the criticism that both sides present. If we look at the criticism of Ambedkar by the CPI, we must acknowledge that the critique is ideologically weak. For example, that Ambedkar was a stooge of imperialism was only looking at the apparent reality and not the essential reality. This

essential reality could have been revealed only had the communists undertaken a scientific and inductive analysis of the philosophy and politics of Dr. Ambedkar. He not only collaborated with the British rulers but the state in general. Christopher Jaffrelot has shown in his book, which Teltumbde also quotes repeatedly, that one of the strategies of Ambedkar was collaborating with the rulers. The root of this strategy is missed by Jaffrelot as well as Teltumbde: the Deweyan pragmatism of Ambedkar according to which, in words of Ambedkar himself: "The government is the most important and powerful institution. The manner in which the government thinks, makes things happen." (Speech of Ambedkar in the Mahad Conference, March, 1927) Since the communists failed to see the philosophical roots of Ambedkar, they called him 'stooge of imperialism', which was like missing the essential reality. Ambedkar's strategy of separatism and reformism also stems from his Pragmatism. **However, how can one deny that demand for separate electorates was in fact a political separatism? How can one deny that Ambedkar's strategies were actually reformist? And if the CPI presented his criticism on these points, how can one be irked by it, as Mr. Teltumbde is? Is it not the right of a political group or faction to present his critical views about others? Did not Ambedkar do the same in regard to communists, the Congress, even some untouchable leaders like Gavai, Raja, at different points of time? Then why so irked at the criticism of Ambedkar, howsoever weak or even incorrect it was? Was Ambedkar's critique of Marxism and Indian communists correct?** We have already seen some instances that his critique was misplaced. Later, we will see in detail how Ambedkar critiqued Marxism without even reading a single classic work of Marxism and all his knowledge about Marxism came from the lectures of pragmatist teachers like Dewey in Columbia University, the positions of Fabianists as well as Austrian School of Economics (Karl Menger), another source of influence on Ambedkar that Mr. Teltumbde has totally missed.

Teltumbde gives three quotes from CPI's resolution of 1952 which critique the SCF in which Ambedkar has been called pro-imperialist and opportunist and a call to win over the local units of SCF has been made. As we argued above, it would be a mistake to call Ambedkar pro-imperialist. He was pro-state, irrespective of who was in the state. Even when he was angry with some policy of state, he only criticized it in the vein of counselling rather than presenting a radical subversive critique. This much even Deweyan pragmatism allows. In that sense, he cannot be called pro-imperialist, which is a misplaced criticism. However, Ambedkar's role in the working class movement objectively did assume a shape of separatism and reformism and in such a scenario a collision with communists was inevitable. **When the collision did take place, no side left any stone unturned, neither the communists nor Ambedkar. Therefore, there is no need for whining that Mr. Teltumbde is doing.**

Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar was embittered and irked by the practice of communists and that is why, he went against Marxism. **A counter-question can be asked. The British colonial state did a lot of harm to the Dalits and even Ambedkar's movement. In fact, the British colonial state did not tamper with the system of colonial exploitation in the village, except one thing: the main appropriator at the top of the system of feudal exploitation was replaced. The British colonial state even systematized the feudal exploitation of shudra peasants and landless Dalits. In comparison to the negligible positive changes for the Dalits like army recruitment and Western education (limited to a very small section of the Dalits, especially in garrison towns and for a very limited time, because the army recruitment was discontinued in the early-1890s). Why did not Ambedkar ever go against the British state, even when it repeatedly disregarded the demands of Ambedkar himself? I will give a few instances. The Simon Commission rejected the demand for separate electorates but accepted the demand for reserved seats, but added a caveat which irked Ambedkar a lot. The caveat said that the Dalit**

candidate will have to have his competence certified by the governor of the province! However, did Ambedkar oppose or attack the British state? No! The British stopped military recruitment of the Dalits due to protest from Brahmins. Did Ambedkar oppose or critique the British for this? No! He only continued to plead with the British that military recruitment be resumed, just like a number of other reformers had been doing in Maharashtra, even before Ambedkar. The British in their land settlements never gave land to the landless Dalits, neither in the permanent settlement, nor in Ryotwari or Mahalwadi settlements. In fact, private ownership was introduced in land by British and the land was given to high castes mainly and secondarily some upward mobile middle peasant castes. This made the landlessness of the Dalits even more perennial. Did Ambedkar ever criticize the British for their anti-Dalit land settlements? No! The British ethnographic state ossified the entity of caste through its surveys and census by making caste a modern categorized, systematized juridico-legal category. Did Ambedkar oppose it? No, because from his Deweyan perspective these steps were for the good of the Dalits because they presumably formed the basis of future “affirmative action” (the term was not existent then and came into existence in the 1960s in the US; I always wonder what does this “affirmative action” affirm? The *status quo*?!). The British rejected Ambedkar’s demand for Sikh Dalit converts to be given the benefits reserved for minorities and made clear to him that only Jatt Sikhs will get these benefits. Did Ambedkar attack the British for this? No! He rather abandoned his idea of conversion into Sikhism! The Hindu sepoys attacked the Dalits pulling a robe of the chariot during the Nashik movement on the order of the British administration. Did Ambedkar critique British administration? No! He only demanded that the caste Hindu sepoys be punished. During the Mahad Satyagraha, the DM Kolaba, Mr. Hood, made it clear to Ambedkar that if he goes ahead with the Satyagraha in Mahad, he would take action against the protesters and therefore he must abandon the idea

of Satyagraha. Did Ambedkar go ahead with Satyagraha anyway and critique the British administration for its partisanship with the Brahmins, who had been granted an injunction order to prevent the Dalits from drinking water from Chavdar Tank within one day? No! He rather dropped the idea of Satyagraha and tried to convince the Mahars that there is no need to put the British government in dilemma because the government is with us! Why are we presenting these instances? Just to show that it was not the opposition from the Communists which made Ambedkar anti-communist, otherwise, the constant thwarting by the British colonial state of a number of steps of Ambedkar himself, would have made him a staunch anti-colonialist. He never became anti-state or anti-British or he never became a supporter or admirer of Marxism, not due to deeds or misdeeds of certain people (communists or otherwise). **It was his ideological and political standpoint of Deweyan pragmatism which guided his political practice and the political positions that he took.** Teltumbde should abandon this useless exercise to show that Dr. Ambedkar did not have an independent and non-derivative political position and wisdom, and that his anti-communism stemmed from the practice of Indian communists.

Ambedkar and Marx: or How Teltumbde Hides the Ignorance of Dr. Ambedkar Regarding Marxism – II

After repeating his old arguments (like, “CPI was irked by Ambedkar’s tryst with class politics,” etc) and critiquing the economism of Ranadive’s article on the SCF (though Teltumbde also criticizes some elements of the article which are broadly correct, for example, the desirability of democratic revolution as a step forward for annihilation of caste), he makes some new bold claims. He claims, “It is noteworthy that while Ambedkar was harsh against the communists in his statements, he was not so when he spoke on Marxism. It is the greatest compliment of a critique to place Marx and Buddha, whom he adored as his master, on the same plane, albeit

for their goals. As a matter of fact, Ambedkar, never questioned the communist philosophy.” (ibid, p. 55)

Now let us turn to this question. Did Ambedkar ever attack Marxist philosophy itself? Yes. He did. Not once but many a times. Not only attacked it but also exposed his complete ignorance about Marxism. He once claimed that he had read more Marxist books than all the Marxists of India. However, this can be shown and proven to be a bombastic and false claim. Let us see, in brief, how and what Ambedkar understood of Marxism and how he “critiqued” it, the context of his work ‘Buddha and Karl Marx’ first. In the third part of the present subhead, we will come to other writings/speeches of Ambedkar, where he (attempts to) critique(s) what he thought to be Marxism.

First of all, Ambedkar called Marxism a philosophy of pigs. This is what he wrote, “Carlyle called Political Economy a Pig Philosophy. Carlyle was of course wrong. For man needs material comforts. But the Communist Philosophy seems to be equally wrong for the aim of their philosophy seems to be fatten pigs as though men are no better than pigs.” (Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx*) As evident from the statement, Ambedkar did not understand even a little of Marxist philosophy. The above comment is made in the context of Marxism’s critique of religion, which Ambedkar considers to be the only mode of spirituality. Marxism is presented as an ideology which only talks about fulfilling the material requirements of human beings as if they are animals. **Such liberal “common sense” about Marxism suits a student of humanities in some school, but not Ambedkar who claims to have read more Marxism than Marxists!**

Let us see a few more examples of Ambedkar’s understanding of Marxism. Though Ambedkar has made critical comments about Marxist philosophy at many places, we will focus only on the above-cited work here. He informs the readers in this book that for Buddhism he has read *Tripitakas*; however, we are not informed which Marxist classic has been used to expose the weaknesses of this “philosophy of pigs”! As you read on, you find that nowhere in

the entire book has Ambedkar quoted any Marxist classic of Marx, Engels, Lenin, or Stalin. You also come to know that he has actually not read a single original work of Marxism and the source of his knowledge, or rather attack, on Marxism is the textbooks that are taught in the Western academia. A few examples will suffice. Ambedkar writes, "Karl Marx is no doubt the father of modern socialism or Communism but he was not interested merely in propounding the theory of Socialism. That had been done long before him by others. Marx was more interested in proving that his Socialism was scientific." In the same breath, Ambedkar claims that Marx launched a "crusade" against pre-Marxian socialists. Had Ambedkar read any original Marxist classic written by Marx or Engels, he would not have made such a baseless claim. The truth is that Marx never launched any crusade against Utopian Socialists. In fact, Marx and Engels critically engaged with their theories and in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels clearly shows that the theories of Utopian Socialists were in some sense a precursor to Marxist theory of Socialism and praises them. It was class analysis that was missing from their theories and they could not have advanced the theory of Scientific Socialism based on class analysis in a period when the proletariat was in its infancy and capitalism itself was in the process of consolidation. Marx waged a struggle against those petty-bourgeois socialists who were playing the role of splitters in the working class movement. But he had high regard for Utopian Socialists like Saint-Simon, Fourier and Robert Owen. Moreover, Ambedkar's claim that the theory of Socialism was propounded long before Marx, also, is an inaccurate statement. From the times of Levellers and Diggers itself, there was a political trend within the workers' movement that aspired for a future of equality and called it 'socialism'. However, to mistake it for the *theory of socialism* only shows that Ambedkar was not aware with the history of socialist thinking in Europe.

Ambedkar argues further while enumerating the "principles of Marxism", "Marx's contention rested on the following theses: "the purpose of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to explain

the origin of the universe.”” Surprisingly, Ambedkar thought that Marx thought it a waste of time to interpret the world. Again, one can see Ambedkar’s complete lack of understanding regarding Marxism. Marx had said, “The philosophers, hitherto, have **only** interpreted the world in different ways, the point, however, is to change it.” Any reader can compare the two statements. Marx believed that only interpreting the world is not enough and interpretation should serve the project of changing the world; secondly, Marx believed that only those can interpret the world correctly who are also engaged in the struggle to change it (see Marx’s critique of Kantian agnosticism and his emphasis on praxis as the true source of knowledge.). However, Ambedkar’s interpretation of Marxism is straight out of the textbooks prescribed by pragmatists and Fabian teachers in Columbia University and LSE!

Ambedkar argues further that Marx says that “the workers are exploited by the owners who **misappropriate** the surplus value, which is the result of workers’ labour.” True, that the source of surplus value is the labour of the workers, however, Marxism unlike a moral philosophy, is least bothered about the good or bad use of this **misappropriation**! Had the owners made a good use, would this exploitation have been tolerable? Again, the very concept of exploitation and the class struggle is totally misunderstood by Ambedkar.

Ambedkar claims that in 60 years of its existence Marxism has been criticized by many and much of it has been discredited. But when he informs what has been discredited, we are totally floored. One of the theories that has been discredited, according to Ambedkar, is the absolute pauperization or impoverishment of the proletariat. First of all, if one reads Marx’s works like *Capital*, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, or *Grundrisse*, they can understand that Marx gave no such theory. This fallacy was propagated by the likes of Bohm-Bawerk and it has been refuted from the times of Engels himself. Marx gave the concept of relative impoverishment of the working class, which may or may not take the form of absolute increase in the number of paupers. The concept of relative

impoverishment is based on Marx's concept of relative surplus value. However, Ambedkar totally misses this significant part of Marx's political economy. Ambedkar also claims that Marx argued that Socialism is inevitable. However, Marx never said that Socialism is inevitable. He definitely argued that the class struggle is inevitable; however, this class struggle can lead to a higher form of social order or can lead to the destruction of the mutually antagonistic classes. This, in fact, is one of the basic teachings of Historical Materialism. Evidently enough, Ambedkar's knowledge of Marxism was in want of serious study.

Ambedkar claims further, "The dictatorship of the proletariat was first established in 1917 in one country after a period of about seventy years after the publication of his 'Das Capital', the gospel of socialism. Even when the Communism – which is another name for the dictatorship of the Proletariat – came to Russia, it did not come as something inevitable without any kind of human effort." As any informed reader of Marxism can see, Ambedkar had got it totally wrong! First, he did not know when *Das Kapital* was published because the Russian Revolution took place after 49 years of publication of 'Das Kapital', not 70 years. Apparently, Ambedkar confuses *The Communist Manifesto* with *Das Kapital*. Secondly, Communism is not the other name for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Communism is the name of a classless society which can come into existence after a protracted transition period of Socialism, characterized by the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Communist society, since there will be no classes, the state, too, as an instrument of class domination, will wither away, and therefore, there is no question of existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thirdly, Marx never said that Socialism can ever come without conscious effort. On the contrary, Marx wrote important pieces on the 'art of insurrection' and the need of planned class action under the leadership of the vanguard. However, Ambedkar is stupefied that Russian Revolution was organized with so much conscious effort, whereas, according to Ambedkar's "study" of Marx, it should have come automatically! What can we say!

To prove that Buddha had already given the theory of class and class struggle, Ambedkar quotes this statement of Buddha, “there is always strife going on between kinds, between nobles, between Brahmins, between house-holders, between mother and son, between son and father, between brother and sister, between sister and brother, between companion and companion...” As one can see, Ambedkar never actually understood the Marxist concept of class. Marxist concept of class is based on relations of production, namely the relations of ownership, the relations of division of labour and the relations of distribution. Class is something which is constituted, produced and reproduced through the real process of production and reproduction. Ambedkar is unable to make a distinction between Marx’s concept of class struggle and the above general idea of strife as expressed in the above quote of Buddha.

Buddha’s idea of doing away with sorrow was through change of heart because the reason for sorrow was what Buddha called *trishna*! So, the reason for sorrow of a worker or an Untouchable is his/her *trishna*, just like the reason for the sorrow of a king or a capitalist is his/her *trishna*. All are called upon to get rid of *trishna* by adopting the *ashtamarga* of Buddha. This according to Ambedkar is stipulation of one of the communist principles by Buddha 2500 years ago! Again, one can see the big void in Ambedkar’s understanding of Marxism and the clear evidence that he had not read a single classic work of Marxism.

Ambedkar goes further and claims that the elimination of private property is something that Buddha talked about 2500 years ago when he said that the *Bhikkhu* will have no private property, except eight personal items. First of all, for Marxism the elimination of private property is not a principle of asceticism and refraining from lures of the world! Marxism is a materialist philosophy and believes that abundant fruits of human labour and Nature, that is, all wealth should be enjoyed by human beings to the fullest extent, and this would become possible only in a communist society where everyone will work according to their capabilities and would get according to their needs. The very notion of ‘saving’ and ‘private property’ would

become superfluous in this stage of abundance. However, Ambedkar confuses it with Buddhist principle of taking *pravrajya* and becoming an ascetic. Secondly, did Buddha call upon all the kings, lords and members of ruling class constituted by Brahmins and Kshatriyas to give up their wealth and private property and become *Bhikkhu*? No! Communism is not a sect of *Bhikkhus* and Ambedkar did not understand this simple fact, in his zealous attempt to prove that everything correct in Marxism has already been said by Buddha and whatever was not said by Buddha is incorrect in Marxism. However, it seems that Ambedkar made these bold claims without reading a single Marxist text. He also claims that a 60 year old political philosophy like communism would not work. And what would work? A 2500 years old philosophy of Buddhism! These are some of the “refutations” of Marxism by Ambedkar!

Finally, Ambedkar comes to the question of democracy and dictatorship and the question of violence on which Anand Teltumbde too, has surprised me with his confusion and liberal virus. However, on Teltumbde’s muddled liberal understanding of Marxism, we will come later. First, on Ambedkar’s critique of Marxism on these questions.

Ambedkar believed that “the communists preach violence as an absolute principle.” Ambedkar never provides any reference for his claims about this. Where did he read it? Nobody knows! Marxism has no fetish for violence whatsoever and it clearly distinguishes between the reactionary violence of the ruling class and the collective use of revolutionary violence by the revolutionary classes. In fact, the cherished bourgeois ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality had come to the fore only by a violent (even more violent than the Bolshevik Revolution!) revolution, the French Revolution of 1789. Secondly, Marx also distinguished between adventurist violence of a small group of revolutionists and the collective use of violence by the proletariat for overthrow of capitalism. However, Ambedkar is definitely ignorant about these things. Moreover, the question of violence or the use of force (because philosophically speaking, use of force has the fact of violence, even if not a single

drop of blood is shed) is not an issue of choice for Marxism. It would be blissful if the ruling classes give up their control over political power and economic resources by a change of heart or without any use of force (it is noteworthy that a threat of use of force is actually use of force). It is a scientific analysis that Marx and Engels put forward according to which in every emancipatory and transformative change, the role of force is essential, whether some soft-hearted liberal likes it or not. **Therefore, it was never a fetish for Marx and Engels, never a question of moral judgement for Marx and Engels, rather a historical necessity and a scientific judgement. Moreover, Ambedkar claims that violence is justified if it is done for justice and then he refutes Marxist theory of role of violence; of course, he has presumed that the revolutionary violence of proletariat is not for justice! Like any pragmatist philosopher, Ambedkar always remained blind to the violence of modern bourgeois state and the process through which a modern capitalist state perpetrates and perpetuates violence against the exploited and oppressed people on a daily basis. One can show ample evidence for this from the writings and speeches of Ambedkar as well as his political practice.**

When Ambedkar gave his advice to the anti-untouchability league of Gandhi, in his letter to Thakkar, who was secretary of the league, Ambedkar clearly argued that in the process of fighting against untouchability, there will be some social upheaval and peace will be broken, some heads will be broken, some blood will be shed. But the league should pursue the strategy to assert the democratic and civil rights by use of force. He critiqued the league for limiting itself to just peacefully persuading the caste Hindus to do away with untouchability. **It is interesting that Ambedkar himself never applied this strategy and whenever faced with the prospect of collision with the State, he always backed away, be it the case of Mahad Satyagraha or the Nashik temple entry movement. On record, he did give this advice to Mr. Thakkar of anti-untouchability league. However, the same use of force by workers *en masse* for revolution, under the leadership of**

communists, has been condemned by Ambedkar! It becomes clear why if we match this position of Ambedkar with the statement that he made to Dhananjay Keer. He clearly said that he would never support a strike led by communists. It is noteworthy that he was not against the right to strike *per se*, as long as, it was not politicized. He was openly against politicization of strikes. *Note bene*, it is the politicization of workers movement that educates and trains the workers to go beyond pecuniary logic and raise the question of state power, that Ambedkar was opposed to. He saw this as totally undesirable and condemnable. At any rate, one this is clear, Ambedkar was not opposed to the right of the State to perpetrate and perpetuate violence. He was rather blind to it. It is only the revolutionary violence that he is opposed to, and finds it even more undesirable if it is led by the communists.

Now let us come to the question of dictatorship. Ambedkar here too in wanting in the comprehension of the Marxist concept of class dictatorship and juxtaposes democracy with dictatorship without any class qualifier. Marxism never talks about democracy without a class qualifier: democracy for whom? What was the meaning of democracy for Sacco and Vanzetti who were executed in August, 1927, when Ambedkar was preparing for the Mahad Satyagraha? It is noteworthy that demonstrations against their execution were held in India too. Marx showed the class essence of bourgeois democracy and how a bourgeois democracy is at the same time a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. This element of dictatorship is exposed whenever the capitalist system is threatened during political crises, just like in June, 1975, when the Emergency was declared in India. Also, it is noteworthy that the provision of Emergency was there in the constitution drafted by Ambedkar. Indira Gandhi did not have to amend constitution for imposing Emergency! Moreover, proletarian dictatorship is also proletarian democracy and it is democracy for the exploited majority rather than exploiting minority. Lenin had said that Soviet democracy is a hundred times more democratic than even the most democratic bourgeois republics. It is

true and this fact was recorded by numerous non-Marxist foreign visitors to the USSR even in the 1930s. **However, Ambedkar was totally unfamiliar with Marxist concept of class dictatorship and the concept of class essence of democracy and he naively juxtaposes democracy and dictatorship.**

We can go on and on about Ambedkar's (total lack of) understanding of Marx and Marxism. However, we will stop here and we will take another opportunity to present a Marxist critique of Ambedkar's speech 'Buddha and Karl Marx'. Also, in the third part of the present subhead we will return to Ambedkar's comments on Marxism and Communism in the last years of his life.

Teltumbde is disturbed by the fact that the CPI never missed an opportunity to attack Ambedkar "even when they sympathized with the Dalits." (! When did they not?). This is a sly way of writing and conveying that it was only seldom that the communists sympathized with the Dalits. However, Teltumbde does not feel any need to prove this assertion which is made tangentially. When we look at the issues on which the CPI attacked Ambedkar, while opposing the torture and arrest of SCF members, we find that on most of these issues Ambedkar was in fact wrong. For example, the charter of SCF was in fact separatist, even calling for making separate villages for Dalits. Ambedkar even wrote a letter at this time to a British officer Beverly Nicholas and pleaded that even if the British have to resort to force (the holy force of the State!!) to effect *en masse* exodus of the Dalits, they must do it to establish separate Dalit villages before they leave. Will Teltumbde support this kind of separatist proposal of Ambedkar? And if not, then what wrong did the CPI commit in criticizing such proposals of Ambedkar? Moreover, the issue of bitter tone of these attacks can be supplemented by the bitter attacks made by Ambedkar on communists as well as Marxism on a number of occasions. In political struggle, anyway, bitterness of tone is an issue raised by someone who does not have logic on their side. Teltumbde's argument that Ambedkar only attacked Indian communists and their practice and never attacked Marxist philosophy is a lie which we have refuted above and will provide

more evidence later in the essay and even after this essay, if Mr. Teltumbde demands.

The Question of Imperialism, Dr. Ambedkar and Mr. Teltumbde

In the next subhead 'Question of Imperialism', Mr. Teltumbde makes some bedazzling revelations. First he claims that the Dalits *en masse* saw the British as liberators, though the communists clung to their anti-imperialism. Wrong! All Dalits did not see the British as their liberators or their sympathizers. In fact, the movements led by communists against the British saw considerable participation from the Dalit masses. Ambedkar himself was alarmed at increasing participation of the Dalits in the anti-colonial movement led by the communists, as we shall show later in this essay with evidence. Christopher Jaffrelot has shown in his study that even at the height of Ambedkar's political career, more Dalits stood behind the Congress due to their participation in the national movement. Therefore, Teltumbde again uses the Ambedkar's movement and the entire Dalit masses as synonyms, just like other middle class Dalit identitarian politicians and ideologues. Secondly, the communists were not uncritically with the Congress or nationalists as Teltumbde claims. Let us see a quotation from a CPI leader Mirajkar:

"The Indian bourgeois politicians were, no doubt, at that time very much displeased with British Imperialists because they expected to get a few seats on this Royal commission (Simon Commission); And had that happened, the Indian bourgeoisie would surely have co-operated with the said commission. In that case, the boycott and counter-movement of that character would have been confined only to the petty-bourgeoisie and the working classes. But because of the mistakes of the British imperialists, in excluding the members of the Indian bourgeoisie on it, a temporary oppositional bloc was created; all political parties, such as moderates, Congresswallahs, communalists joined in the boycott movement of this commission." (Documents of the Communists Movement in India, Volume 3C, page 183 onwards)

Another quote from 'Resolution on Simon Commission':

“The bourgeoisie has taken up an attitude of opposition to the commission and many of its representatives, in common with the rest of the nation, have declared for boycott. We welcome support from any quarter. **But we desire to warn the nation in general against the danger to be expected from the participation and the leadership of a certain section of the bourgeoisie. This class has shown in the past and many of its representatives are showing now that they are not desirous of independence or even of democracy and freedom. They desire in their own interests, compromise with imperialism and use the enthusiasm of the masses as a weapon to extract concessions. Some proposed Indian membership of the commission, some a parallel commission, some a round table conference. All these things mean compromise, and the nation does not need compromise, it needs independence.**” (ibid)

This is the policy that the communists always followed. When the Congress made governments in a number of provinces in 1937 and passed regressive legislations, it was not just Ambedkar who opposed certain legislations, but the most important force agitating against the Congress government was the communist party. The line of allying with that part of bourgeoisie which becomes a part of national liberation movement comes from the line of people’s democratic revolution, as propounded by the Comintern under the leadership of Lenin. This line was based on proletarian revolution in two stages in countries that were colonial, neo-colonial and/or feudal. Lenin had argued that in such countries the immediate task would be an anti-colonial anti-feudal National Democratic Revolution and the communists should strive to acquire the leadership of this revolution (which the Indian communists failed to do due to their lack of concrete analysis and strategic-cum-tactical mistakes regarding attitude towards the Congress). This revolution according to Lenin would be based on the alliance between the proletariat, the entire peasantry, the national bourgeoisie (generally, small owners, traders, etc.) and the middle class. Once this people’s democratic revolution is consummated, the communists should move forward toward

Socialist revolution by forming a strategic class alliance between the proletariat, the poor and lower-middle peasantry and the lower middle class. This is Lenin's theory of two-stage revolution which might assume the form of "uninterrupted revolution" under certain circumstances. This new strategy and general tactics of proletarian revolution propounded by Lenin was based on his analysis of the Imperialist phase. Anand Teltumbde is pathetically confused about this analysis, to which we will come shortly. Anyhow, this line of national democratic revolution was adopted by Indian communists, though they failed to implement this line in the Indian conditions since they did not undertake any creative Marxist analysis of the concrete conditions of India. **However, the argument of Teltumbde that the communists saw nationalist forces as their friends is at best inaccurate and at worst, false. The statement of Mirajkar quoted above shows a policy of distrust and the intent to assume the leadership of the national liberation movement based on worker-peasant alliance. That the communists failed in this in India, is an issue of separate discussion. However, they never saw the Congress uncritically as a strategic friend during the national movement, as Mr. Teltumbde wants us to believe.**

Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar too wanted freedom from colonial rule provided the Dalits are provided their freedom and equality. I could not find where Ambedkar has opposed the British colonial state directly. Secondly, if Ambedkar thought that the Congress leadership of the national movement was reactionary, then he should have worked to build an alternative leadership of national liberation movement. We cannot defend his position during the national movement by arguing that it was the reactionary leadership of the Congress that had driven him into the arms of the colonial state time and again. We have already shown that it was not Ambedkar's love for colonial rulers but his Deweyan pragmatism that prevented him from going against the state in a confrontational manner. He genuinely believed that it is only the State that can bring any positive change in the society. This was something that Indian communists

could not understand and called him “stooge of imperialism”. However, if Ambedkar even studied the history of colonial India, it should have become clear to him that the British colonial rule had caused more harm to the Dalit cause, than benefit. Moreover, even Mr. Teltumbde has almost accepted this fact and said that whatever miniscule positive developments took place for the Dalits during the British rule was only a by-product of some policies or measures of British colonial state, whose main aim was serving the interests of the British imperialists (see, Anand Teltumbde, *Mahad: The Making of the First Dalit Revolt*). However, here Mr. Teltumbde has performed a shocking volte-face!

Mr. Teltumbde and His Amusing Ideas About Marxism, Or, How Mr. Teltumbde turns Marx into a Common Liberal!

The task of this introduction written by Anand Teltumbde is to prove that Ambedkar was not antithetical to Marxism. Now, as long as Ambedkar is Ambedkar and as long as Marxism is Marxism, this is not possible. So, Mr. Teltumbde has employed an ingenious method to achieve the desired aim: he first turns Marx into a liberal (akin to a Fabian), then makes Ambedkar stand beside him and then prove that there is a remarkable affinity and vicinity between them, ideologically and philosophically! This in my opinion is politically and ideologically a criminal enterprise and I feel duty-bound to show that Mr. Teltumbde is performing an intellectual somersault which could prove quite harmful to his intellectual legacy.

First, I will show that Teltumbde’s understanding of Marxism and Leninism is extremely poor, if not poorer than Ambedkar’s understanding of Marxism. I will present quotations and clear evidence from his introduction itself, which will reveal that Teltumbde too has either not read Marxist classics or, may be, he read them a long time back and has now forgotten the basic Marxist theories of, for example, imperialism, three moments of capital in its circuit, violence, dictatorship and democracy, etc.

Let us first turn to Mr. Teltumbde’s understanding of Lenin’s theory of Imperialism and Marx’s theory of the three moments of capital. This

is what Mr. Teltumbde opines: “He (Lenin) saw that the competitive industrial capitalism of Marx’s times had given way to finance capital (combination of industrial and bank capital), which in turn created imperialist blocks seeking to control developing countries. The ensuing competition between these imperialist blocks would result in internecine world wars, which would be the moment for the communist forces to strike at the weakest links, thus ushering into the world revolution. The promise of winning the world revolution gripped the communists so much that thereafter this empirical observation of Lenin would nearly eclipse the theoretical discovery of Marx and Engels. They would simply forget the fundamentals of Marxism and the class struggle, the prime mover of revolutions. Arguably, Marx’s theory was adequate to deal with the phenomenon. Marx in the second volume of *Capital* had explained that circuit of capital had three moments: money capital, productive capital and merchant capital, and that any one of them could dominate over the others. The contemporary ‘supply chain’ paradigm that created Walmart-like behemoths best illustrates it.” (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 58-59)

This statement is foolish on so many levels that one essay is not sufficient to critique it, because one will have to go to the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism to show the ridiculous understanding of Teltumbde. But allow me to make an attempt.

First of all, Lenin never said that imperialist blocs (I don’t know why Mr. Teltumbde has used the word ‘block’) would necessarily result in *World Wars*. He only said that imperialism would necessarily result in wars because no alliance between imperialists can be permanent. Why? Because of the law of uneven development that is characteristic feature of capitalist development. Therefore, any equation or balance of power that would lead to creation of a bloc can only be temporary. As soon as the equation changes, the old blocs would disintegrate and new blocs would be created and the international competition for re-division of the world would resume. This process would necessarily involve imperialist wars, which might or might not assume the form of a world war. Therefore, Teltumbde is

totally wrong in claiming that Lenin believed that Imperialism will necessarily lead to world wars.

On the basis of this false claim, Teltumbde has tried to prove that Lenin's thesis was totally conjunctural, based on the contemporary empirical evidence. In other words, now that conjuncture is past and Lenin's theory of imperialism has become superfluous. (I wonder whether Mr. Teltumbde is reading too much of Prabhat Patnaik these days!) However, necessity of a world war was never a constituent part of Lenin's theory of imperialism. The basic elements of Lenin's theory were: formation of finance capital and monopolies and export of capital. Lenin talks about five characteristics of the imperialism, but rest of the three characteristics flow from the above two. Both of these characteristics have become even more pronounced since the demise of Lenin. There has been a lot of work on the late-20th century and early-21st century Imperialism, some of which empirically show that these two basic tendencies of imperialism have become even more intensified and pronounced. This is not to say that there have not been any changes in the *modus operandi* of imperialism. Those interested in these changes can read this paper: (<https://redpolemique.wordpress.com/2018/04/15/marxist-theories-of-imperialism-from-marx-to-present-times-a-contemporary-critical-reassessment/>). However, to claim that the concept of imperialism has become superfluous is preposterous in a time when the entire Middle East has become a battle-ground of inter-imperialist rivalry, the domination of finance monopoly capital has become so pronounced that a handful of financial corporations and TNCs are ruling the roost in world capitalism and the export of capital has assumed unprecedentedly gigantic proportions. Therefore, Teltumbde fails to show how Lenin's theory of Imperialism was simply conjunctural and now it does not apply to the world.

Teltumbde also fails to understand that in the phase of finance capital and monopoly capital, the competitive phase is not finished, rather they re-emerge in much more intensified form. Lenin wrote in 'Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism': "At the same time, the

monopolies, which have grown out of free competition, do not eliminate the latter, but exist above it and alongside it, and thereby give rise to a number of very acute, intense antagonisms, frictions and conflicts.” (Lenin, 1978, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 83)

Teltumbde utterly fails to understand what Lenin means by ‘world revolution’. For Lenin, it was not a world revolution at a single stroke. It only meant that the breaking of the weak links might inaugurate something of a domino effect and lead to collapse of world capitalist system eventually. Lenin was not at all deterministic about it that something of this sort was round the corner. In fact, Lenin sensed that people like Teltumbde might get confused with his use of terms for imperialism like ‘highest stage of capitalism’, ‘dying’, ‘moribund’ capitalism, ‘eve of proletarian revolution.’ Lenin clarified in the same booklet itself that he is not speaking chronologically at all. All these terms are used in logical sense, rather than chronological sense. Therefore, he writes, “...then it becomes evident that we have socialization of production, and not mere “interlocking”; that private economic and private property relations constitute a shell which no longer fits its contents, **a shell which must inevitably decay if its removal is artificially delayed, a shell which may remain in a state of decay for a fairly long period (if, at the worst, the cure of the opportunist abscess is protracted), but which will inevitably be removed.**” (ibid, p. 120) Lenin clearly stipulates here that proletarian revolution is not a spontaneous process and if right-wing opportunism and chauvinism dominates within the working class movement, instead of a revolutionary communist line, then world capitalism can continue to survive for a fairly long period, though in a state of decay. Tragically, the prognosis, rather this apprehension of Lenin has come true. However, the bearers of such opportunism, like Mr. Teltumbde, can hardly be expected to comprehend this fact.

Further, Mr. Teltumbde claims that to understand present world capitalism, there is no need to resort to Lenin’s theory, which was only conjunctural and now has become superfluous and Marx’s

theory of circuit of capital is sufficient to explain the present world capitalism. Now comes the funny moment. **He claims that in Marx's theory of circuit of capital, there are three moments: money capital, productive capital and merchant capital! WRONG!** The third moment is commodity capital. Now the value (including surplus value) can be realized by the sale of commodity by the industrial capitalist himself, without the intervention of merchant capital, or by the intervention of merchant capital. The point is that the division of capitalist class into industrial, merchant and bank/finance capital has nothing to do with the moments of capital in the circuit of capital and in the words of Marx, it is the division of labour within capitalist class in order to make the process of production and circulation smooth and uninterrupted. The circuit of capital with three moments of capital show the motion of capital-value advanced by the capitalist in the money form; how in order to valorize itself, first, it assumes the form of productive capital (which means, means of production and labour power); and how consequently it assumes the form of product/commodity, which embodies the value of the means of production (which is preserved and transferred to commodity *in toto*, in the case of circulating constant capital and in part, in the case of fixed constant capital), the value of the labour power (which is reproduced by the worker in the necessary labour time) and the surplus value (which is produced by the worker in the surplus labour time). The circuit of capital is to show the movement of capital-value in order to reveal how the circuit starts in the sphere of circulation and ends in the sphere of circulation, but through the sphere of production which is essential for valorization of capital. **However, Teltumbde confuses commodity capital with merchant capital and then makes his revelation that the present stage of 'supply chain' capitalism can better be explained by Marx's circuit of capital! We cannot prevent ourselves from quoting Einstein at such revelation of Mr. Teltumbde, "Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former."**

Teltumbde argues that anyone of 'money capital, productive capital and merchant capital' can dominate over the others. **Again a foolish statement!** The movement of capital value through the circuit of capital must be seen in totality. It is not about the dominance of one moment over the other. Marx makes it clear that it is the same capital value which transmutes its form in order to valorize itself and then realize its value in money. It seems that Teltumbde has glided over the theories of Christian Palloix but not seriously. Palloix argued that the different moments of circuit of capital were globalized/internationalized at different points in history. First the commodity capital was globalized, which was the phase of pre-imperialist colonialism of free-trade era. Then the money capital was globalized, which was the phase of finance capital as described by Lenin. He argues that since the 1970s, the productive capital has been globalized as apparent from shifting of production centres from Global North to Global South and emergence of 'value chains' and 'supply chains'. This theory too is mechanistic because the moment money capital is globalized, the productive capital is bound to be globalized. In fact, in *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* itself Lenin draws our attention to the exodus of industry from advanced capitalist countries to colonial and neo-colonial countries. Therefore, the temporal division presented by Palloix is mechanical. However, Teltumbde seems to have failed to follow even this oversimplistic mechanical scheme of Palloix, also known as 'internationalization of capital', which tries to build on Marx's notion of three moments of capital. Teltumbde has even failed to understand the Marxist notion of three moments of capital by arguing that the third moment is the merchant capital! The emergence of companies like Walmart and Carrefour can be explained within the framework of Marxist-Leninist theory of Imperialism. It can be shown with sufficient evidence that these supply chains are created only by the power of finance capital and the quest of imperialist capital to exploit the cheap labour and resources of the developing countries. The new feature which has enabled the capital in the post-Fordist era to emerge as a 'hunter and gatherer' of cheap labour and cheap raw material is transport and communication revolution and IT

revolution. These two phenomena represent a change from Lenin's time. However, these changes have only buttressed Lenin's theory of Imperialism because the tendencies identified by Lenin have become much more intensified and pronounced due to these changes. It seems that Teltumbde has dropped a speculative statement on the basis of, may be, some article that he read on the internet. However, not understanding the foundations of the science of history and society leads one to commit embarrassing blunders, like Mr. Teltumbde tragically has done. This is what happens when one is too eager and inclined to show their eruditeness without going to the classics.

Now let us move to Mr. Teltumbde's comment about Marxism's relation to nationalism and how Indian communists did not understand this relation. This is what Teltumbde has to say, "As a matter of fact, nationalism should be regarded as antithetical to communists whose ideology is primarily internationalism. The accusation against Ambedkar for ignoring the 'nationalist' struggle should thus be basically problematic. Ambedkar's notion of every caste being a nation in India better reflected the Indian reality rather than imagining India as a nation. Moreover, when Ambedkar is accused of not being anti-imperialist, one could rather find the conduct of early communists to be wanting. Initially, guided by Comintern, the communists regarded the freedom struggle as a movement of the reactionary bourgeoisie and advocated militant struggle against the capitalist and landlords." (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 59) Teltumbde tries to prove further that this stand of communists changed only after 1929 and then after 1934 and in 1938 the CPI declared support for the Congress. It is funny that a couple of pages later Teltumbde has the audacity to write this, "They (the communists) would easily ally with the bourgeois nationalists (although Marxism professed internationalism) but oppose the proletariat's battle against the basic evil that thwarted this country *from becoming a nation*." (ibid, p. 61)

First, Marxist espousal of internationalism and allying with every force that is anti-colonial against imperialism has no contradiction.

Since, Mr. Teltumbde seems to be a google-Marxist, he does not know the Marxist-Leninist position on anti-imperialist national liberation movement as the first stage of proletarian socialist revolution, during which the communists, if possible, should ally with forces that are anti-colonial, with or without conditions. Secondly, if according to Teltumbde Marxism is not in support of national movement, why should the proletariat strive to make India a nation? Since Teltumbde wants to ride many boats together he is not able to decide what to say and what not to say and most of his statements are contradictory. Besides, it is a lie that communists were not part of anti-caste movement or did not raise the issue of caste, even if they failed to understand this problem in its historicity and contemporaneity and failed to present a program for its annihilation. But then, this failure was shared by Ambedkar also. Only because the anti-caste activities of the communists were not according to the line proposed by Ambedkar and only because they critiqued the line of Ambedkar, how can Mr. Teltumbde claim that they did not participate in anti-caste struggle and “allied with Congress”, as if they loved the Congress? We will show in a short while how Teltumbde is not only theoretically poor but he is also distorting the facts about communist movement. We will also show what kind of support for and alliance with the Congress, the CPI had, so that the lies being spread by Mr. Teltumbde are exposed. However, let us begin from the theoretical question of Marxism’s approach as an internationalist philosophy to the question of nation, nationalism and national liberation movements.

First of all Marxism is definitely an internationalist philosophy. However, to draw a conclusion so childish that Marxists would/should oppose the national liberation movement of the oppressed people shows how little Teltumbde has read and understood Marxism. Secondly, Marxism-Leninism differentiates between the chauvinist bourgeois nationalism of the imperialist and advanced capitalist countries and the national liberation movements of the oppressed people; had Mr. Teltumbde went beyond reading articles about Marxism on the

internet and had he read the Leninist thesis on national liberation movements and Stalin's work on nations and nationalism, he would not have made such a naively ridiculous argument. Needless to say, these oppressed people are never a homogeneous or monolithic entity and are always divided into many sub-nationalities, linguistic identities, ethnicities, religious groups, castes, etc. Still, the imperialist oppression and existence of a common colonial enemy becomes the principal contradiction and this contradiction can be resolved only through the national liberation movement of the oppressed people against imperialism and feudalism, which always work in collusion, as was the case with India. If the principal contradiction is between imperialism and Indian people, between feudalism (supported by colonialism) and the Indian people, then the communists should form alliance with the forces that are anti-colonial. The CPI followed this line of people's national democratic revolution. About alliance with the Congress, on most occasions, the CPI made it evidently clear that in the alliance, it will follow a policy of suspicion and distrust, as we have shown above. As we can see in these proclamations, the CPI never extended its uncritical support or trust to the Congress as a genuinely progressive force of the national movement. However, Teltumbde knowingly or unknowingly projects the false image that the Communists gave their unflinching support to the Congress. Even the policy of infiltrating the Congress was based on winning over the masses in the Congress for a radical national liberation movement, away from the collaborationism of the Congress. Is this not a gross distortion of facts and slandering against the communists by Teltumbde, whatever their weaknesses and mistakes might have been?

Now let us come to Ambedkar's notion of each caste constituting a separate nation in India. Teltumbde claims that this better reflected the reality of India. Again, Teltumbde reveals his complete lack of understanding of the dialectical method. First of all, castes in no way, even in the academic sociological sense, constitute separate nations. This kind of argument presupposes a homogeneous and undifferentiated idea of a 'nation', which no nation is. **The**

constitution of an oppressed nation is only through the contradiction of a people (howsoever heterogeneous and differentiated) with imperialism and colonialism, which almost as a matter of law, always co-opts the feudal forces. Even the antagonistic social groups within a people, in face of a common and bigger enemy form alliances to fight against this common enemy. The question here is this: was the British colonialism an enemy of the Dalit masses or its friend? The constitution of a contradiction itself is always contradictory and one entity always divides into two. Therefore, we should ask: in the main, was British colonialism good for the Dalit masses? Any serious student of history would answer this question in a resounding 'No!' The British consolidated and fossilized caste distinctions and the excess vulnerability of the Dalit working masses through mainly two measures: rise of colonial ethnographic state and even more importantly, the British land settlements, which perennialized even more, the perennial landlessness of the Dalit masses. In the pre-British India, many a times, revolts of *shudra* and *ati-shudra* (Dalit) castes had forced kings and their ideologues, i.e., Brahmins, to accept social and ritualistic mobility to certain Dalit and *Shudra* castes. However, with the freezing of caste hierarchy with exercises like myriad kinds of ethnographic surveys and the Census, this relative mobility was completely eliminated. Once the colonial state defined and demarcated the lines, the castes for the first time became juridico-legal entities in the modern sense of the term. The land settlements of the British clearly show who was their firmest ally in India: the upper caste landlords, kings, and their subfeudatories and to a very limited extent, some middle peasant castes, coming mostly from upward mobile *shudra* peasant castes. **In short, the Dalit masses did not have a friend in the British, but a colluder and collaborator of the same Brahmanical feudal forces that had oppressed them for centuries.** That is why, when the British were about to leave India, it was not the Dalits who *en masse* flocked to petition the British not to leave India, but the upper-caste kings, feudal lords, and landlords who shed so many tears and requested the British not to leave. As Lenin said, "facts are stubborn" and

history is the best judge. **The miniscule benefits that reached a very miniscule section of the Dalits due to Western education and military service introduced by the British were thwarted and stopped whenever the Brahmins resisted.** For instance, the military recruitment stopped in 1891-92 due to protest from Brahmins; even the education was denied repeatedly to the Dalit children despite all the laws, except in the garrison towns when the military recruitment was open to the Dalits. Moreover, even these miniscule benefits to a miniscule section of the Dalits were available for a short time-span only in few provinces of the colonial India, Bombay being one of them. Therefore, if we counterweigh the cost and benefit of the British rule for the Dalit masses, only someone ideologically blinded would argue that British were, in the main, the benefactors of the Dalits. **Therefore, the concept that *vis-à-vis* the British colonialism, all castes constituted a separate nation is not only incorrect but a regressive concept, especially in the view that the British had always colluded and collaborated with the Brahmanical forces, except the period when their conquest of India was incomplete. This regressive idea was put forward by Ambedkar due to his Deweyan Pragmatist worldview; that is understandable. However, what is not understandable is the support that Teltumbde lends to this idea. What is his politics?**

Teltumbde's third assertion in the above-quoted statement is that the communists were wanting in their anti-imperialist stance and under the guidance of the Comintern, only talked about fighting against the capitalists and landlords and saw the freedom movement as a reactionary movement led by capitalists and landlords. Teltumbde does not produce a single resolution of the CPI, or its frontal organization WPP, or any communist leader that said that freedom movement itself was a reactionary movement led by capitalists and landlords. **This again is a gross lie. The fact is that the analysis of the Congress by the CPI has been superimposed by Teltumbde on the analysis of the freedom movement itself.** It was the Congress which was described by the communists as a party led by capitalist and landlord elements and which naturally

would collaborate with the British and would shy away from demanding total independence. **The CPI never in any of its documents said that the freedom movement itself is a reactionary movement. However, Teltumbde has no hesitation in presenting this brazen lie in order to show that it was not only Ambedkar who never participated in the anti-imperialist struggle, but also the early Communists who never participated in the anti-imperialist struggle.** The CPI's strategy and tactics continued to change regarding its attitude towards the Congress, under the influence of the line proposed by the Comintern from total distrust and opposition to conditional alliance with the Congress. It was never of opposing the freedom movement and it was never of giving unflinching and uncritical support to the Congress during the colonial period. Even when the CPI formed front with the Congress, it was a front of critical and conditional support with sufficient infusion of internal struggle and opposition and secondly the communists maintained their autonomy in the workers' movement and peasant revolts, which were thoroughly opposed by the Congress. Otherwise, they would not have been active, often in leadership capacities, in the Tebhaga, Punapra-Vylar, Telangana peasant revolts, the wave of strikes in the 1940s and the Naval Revolt. **Clearly enough, Mr. Teltumbde is lying about the communist movement.**

Teltumbde makes many such historically incorrect claims and comments about the communist movement in one-liners and we do not have the space to refute each and every of them. However, to argue that how can communists criticize Ambedkar for not being part of anti-imperialist national movement when they themselves were not consistently anti-imperialist, is slanderous and preposterous on the part of Mr. Teltumbde. He needs to study history of the communist movement properly.

Now let us see how Teltumbde makes Marx a 'Common Liberal.'

How Anand Teltumbde Turns Marx into a Common Liberal

As I noted earlier, one of the projects of Teltumbde in this introduction is to prove that Ambedkar was amenable and rather

near to Marxist philosophy and it was only the practice of Indian Marxists by which he was repelled. Now, given the revolutionary content of Marxism this cannot be done. Therefore, first Teltumbde makes a pathetic attempt at turning Marx into a liberal and then brings Ambedkar close to him. For this, he also tries to prove in vain that Ambedkar's two reservations about the methods to bring "communism", namely violence and the dictatorship of the proletariat, were after all not that foolish and even Marx towards the latter part of his political life had moved to such an idea!

To agree or disagree with any philosophy, first of all you are required to know what that philosophy is. I have shown above with extensive quotations that Ambedkar did not have any understanding about Marxism as he had not read a single work by Marx, Engels or Lenin. Therefore the very question whether Ambedkar agreed or disagreed, in real sense of the terms, with Marxism or not is a non-question. The truth is that he did not have any understanding of Marxism. In fact, during the Chandigarh seminar on caste in 2012, Mr. Teltumbde himself accepted that Ambedkar had not read any original work of Marx. Then how can, in all earnestness, he raise this non-question as a pertinent question is beyond me. It is nothing short of intellectual dishonesty.

In the subhead 'Opposing Communists' Teltumbde once more embarks upon his futile project to show that Ambedkar was only opposed to the practice of Marxists in India and not the Marxist philosophy. This baseless claim I have already refuted above. Moreover, he also claims that Ambedkar went against the communists only when the latter attacked him for collaborating with the Simon Commission. First of all, it can be shown that even before that he was against communists and communism; secondly, it was correct to oppose the Simon Commission and communists attacked everybody who collaborated with this British endeavour to break the resistance of people; thirdly, just because it was Ambedkar, the communists could not have refrained from criticising his collaboration with the Simon Commission. Rest of the arguments in this regard, we have already stipulated above.

Teltumbde also presents a quote from 1938 where first Ambedkar claims that he has read more books on communism than all communist leaders present on the occasion and then also expresses his affinity to certain tenets of Marxism. As we have pointed out earlier, the period of the ILP was one in which due to his particular electoral strategy, Ambedkar was obliged to form joint fronts with the communists and contrary to Teltumbde's claim the proposals of joint action were not always proposed by Ambedkar but also by the communists, for example, the proposal for one day strike against the industrial disputes bill of 1938 came from the communists. However, as Teltumbde himself accepts, that this quote should not be taken as a proof that Ambedkar accepted the communist philosophy, rather he questioned its practicability in India. Again, since Ambedkar did not understand what communism was, he was not a very good judge of the applicability of communism in India. The universal truth of Marxist philosophy, approach and method has been proven by history time and again.

Teltumbde claims that Ambedkar accepted the goal of communism but objected on the methods proposed by Marxism to achieve this goal. We have already shown that Ambedkar did not understand what communism is and equated communism with the dictatorship of the proletariat. He also did not understand the communist goal of elimination of private property and the withering away of class and state, when he equates the *Bhikkhu Sangha's* rule for *bhikkhus* to renounce all private property except eight things. Twenty years before writing 'Buddha and Karl Marx' in 'Annihilation of Caste' also he had equated the aim of socialists with 'equalization of property', a goal to which Marx was thoroughly opposed. Ambedkar had never understood what dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism and communism meant. So there is no question of Ambedkar accepting the goal of Marxism, because to agree with it, one has first to understand it.

Now let us come to the question of dictatorship of the proletariat and that of violence, to which Ambedkar had objected and in defence of Ambedkar's total lack of understanding of these concepts, how Mr.

Teltumbde performs a liberal appropriation of Marx. Teltumbde opines, "Here too (in 'Buddha and Karl Marx') Ambedkar reveals his acceptance of its goals being the same as that of Buddha but faults it on two counts in its methodology. They were its reliance on violence and dictatorship. *Surely, going by what has happened on the ground in Marxist revolutions so far, one will be inclined to accept these observations.* They are however not essential to Marxist theory – for Marx did not justify violence anywhere, although at places one may tend to derive that impression." (ibid, p. 62-63, *italics ours*)

Surprisingly enough, Mr. Teltumbde relies on Bhikhu Parekh for his understanding of Marx's attitude towards use of violence! Parekh is Labour member of House of Lords. Of course, we can understand that in order to make Marx a liberal, something of that sort was required. The other source which appears in William Paul, whose article that Teltumbde has referred to emphasizes precisely the point that use of force and revolutionary violence (not to be confused with individual terrorist violence or adventurist violence to which Marxists have always been against) are, as a matter of law, part of revolutionary transformation. Teltumbde blames it on Kautsky who translated "force" as "violence" and since he was referred to as "the Pope of Marxism" by Lenin at one point of time, this confusion was internalized by the communists everywhere. **This silly statement shows how less Teltumbde knows about International Communist Movement.** Teltumbde writes, "Insofar as Marx's metaphorical expression goes, anyone can see that force is not violence and a midwife is not an essential agent in the process of birth." (ibid, p. 63) This is how Teltumbde begins his liberal misappropriation of Marx.

First of all, innumerable quotes can be produced to show that Marx had no unqualified notions about violence. He never opposed or supported violence as such, because as such, violence is an empty container, which can be filled with anything. Whenever Marx talks about violence he makes a clear distinction between revolutionary violence and individual

terrorist violence, between revolutionary violence and the counter-revolutionary/reactionary violence of the ruling class.

Secondly, use of force is nothing but violence, philosophically speaking. Even the threat of use of force is nothing but violence, philosophically. Therefore, the watertight compartmentalization between the force and violence conjured up by Teltumbde here is a foolish device to justify, or make look respectable, Ambedkar's totally misplaced objection on the supposed Marxist support for "violence." Later, Teltumbde quotes Marx's oft-quoted and oft-misused statements about the possibility of socialism through a peaceful parliamentary path in certain countries like England and America. I will later show how Mr. Teltumbde has misused and abused these quotations to turn Marx into a 'common liberal'. First, I will show what Marx thought about the use of force and revolutionary violence to show that Teltumbde is selectively quoting the second-hand writers rather than primary sources to make this rubbish claim that Marx was for/against violence.

As I pointed out earlier, without any class qualification, Marx was neither for nor against violence. He would first ask: whose violence? Against whom? By whom? How? Individual violence? Terrorist violence? Or collective use of violence by the exploited classes? Without these qualifying questions, for Marx, violence was an empty term, a void rhetoric. If Mr. Teltumbde does not understand one of these basic concepts of Marxism, I am obliged to present Marx's views on violence in short. Then, subsequently, I will show that Marx's observations about England and America were totally conjunctural and even in that conjuncture these exceptions only proved the rule, namely, the use of force and revolutionary violence as a general necessity in history of revolutions in class societies. Let us proceed to the refutation of the first lie and fallacy propagated by Mr. Teltumbde. *Note bene.*

Marx definitely despised individual terrorist violence and considered it harmful for the revolutionary cause. He believed that role of force

in history is the role that a midwife plays in the birth of the new, as Teltumbde himself accepts. However, he builds a Chinese wall between 'force' and 'revolutionary violence', which Marx never built. Let us see what he wrote about revolutionary violence:

"...on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be: "Struggle or death; bloody war or nothing. It is thus that the question is *inevitably posed*." (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *emphasis ours*)

Regarding the lessons of 1848 in Paris, he wrote:

"The purposeless massacres perpetrated since the June and October events, the tedious offering of sacrifices since February and March, the very cannibalism of the counterrevolution will convince the nations that **there is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be shortened, simplified and concentrated, and *that way is revolutionary terror***." (Marx, 'The Victory of The Counter Revolution in Vienna' *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, No. 136, November, 1848, *emphasis ours*)

Just before the crushing of Paris Commune, Marx wrote: "It seems that Parisians are succumbing. It is their own fault, but a fault which really was due to their too great decency." Marx continues: "If they are defeated only their "good nature" will be to blame. ***They should have marched at once to Versailles***...They missed their opportunity because of conscientious scruples. They did not want to start a civil war..." (*emphasis ours*)

As we can see, according to Marx, one of the faults of the Communards of Paris was hesitation in the use of revolutionary violence.

In March 1850, in an address to the Communist League, Marx says, **"*The arming of the whole proletariat with rifles, muskets, cannon and munitions must be done at once***, the revival of the old *Bürgerwehr*, or Citizens' Militia, directed against the workers must be opposed. However, where the latter is not feasible the

workers must attempt to organize themselves independently as a proletarian guard with commanders elected by themselves and with a general staff of their own choosing, and to put themselves at the command not of the state authority but of the revolutionary municipal councils which the workers will have managed to set up. Where workers are employed at the expense of the state they must see that they are armed and organized in a separate corps with commanders of their own choosing or as part of the proletarian guard. Arms and ammunition must not be surrendered on any pretext; any attempt at disarming them must be frustrated, by force if necessary. To destroy the influence of the bourgeois democrats upon the workers, ***establish immediately an independent and armed organization of the workers and create conditions which will be the most difficult and compromising for the inevitable momentary rule of the bourgeois democracy — these are the main points which the proletariat and hence the League must keep in view during and after the impending insurrection.***” (Marx, ‘Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League, March 1850, *emphasis ours*)

More: “As long as other classes, and the capitalist class in particular, still exist; and as long as the proletariat fights against them... it must employ coercive measures, that is, governmental measures; so long it is still a class itself, and the economic conditions which give rise to the class struggle and the existence of classes have not yet disappeared and must be forcibly removed... With its complete victory, therefore, its rule also comes to an end” (*Collected Works* I: 321–3).

And finally these poetic words from the Communist Manifesto: “The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by ***the forcible overthrow*** of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.” (Marx-Engels, Chapter 4, *The Communist Manifesto*, *emphasis ours*)

Now let us come to Engels' arguments. In the following quote from *Anti-Duhring*, Engels clarifies that the use of force or the use of revolutionary violence are not totally isolated things and in the class struggle, the law is that their use is generally unavoidable:

“...That force, however, plays yet another role [other than that of a diabolical power] in history, a revolutionary role; that, in the words of Marx, it is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one, that it is the instrument with which social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilized political forms — of this there is not a word in Herr Duhring (Just like in Herr Teltumbde and Herr Ambedkar! — author). It is only with sighs and groans that he admits the possibility that force will perhaps be necessary for the overthrow of an economy based on exploitation — unfortunately, because all use of force demoralizes, he says, the person who uses it. And this in Germany, where **a violent collision** — which may, after all, be forced on the people — would at least have the advantage of wiping out the servility which has penetrated the nation's mentality following the humiliation of the Thirty Years' War. And this person's mode of thought — dull, insipid, and impotent — presumes to impose itself on the most revolutionary party that history has ever known! (Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, third German edition, Part II, end of Chap.IV, p.193, *emphasis ours*)

Here is another quote from the 'Introduction' of 1895 edition of Marx's *Class Struggles in France* where Engels argues that the days of street fighting behind barricades with small revolutionary groups is gone and by the end of the 19th century, much broader organization of masses and winning over of a section of military would be necessary for the revolution to emerge victorious in the insurrection. That certainly holds true even today. Let us see, what Engels says:

“Does that mean that in the future street fighting will no longer play any role? Certainly not. It only means that the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavourable for civilian fighters and far more favourable for the military. In future street fighting can, therefore, be victorious only if this disadvantageous situation is

compensated by other factors. Accordingly, it will occur more seldom at the beginning of a great revolution than at its later stages, and will have to be undertaken with greater forces.” (*emphasis ours*)

Engels emphasizes in ‘Principles of Communism’ : “*Will it be possible to bring about the abolition of private property by peaceful methods?* It is to be desired that this could happen, and Communists would certainly be the last to resist it... ***But they also see that the development of the proletariat is in nearly every civilised country forcibly suppressed, and that thus the opponents of the Communists are working with all their might towards a revolution.***” (*Principles of Communism*, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, op cit, vol VI, p349, *emphasis ours*).

Here too, Engels clarifies beyond doubt that the use of revolutionary violence is not an issue of the wish of the communists. The dynamics of class struggle between the ruling class and the proletariat as a matter of rule leads to the necessity of the use of force, in most cases, assuming the form of physical revolutionary violence. Even where the physical violence is nominal, for example in the storming of the Winter Palace, during the October Revolution, what happened was, from the Marxist standpoint, the use of revolutionary violence.

Let us look at this comment of Engels about England, about which Teltumbde is so enthusiastic due to a comment of Marx, taken out of context:

“A revolution by a peaceful path is an impossibility, and only a forcible overthrow of the existing unnatural conditions, a radical ouster of the titled as well as the industrial aristocracy, can improve the material situation of the proletarians. They are still held back from this violent revolution by their peculiarly English respect for the law; but the conditions in England described above cannot fail shortly to produce general hunger among the workers, and then their fears of starvation will be stronger than their fear of the law. This revolution was an inevitable one for England” (quoted in

Hunt, Richard N., 1974, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, MacMillan, p. 111).

Now let us come to the views of Lenin on use of revolutionary violence, whom Mr. Teltumbde has totally and intentionally ignored. The reason for that is obvious. As one of my close friends once remarked, “One can try to perform a liberal misappropriation of Marx, because Marx’s time was the theoretical establishment of Marxist worldview, approach and method. However, it is impossible to even try to perform a liberal misappropriation of Lenin, because Lenin grounds Marx in concrete terms...” I cannot agree more and in the case of liberal misappropriator Mr. Teltumbde, this comment is bang on target!

This is what Lenin says in unequivocal terms: “We must not depict socialism as if socialists will bring it to us on a plate all nicely dressed. That will never happen. Not a single problem of the class struggle has ever been solved in history except by violence. **When violence is exercised by the working people, by the mass of exploited against the exploiters — then we are for it!** (Lenin, ‘Report on the Activities of the Council of People’s Commissars’ (24 January 1918) *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, pp. 459-61, *emphasis ours*)

Lenin destroys the apologists regarding Marxism’s espousal of the use of revolutionary violence when he was writing against bourgeois pacifism:

“But whoever expects that socialism will be achieved *without* a [social revolution](#) and the [dictatorship of the proletariat](#) is not a socialist. Dictatorship is state power based directly on *violence*. And in the twentieth century — as in the age of civilisation generally — violence means neither a fist nor a club, but *troops*. To put “disarmament” in the programme is tantamount to making the general declaration: We are opposed to the use of arms. **There is as little Marxism in this as there would be if we were to say: We are opposed to violence!**” (Lenin, [‘The “Disarmament” Slogan’ \(October 1916\)](#); *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 94-104, *emphasis ours*)

The following words, it seems, were penned by Lenin precisely for the hopeless victims of 'liberal virus' like Mr. Teltumbde:

"Without in the least denying violence and terrorism in principle, we demanded work for the preparation of such forms of violence as were calculated to bring about the direct participation of the masses and which guaranteed that participation. We do not close our eyes to the difficulties of this task, but will work at it steadfastly and persistently, undeterred by the objections that this is a matter of the "vague and distant future." Yes, gentlemen, we stand for future and not only past forms of the movement." (Lenin, *Revolutionary Adventurism*, 1902)

And this last quote from Lenin is to show that the peaceful surrender of bourgeoisie even in small capitalist states can only be a very unlikely likelihood and therefore the general Marxist law cannot be that of peaceful transition to Socialism, but transition through revolutionary civil war:

"Peaceful surrender of power by the bourgeoisie is possible, if it is convinced that resistance is hopeless and if it prefers to save its skin. **It is much more likely, of course, that even in small states socialism will not be achieved without civil war, and for that reason the only programme of international Social-Democracy must be recognition of civil war, though violence is, of course, alien to our ideals.**" (Lenin, ['A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism' \(August – October 1916\)](#), *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, pp. 28-76)

A hundred more quotations can be produced to show that: (1) Marxism firmly believes in the use of force; (2) It does not draw a rigid line of demarcation between use of force and use of revolutionary violence, in fact, use of force even when not involving physical violence has the 'fact of violence'; (3) As a matter of law, with the consolidation of bourgeois state with its standing army, bureaucracy and its militarist tendency, the exceptional cases of peaceful surrender of power by the bourgeoisie have become totally impossible; (4) Marxism opposes individual acts of violence and

terror or such acts by small groups of adventurers, however, it clearly differentiates such individual terrorism/violence from collective use of violence to smash the capitalist instrument of domination and oppression, i.e., the capitalist state and calls the latter as the revolutionary violence. **Bottom-line: There can be no revolutionary transformation of society without the intervention of revolutionary violence.**

Now let us move to Teltumbde's claim that Marx believed that revolutionary transformation is possible without the use of revolutionary violence or use of force, through the use of universal franchise by the workers, in a peaceful process. In fact, Teltumbde argues that Marx believed that force *only sometimes* played the role of midwife in the birth of new societies in history. However, he does not feel the need to support this claim by quoting statements from Marx. The quotations that he gives are the ones where Marx is talking about exceptions of the US and England due to historically specific reasons. Lenin showed that generalizing these statements of Marx is a travesty of Marxism. These arguments were talking about an exception that proved the rule, even when Marx said these words. We will show the ideological sleight of hand by Mr. Teltumbde. Kautsky had done exactly the same thing: he quoted Marx's comments about the exceptional scenario in the US and England, out of context to vindicate his thesis of peaceful transition. Lenin destroyed his revisionist logic in *Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* almost a century ago. Teltumbde does the same Kautskyian trick to make Marx a liberal and therefore amenable to Ambedkar. We therefore do not need anything more than to invoke Lenin to show how useless this revisionist trick is. Interestingly, the subhead used by Lenin is 'How Kautsky turned Marx into a Common Liberal'! Let us see what Lenin says here in this rather long statement,

"The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution for it of a *new one* which, in the words of Engels, is "no longer a state in the proper sense of the word".

“Because of his renegade position, Kautsky, however, has to befog and belie all this.

“Look what wretched subterfuges he uses.

“First subterfuge. “That Marx in this case did not have in mind a form of government is proved by the fact that he was of the opinion that in Britain and America the transition might take place peacefully, i.e., in a democratic way.”

“The *form of government* has absolutely nothing to do with it, for there are monarchies which are not typical of the bourgeois *state*, such, for instance, as have no military clique, and there are republics which are quite typical in this respect, such, for instance, as have a military clique and a bureaucracy. This is a universally known historical and political fact, and Kautsky cannot falsify it.

“If Kautsky had wanted to argue in a serious and honest manner he would have asked himself: Are there historical laws relating to revolution which know of no exception? And the reply would have been: No, there are no such laws. Such laws only apply to the typical, to what Marx once termed the “ideal,” meaning average, normal, typical capitalism.

“Further, was there in the seventies anything which made England and America exceptional *in regard to what we are now discussing*? It will be obvious to anyone at all familiar with the requirements of science in regard to the problems of history that this question must be put. To fail to put it is tantamount to falsifying science, to engaging in sophistry. **And, the question having been put, there can be no doubt as to the reply: the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is *violence* against the bourgeoisie; and the necessity of such violence is *particularly* called for, as Marx and Engels have repeatedly explained in detail (especially in *The Civil War in France* and in the preface to it), by the existence of *militarism and a bureaucracy*. But it is precisely these institutions that were *non-existent* in Britain and America in the**

seventies, when Marx made his observations (they *do* exist in Britain and in America now)!

“Kautsky has to resort to trickery literally at every step to cover up his apostasy!

“And note how he inadvertently betrayed his cloven hoof when he wrote: “peacefully, *i.e., in a democratic way*”!

“In defining dictatorship, Kautsky tried his utmost to conceal from the reader the fundamental feature of this concept, namely, revolutionary *violence*. But now the truth is out: it is a question of the contrast between *peaceful* and *violent revolutions*.

“That is the crux of the matter. Kautsky has to resort to all these subterfuges, sophistries and falsifications only to *excuse* himself from *violent* revolution, and to conceal his renunciation of it, his desertion to the side of the liberal labour policy, *i.e., to the side of the bourgeoisie*. That is the crux of the matter.

“Kautsky the “historian” so shamelessly falsifies history that he “forgets” the fundamental fact that pre-monopoly capitalism—which actually reached its zenith in the seventies—was by virtue of its fundamental *economic* traits, which found most typical expression in Britain and in America, distinguished by a, relatively speaking, maximum fondness for peace and freedom. Imperialism, on the other hand, *i.e., monopoly capitalism*, which finally matured only in the twentieth century, is, by virtue of its fundamental *economic* traits, distinguished by a minimum fondness for peace and freedom, and by a maximum and universal development of militarism. To “fail to notice” this in discussing the extent to which a peaceful or violent revolution is typical or probable is to stoop to the level of a most ordinary lackey of the bourgeoisie.” (Lenin, *Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky*, ***bold emphasis ours***)

Does not it seem that these words were written precisely for Mr. Teltumbde, though anachronistically! Lenin here clearly shows that the situation in the US and England that Marx had talked about as a matter of exception was a temporally and spatially a very

specific and peculiar situation that existed for a brief period and this in any case constituted only a rare exception to the law: the law of the role of force in history. Besides, Lenin also shows why this situation no more exists anywhere in the world, especially in the era of imperialism. **However, since Teltumbde is too engrossed in his project to prove the ideological vicinity of Marx and Ambedkar, he has forgotten the A B C of Marxism. Tragic!**

Teltumbde argues about the usefulness of Buddha's distinction between "purposeful violence" and "natural violence". Useful for what? Enriching Marxism, as Ambedkar argued? How? Marx, Engels and Lenin argued that the State is an instrument to perpetuate and perpetrate violence against the ruled, in order to perpetuate the rule of the ruling class and crush the resistance of the ruled. It is an instrument of force, maintained by force. Therefore, it has to be smashed by force. Only in the case of a bourgeois state whose repressive limbs (military, police, bureaucracy, etc.) have not developed properly and are still nimble; and these limbs of state are percolated by elements of the revolutionary class, and the ideological structural hegemony of the ruling class has not been established over it; only in such case as a matter of exception is it possible to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie without revolutionary violence, by using universal franchise and gaining majority in parliament. Even in that statement Marx clearly says, **"This being the case, we must also recognize the fact that in the most countries on the Continent the lever of our revolution must be force; it is force to which we must someday appeal in order to erect the rule of labour."** As we can see, Marx clearly argues that the general law can only be the use of force and revolutionary violence. Teltumbde is factually wrong that Marx and Engels justified the use of force only in the case of 1848 in Europe and in the conditions of Tsardom in Russia. It is a criminal distortion of history as we have shown above with quotes from Marx and Engels from period spanning from 1848 to 1895. **They always stood for the general law of role of force and revolutionary violence in the historical revolutionary transformations and**

exceptions which existed for a short period for them, only proved the general rule, rather than refuting it. Moreover, as Lenin showed even those spatio-temporally determined exceptions too, do not exist anymore, anywhere in the world. However, Mr. Teltumbde clings to the dirty old revisionist tricks of Kautsky and attempts to turn Marx into a 'common liberal' just like his master Kautsky did a century ago. Pathetic attempt!

Now let us turn to another misinterpretation and misappropriation by Anand Teltumbde. Teltumbde talks about the concept of 'historical calculus' or 'calculus of progress' used by Herbert Marcuse. Let us see what it means and how Teltumbde misappropriates or misunderstands it to prove that Marxism is against violence. As we have shown above, Marxism *per se* is not for or against violence or class dictatorship. Before expressing its attitude to the question of violence and dictatorship, Marx would ask: whose violence? What kind of violence? Reactionary violence of the ruling class state or collective revolutionary violence of the masses? However, in order to prove the alleged theoretical affinity of Ambedkar and Marx, Teltumbde reduces the whole thing to this empty rhetoric which totally misrepresents Marxism: "On its own, Marxism is against violence." (ibid, p. 67) We have shown above that this statement lacks any understanding of Marxism. However, to prove this, Teltumbde turns Marxism into pragmatism by using the concepts of Barrington Moore Jr., Herbert Marcuse and Ted Honderich. First of all, these scholars are not Marxist-Leninists, but, despite their contribution to critical theory and sociology in certain areas, are what can be termed as New Left or radicals. The New Left of 1960s was characterized by its antipathy to the concepts of dictatorship and violence, as is well-known. The reason for that was that most of these Left liberals did not understand the Marxist concepts of role of force and that of class dictatorship and harboured incorrigible liberal bourgeois illusions about "democracy", which again, according to Marx was an empty container. We will show in a short while what Lenin had written about these illusions about "democracy" and "dictatorship" and how Mr. Teltumbde distorts the basic teachings of

Marxism-Leninism on this question. But first, let us see how miserably Mr. Teltumbde has failed to understand the concept of 'historical calculus of progress' introduced by Marcuse, though the concept itself suffers from incurable bourgeois humanism. The reason for this misunderstanding is that Mr. Teltumbde in his hurry to prove what he badly wants to prove, did neither read Marcuse's theory, nor Honderich's theory, nor Moore's argument.

First of all the historical calculus of progress offered by Marcuse is actually a thinly veiled vindication of the revolutionary violence and subversion of the oppressed people, as Ted Honderich himself accepts in his essay "On Democratic Violence". Let us first see what Marcuse has to say about his concept of historical calculus:

"The historical calculus of progress (which is actually the calculus of the prospective reduction of cruelty, misery, suppression) seems to involve the calculated choice between two forms of political violence: that on the part of the legally constituted powers (by their legitimate action, or by their tacit consent, or by their inability to prevent violence), and that on the part of potentially subversive movements. Moreover, with respect to the latter, a policy of unequal treatment would protect radicalism on the Left against that on the Right. Can the historical calculus be reasonably extended to the justification of one form of violence as against another? Or better (since 'justification' carries a moral connotation), is there historical evidence to the effect that the social origin and impetus of violence (from among the ruled or the ruling classes, the have or the have-nots, the Left or the Right) is in a demonstratable relation to progress (as defined above)?

"With all the qualifications of a hypothesis based on an 'open' historical record, it seems that the violence emanating from the rebellion of the oppressed classes broke the historical continuum of injustice, cruelty, and silence for a brief moment, brief but explosive enough to achieve an increase in the scope of freedom and justice, and a better and more equitable distribution of misery and oppression in a new social system—in

one word: progress in civilization. The English civil wars, the French Revolution, the Chinese and the Cuban Revolutions may illustrate the hypothesis. In contrast, the one historical change from one social system to another, marking the beginning of a new period in civilization, which was *not* sparked and driven by an effective movement 'from below', namely, the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, brought about a long period of regression for long centuries, until a new, higher period of civilization was painfully born in the violence of the heretic revolts of the thirteenth century and in the peasant and laborer revolts of the fourteenth century." (Herbert Marcuse, *Repressive Tolerance*, 1965, *emphasis ours*)

I quoted Marcuse at length only in order to show what he means by historical calculus of progress and how little Mr. Teltumbde understands this concept. This concept has nothing to do with the relative weight of the number of casualties in the case of continuation of *status quo* and the event of revolutionary violence or revolution. Mr. Teltumbde writes, "...Marcuse's 'calculus of progress', involving a comparative assessment of the number of people likely to be killed during and after the revolution and if the existing order were to be allowed to continue, might be useful." (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 67) Ridiculous! How can a person misunderstand a concept in such a childish way!

Secondly, the oppressed people and their leadership cannot first sit and calculate the estimated number of people to be killed in both the possible scenarios! Not only is this pragmatism of the worst kind, but also it is impossible to do so. However, Teltumbde himself has a strong streak of pragmatism. His eclecticism stems from this very pragmatic attitude. The kind of sources he has used in this introduction reveals his pragmatic eclecticism, though ironically he has not even read these academicians like Honderich, Goldstone, etc. properly. Most of the classics that he has quoted, he has quoted either from the internet or from secondary sources like Norman Geras, whose work 'Althusser's

Marxism' has been used to retrieve a quote of Engels from his famous *Anti-Duhring*.

Let us see what Ted Honderich has to say about Marcuse's historical calculus, which might have caught the eye of Mr. Teltumbde, had he read these essays from beginning to end:

"Most of us, to pass on to another example, will be as reluctant to suppose that the "historical calculus" offered to us by Marcuse can be shown to issue in conclusion that political violence of the Left has generally a justification." (Ted Honderich, *On Democratic Violence*) It is well-known that Honderich has been a supporter of the right of the oppressed people to use violent means to oppose their oppressors. In fact, he has fervently supported the moral right of the Palestinians to use 'terrorism' to resist the Zionist Imperialism of Israel. It would have been better had Mr. Teltumbde dropped the names of these scholars like bombs to bamboozle the readers after at least reading these scholars properly.

Now let us turn to Barrington Moore Jr. and his (mis)use by Teltumbde. Barrington Moore Jr.'s comparison between India and China has nothing to do with an assessment of the "number of people likely to be killed during and after the revolution and if the existing order were to be allowed to continue". Moore's comparison of China with India was based on two different types of feudalism; the former leading to peasant revolts and the latter leading to much more cohesive and comparatively peaceful rural life due to reactionary social organization based on caste. Here is the judgement of Moore Jr. regarding this comparison:

"The contrast between India and China suggests an hypothesis perhaps more tenable than those just discussed. Indian society, as many scholars have remarked, resembles some huge yet very simple invertebrate organism. A central coordinating authority, a monarch, or to continue the biological analogy, a brain, was not necessary to its continued operation. Through much of Indian history down to modern times, there was no central authority imposing its will on the whole subcontinent. Indian society reminds one of the

starfish whom fishermen used to shred angrily into bits, after which each fragment would grow into a new starfish. But the analogy is inexact. Indian society was even simpler and yet more differentiated. Climate, agricultural practices, taxation systems, religious beliefs, and many other social and cultural features differed markedly from one part of the country to another. Caste, on the other hand, was common to them all and provided the framework around which all of life was everywhere organized. It made possible these differences and a society where a territorial segment could be cut off from the rest without damage, or at least without fatal damage, to itself or the rest of the society. Far more important, from the standpoint of our immediate problem, is the reverse of this feature. Any attempt at innovation, any local variation, simply became the basis of another caste. This has not been merely a matter of new religious beliefs. Since the distinction between sacred and profane is very dubious for Indian society, and since religiously tinged caste codes cover practically the whole range of human activities, any innovation or attempted innovation in premodern times was likely to become the basis for another caste. Thus opposition to society and preying on society became a part of society in the form of bandit castes or castes in the form of religious sects.

...

“A highly segmented society that depends on diffuse-sanctions for its coherence and for extracting the surplus from the underlying peasantry is nearly immune to peasant rebellion because opposition is likely to take the form of creating another segment. On the other hand, an agrarian bureaucracy, or a society that depends on a central authority for extracting the surplus, is a type most vulnerable to such outbreaks.” (Barrington Moore Jr. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*)

Here we cannot go into a detailed criticism of Moore’s analysis which has now been rejected by most of the historians and social scientists, for example, Kathleen Gough, A.R. Desai, Ranajit Guha, D. N. Dhanagare, etc. First of all, Moore Jr. did not understand the

articulation of caste and class and saw it as a relatively unchanging mechanism through ages, an idea critiqued and rejected by many serious historians of ancient, medieval as well as modern India like Kosambi, Sharma, Suvira Jaisawal, Satish Chandra, Irfan Habib, Sekhar Bandhyopadhyaya, Sumit Sarkar, Nicholas Dirks, Ranajit Guha (especially the early works like *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*). Secondly, Moore tries to prove Marx's idea about Asiatic mode of production and Oriental despotism that it needed an external force to break itself as it lacked internal dynamism, an idea that Marx himself had abandoned after his reading of Kovalevsky's and Elphinstone's works. Finally, Moore Jr.'s analysis of even China and Japan (the countries that he compares with India) is totally outdated. It would have been better had Mr. Teltumbde read, first of all, Moore's work in totality and also understood the obsolete nature of his outmoded and outdated theses. It appears that most of these big names that Mr. Teltumbde drops to stupefy the readers have come to him from some essays and articles and I doubt whether he has read even these essays or articles completely from beginning to end or not.

He uses **Helmut Fleischer**, an infamous name among Marxists-Leninists, who began his career as a Trotskyite and ended up as a scholar who rejected Lenin and also rejected the proletarian revolution of Russia, following **Rudolf Bahro**, an anti-Marxist-Leninist dissident from East Germany who ended up becoming a spiritualist. These are the sources on which Anand Teltumbde relies to prove that Marxists believe that violence is only a matter of tactics (an argument taken from one **Eckard Bolsinger**, a well-known liberal supporter of social market economy who compares the "political realism" of reactionary Right-winger Carl Schmitt and Lenin!). Of course, when and how to use revolutionary violence, is definitely a question of tactics. However, to make the role of force and revolutionary violence itself a question a tactics, is nothing short of a vulgar liberal appropriation of Marxist theory of history, by Mr. Teltumbde. And for What? To somehow drag Marx and put him in line with the pragmatic liberalism of Ambedkar; to defend

Ambedkar's ignorant comments on the question of violence against Marxism! **What is this if not intellectual dishonesty?**

Now let us come to the question of dictatorship and democracy. First, let us listen to what Teltumbde has to say on this issue: "The expression was rarely used by Marx, and never in documents for publication, though Engels did later cite the Paris Commune as a good example of the dictatorship of proletariat." (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 68). A blatant lie! This claim is so outrageous that even Teltumbde understands it and immediately afterwards accepts that Marx has talked about the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat in *Critique of the Gotha Program* also. However, even more important is the fact that there are many places where Marx talks about the dictatorship of the proletariat without using these terms. Let us see. In the 1872 preface to *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argue that certain parts of the Manifesto have become antiquated. The *one amendment* that they insert is this, as Lenin also pointed out in *Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky*:

"...this programme has in some details been antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes." (1872, Preface to *The Communist Manifesto*)

In fact, the following is the first use of the term dictatorship of the proletariat by Marx:

"...there appeared the bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class!" (Marx, *Class Struggles in France*)

Many instances can be shown where Marx has talked about the class dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary transitional phase between capitalism and communism. Secondly, it makes no difference whether Marx used this term in some letter or writing "intended for publication." Teltumbde has himself used and quoted

Marx's letters, whenever it proved useful to his ends. Therefore, it does not really matter.

Another problem with Teltumbde's argument is that he plagiarises from the sources that he uses. For instance, he argues, "It should be noted that the word dictatorship did not have quite the same connotation for Marx and Engels that it does for us. They associated it principally with the Roman office of *dictatura*, where all power was legally concentrated in the hands of a single man during a limited period in times of crisis." (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 68)

These sentences are lifted straight out of 'The Encyclopaedia of Political Revolutions' edited by Jack Goldstone, whom he had quoted earlier in the same essay. The funny thing is that this faulty argument has been copied by Jack Goldstone from a Trotskyite Hal Draper's book, who actually did not say that Marx and Engels associated their notion of dictatorship with the Roman office of *Dictatura*. In fact, Draper, despite his highly problematic treatment of the question, shows that Marx and Engels never associated the notion of dictatorship with the Roman institution of *dictatura*. Marx even names some dictators (individual dictators) who exercised no dictatorship (class dictatorship). Marx in none of his writing even talks about the Roman office of *dictatura*. **So what appears to have happened here is something like this: Hal Draper wrote his work on Marx's notion of dictatorship of the proletariat and shows that it has nothing to do with personal domination or martial law kind of situation introduced by the Roman institution of *dictatura*; then, Jack Goldstone completely misreads this and argues (under the impression that he is simply following Draper) that Marx and Engels associated this notion with Roman office of *dictatura*! And then, the funniest part, Mr. Anand Teltumbde plagiarises this error *verbatim* from J. Goldstone! How's that! A comedy of errors, or rather, a comedy of chain of erroneous plagiarism! We would certainly have laughed with open heart at such ridiculous act, but we cannot**

due to the possible misleading and detrimental impact of such erroneous plagiarism on readers of Mr. Teltumbde.

Though in the end Teltumbde is compelled to accept that there is a difference in the sense in which Marx and Ambedkar used the terms like democracy and dictatorship, and yet, he persists in establishing this sense of affinity or similarity between the two! He should also have said that 'therefore Ambedkar's criticism of Marx's concept of class dictatorship is totally off the mark.' However, he refrains from saying that. It might be due to the fear of the Ambedkarites in Maharashtra, the wrath of whom he has faced more than once. However, one should speak the truth. As Lenin (some claim Gramsci and Arendt also said that) said, 'to speak the truth is revolutionary.'

Teltumbde immediately falls into propagating another lie. He argues, "Ambedkar himself faulted the bourgeois parliamentary model of democracy as only the notional or political model of democracy that enshrines equal rights of all vote-worthy individuals and periodic elections to choose their representative in government." (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 68) This is something that Ambedkar said about the establishment of parliamentary democratic system in India, which according to Ambedkar lacked notions of liberty, fraternity and equality in society and that is why if social and economic democracy is not introduced, the political democracy would become meaningless. He does not say the same thing about the American democracy or English democracy. This assertion of Ambedkar is closely related with the Deweyan Pragmatist idea of 'social endosmosis' characterised by 'a model of associated living.' Teltumbde erroneously equates it with Marx's idea of society as "community of freely associated individuals" or "free association of producers". It was Marx's another name for communism. Ambedkar is certainly not talking about communist society where state and classes would have withered away and everyone will work according to their abilities and will get according to their needs. Ambedkar's concept of 'a model of associated living' belongs to a society which is non-segregated, free of discrimination and guided by a humanist social code. This idea was taken directly from Dewey who had

written in his book *Democracy and Education*, "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." (John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 93). In fact, Ambedkar immediately eliminates any possible confusion of this expression being mistaken as an equivalent of communism or even proletarian democracy. First he quotes Dewey almost *verbatim*, without acknowledging and then also explains the meaning of this Deweyan phrase of 'associated living': "A democracy is not merely a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. **It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards one's fellow men.**" (Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*)

As we can see, first Ambedkar paraphrases Dewey and then Teltumbde tries to equate the paraphrased sentences with Marxian idea of democracy and what he has done by this is, in fact, reducing the idea of proletarian democracy to 'an attitude of respect and reverence towards one's fellow men'! What can be more ridiculous than this moralist and pseudo-ethicalist distortion of Marx and Marxism? Any student of political science will tell Teltumbde that this idea of democracy propounded by Dewey and followed *verbatim* by Ambedkar has little to do with Marxist idea of proletarian democracy/dictatorship. However, as Mr. Teltumbde is hell-bent upon proving something as real which is only a figment of his imagination (quite wild one too!) and is based upon his whims and fancies, he does not care about facts or truths. He also harks back to Ambedkar's idea of a 'socialistic' economy, which has nothing to do with Marx's idea of socialism as an economic system. This Teltumbde accepts at one place, quite embarrassingly. However, towards the end of the introduction he forgets in *his* 'moment of euphoria' what he said in the beginning.

Before we move ahead, let us in brief see what Lenin has to say about these liberal misappropriators and distorters of Marxist notion of democracy and dictatorship. Lenin, removing all doubts created by liberal distortion of Marx by the likes of Kautsky, and may we add, Mr. Teltumbde, writes:

“It is natural for a liberal to speak of “democracy” in general; but a Marxist will never forget to ask: “for what class?” Everyone knows, for instance (and Kautsky the “historian” knows it too), that rebellions, or even strong ferment, among the slaves in ancient times at once revealed the fact that the ancient state was essentially a *dictatorship of the slave owners*. Did this dictatorship abolish democracy *among*, and *for*, the slaveowners? Everybody knows that it did not.

“Kautsky the “Marxist” made this monstrously absurd and untrue statement because he “*forgot*” the class struggle. . . .

“To transform Kautsky’s liberal and false assertion into a Marxist and true one, one must say: **dictatorship does not necessarily mean the abolition of democracy for the class that exercises the dictatorship over other classes; but it does mean the abolition (or very material restriction, which is also a form of abolition) of democracy for the class over which, or against which, the dictatorship is exercised.**” (Lenin, *Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky*, *Bold emphasis ours*)

Further, Lenin writes, as if in anticipation of liberal Left distorters of Marxism like Mr. Teltumbde himself:

“Kautsky *finds it necessary* to interpret dictatorship as a “condition of domination” (this is the literal expression he uses on the very next page, p. 21), because then *revolutionary violence, and violent revolution, disappear*. The “condition of domination” is a condition in which any majority finds itself under ... “democracy”! Thanks to such a fraud, *revolution* happily *disappears*!

“The fraud, however, is too crude and will not save Kautsky. One cannot hide the fact that dictatorship presupposes and implies a “condition,” one so disagreeable to renegades, of *revolutionary violence* of one class against another. It is patently absurd to draw a distinction between a “condition” and a “form of government”. To speak of forms of government in this connection is trebly stupid, for every schoolboy knows that monarchy and republic are two different

forms of government. It must be explained to Mr. Kautsky that *both* these forms of government, like all transitional “forms of government” under capitalism, are only variations of the *bourgeois state*, that is, of the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*.

“The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution for it of a *new one* which, in the words of Engels, is “no longer a state in the proper sense of the word”.” (Lenin, *Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky*)

Academicians like Teltumbde often write about Marxism as if after Marx it is *they* who will understand and interpret and develop Marx! According to them, whether they manifestly say so or not, they believe that leaders like Lenin and Mao (some even include Engels in their list!) have only disfigured Marxism by their supposed “economism” and “determinism”. There is only one place where Mr. Teltumbde quotes Lenin in agreement, that is, where he has quoted Lenin’s famous definition of class from his essay ‘A Great Beginning’. Apart from that, they either make all of Lenin’s analysis totally conjunctural or reject it altogether. Prabhat Patnaik has done the same, time and again, and it seems that regarding Lenin’s theory of Imperialism as a conjunctural one, Mr. Teltumbde has, without acknowledging plagiarized Patnaik’s argument. **However, even without speculating such highly likely likelihoods, we can safely claim that Mr. Teltumbde has made a very poor and pathetic attempt to distort the revolutionary core of Marxism-Leninism, just in order to bring Ambedkar closer to Marxism, an enterprise, which in my opinion is neither possible nor necessary.**

The Quixotic Counter-Factual Simulations of Anand Teltumbde

Now we move towards the end of this ‘Introduction’ written by Teltumbde. In the section ‘Ambedkar and Communism’ he makes some wild counter-factual speculations as to what Ambedkar would have written, had he completed his unfinished manuscript ‘India and

Communism'. Referring to the scheme of the manuscript, we are told about the section 'Pre-requisites of Communism in India' (comprising of three chapters). Teltumbde fantasizes what Ambedkar would have written in this section. First, according to him, Ambedkar would have talked about the "social and religious revolution" like Reformation, Puritanism, etc. and how India lacked such movements due to caste system and therefore the revolutionary transformation of the consciousness of people did not take place. Though, this entire argument is highly problematic, historically inaccurate and *ahistorical*, we would not dwell further on its criticism and move forward. Teltumbde claims that the second chapter on Communism and Democracy would have reiterated Ambedkar's liberal (he forgets to mention 'bourgeois'!) views of Ambedkar regarding democracy and dictatorship. We have shown that Mr. Teltumbde's views himself are nothing short of shame-faced liberalism! Teltumbde keeps making simulations about what was not written by Ambedkar. However, the most ridiculous simulations come when he talks about the two chapters of the third section.

First he accepts that Ambedkar was a liberal (bourgeois liberal, since, is there any other kind? Philosophically, the curious term 'left liberal' is only an apologetic euphemism for a bourgeois liberal who is or seems a little more radical; the '*garam dal*' of liberal bourgeoisie!). Now, he makes a claim that makes you wonder whether Mr. Teltumbde even understands what a liberal is! Teltumbde fantasizes:

"Probably, he (Ambedkar) would have discussed the ways and means to transcend these social orders to create communist society. Or else he might have compared Marx's impact on a society where – as Marx wrote in *Capital* — the idea of equality had become 'a popular prejudice' as against a social order where – as Manu would have it – equality is anathema. India's soil needs to be made fertile for communism. It is sterile because of Manism, the barrier to Marxism.

“The importance of this incomplete book is not as much in its content as it is in the message that Ambedkar cared for communism. Despite the history of bitterness between him and the communists in India, he cared to think of reminding Indians about the prerequisites for communism. If he had been antagonistically oriented towards Marxism as propagandised by vested interests, one could logically ask why would he worry about thinking of impediments in the path of communism in India?” (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 71-72)

How amusing! Another pack of lies! First of all, what Ambedkar would have written or not written about communism in this unfinished manuscript can only be decided on the basis of what he up till then had written about communism in his finished manuscripts, rather than, on the basis of Quixotic fantasies of Mr. Teltumbde. Teltumbde force-fits into the possible ruminations of Ambedkar what he wants him to have thought about communism. We have already shown that Ambedkar was least concerned about construction of a communist society in India. He was and always remained ideologically opposed to communism, whether Mr. Teltumbde likes it or not. For him, the bourgeois ideal society of the imagination of the thinkers of Enlightenment based on ‘liberty, fraternity, equality’ was the most appropriate form of human social organization, though Ambedkar’s understanding of even this society was extremely problematic. For instance, it never occurred to him in his constant opposition of the communist idea of role of force and revolutionary violence that the revolution which established these bourgeois ideals of ‘liberty, fraternity, equality’ was an extremely bloody revolution: the French Revolution of 1789! In fact, much bloodier than the Russian Revolution! **Anyhow, the point is that, Ambedkar was never a supporter of communism or communist society and *what he thought to be acceptable in communist ideal* had nothing to do with what Marx, Engels or Lenin meant by the word ‘communism’.** We have shown how by comparing *Bhikkhu sangha* as an ideal of elimination of property akin to communist ideal, Ambedkar showed his complete lack of understanding of what communism meant! In nutshell, it was not Ambedkar’s concern

whatsoever, how to make India's soil fertile for communism. Moreover, the argument that it is sterile because of Brahmanism and caste system is a fallacious argument. **Marxism in all countries is faced by different forms of social oppression and all identitarians in these countries make similar claims. The faults of Indian communists, especially, not understanding caste and its articulation with class in the specific Indian situation, has nothing to do with the capability of Marxism as an approach and method to analyse the phenomenon of caste and devise a program for its annihilation.**

Secondly, the claim that Ambedkar "cared for communism" and wanted to show Indian communists what must they do to achieve it, in other words, its pre-requisites, is a totally bogus claim of Teltumbde. In fact, the oeuvre of Ambedkar can be quoted at length to show that it was none of his concern to show Indian communists how to achieve communism. Otherwise, rather than showing them through books, Ambedkar would have become a communist practitioner and would have shown them in practice! Give us one reason why he did not, if he cared so much for communism and was worried with the incapability of Indian communists to fulfil its prerequisites!

Besides, Ambedkar did "care for communism" in one way. Communism and Indian communists (despite their all weaknesses) had a strong appeal among the working masses of the country and a large section of middle class intelligentsia as well. That is why Dr. Ambedkar as a firm and genuine Deweyan Pragmatist, "cared for it"! It was not for nothing that he despised Nehru government's (though totally pragmatic and determined by the political interests of Indian bourgeoisie!) inclination towards Soviet government after the Independence and cautioned him that "communism is like a forest fire" and it will burn and consume everything that comes into its contact. It was his ideological duty to show that communism is not fit for India.

Now I come to my own speculative enterprise, if you may allow! Had Ambedkar completed this book, he would have strived to show that communism is not possible in India. Moreover, he would have shown that the ultimate aim of communism, that is, of equality actually were stated by Buddhism 2500 years before Marx and they even did not have the shortcomings of Marx, namely, the principle of “violence” and “dictatorship of the proletariat”. He would have gone further to show, as he tried to do in his ‘Buddha and Karl Marx’, that, in fact, these two problematic principles are in contradistinction with the very ideal of equality which Marxism talks about. And therefore, according to Ambedkar, the Buddhist *ashtamarga* combined with the ideals of ‘liberty, fraternity, equality’, the American ideal of ‘pursuit of happiness’ and the ‘social endosmosis’ *a la* John Dewey, is the best principle that those should follow who aim a reorganization of society. How this is aim to be achieved? Through the state (‘the Great Mediator’) in a gradual process (‘all change is incremental’, another Deweyan dogma) and a religion as a humanist ethical code (read ‘Common Faith’ by John Dewey and Ambedkar’s essay on the need of religion)! **This is what Ambedkar aimed to do and Teltumbde should not be secretly disappointed with Ambedkar’s firm convictions and as a result should not try to distort Marxism and also distort Ambedkar in order to build what he presumes to be a “holy bridge” as opposed to the “unholy rift” that he is talking about. As Marx said, “All that is holy is profaned”!**

Regarding what Dr. Ambedkar said to Dada Saheb Gaikwad in a letter will become clear by quoting him again, “I am inclined to think that our people may join the communists if they think that can give them *immediate relief*?” Any sane person can see that this is only a pragmatic suggestion to try an option for immediate relief rather than an ideological directive to join communists, or become communists. **In order to show that Dr. Ambedkar was ideologically opposed to communism, I will present some quotes from the late-1940s till the last days of Dr. Ambedkar’s life. These quotations will reveal beyond doubt that Mr. Teltumbde is lying.**

Ambedkar and Marx: or How Teltumbde Hides the Ignorance of Dr. Ambedkar Regarding Marxism – III

Let us first see the excerpts from three interviews of Dr. Ambedkar from 1946, 1951 and 1953 and then from his recorded interventions in the parliamentary debates in 1954-55.

In an interview in 1951, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said that his party would not in any case align with the Communist Party ***“for the plain reason that I do not believe in Communism.”*** Asked if he would prevent his party from aligning with the Communist Party simply because he was personally opposed to Communism, Dr. Ambedkar said: “I am not going to be a slave to my party. So long as I and my party agree, we work together else we go our own way.” (Told to PTI in an interview, November, 1951)

Here Ambedkar eliminates any doubt that he will not form any alliance with the communist party ***because*** he is ideologically opposed to communism and if his party goes ahead and forms an alliance with communist party, then he will part ways with his own party!

Let us see what Ambedkar told Field Marshall Viscount Wavell in a meeting with him. This excerpt is from the Note that was prepared based on the meeting and is included in the collected writings and speeches of Dr. Ambedkar published by the government. Take note of the bold and italicized portion:

“He (Ambedkar) thought that if India became independent it would be one of the greatest disasters that could happen. Before they left, the British must ensure that the new constitution guaranteed to the Scheduled Castes the elementary human rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that it restored their Separate Electorates and gave them the other safeguards which they demanded. **At present disillusionment was driving his (Ambedkar’s) followers towards terrorism and communism. He**

was on trial with them for the efficacy of constitutional methods.” (A Note On The Meeting Between DR. B. R. Ambedkar And Field Marshall Viscount Wavell, April 5, 1946)

Teltumbde had asked that if Dr. Ambedkar had no concern for communism, why would he write a book about it? Dr. Ambedkar himself has given the reason above. This reason persisted even after Independence. He deemed communism to be a growing menace, as well shall see shortly. He was not only alarmed at the growing popularity of communism in India, but in entire Asia. A section of his own followers were drifting towards communism and this obviously worried him, as he conceded before Viscount Wavell. **His main objective in his intellectual endeavors regarding communism, was to discredit communism by demonstrating its “impracticability”, at least, in the Indian situation. We will see very soon that he was in general against and alarmed with the advance of communism in the 1950s.**

Ambedkar said various contradictory things in 1950s, especially after his resignation from Nehru’s cabinet, where he served as the first Law Minister of independent India. Ambedkar resigned in 1951. If one reads his resignation speech, they find that Ambedkar was irked by Nehru’s compromise with the Hindu revivalist on the question of Hindu Code Bill; he also wanted the Labour Ministry, perhaps to introduce certain reforms, which was denied to him and also because the Law Ministry was just a useless ministry to do anything. The third reason was the lack of effort on government’s part to uplift the Dalits especially and also the Backward Classes. The fourth reason of Ambedkar for resignation was the foreign policy of India which presumably was suffering from the ill of “being too good” rather than “being realistic”. The realism of foreign policy for Ambedkar would have been partition of Kashmir and giving the Muslim-dominated areas to Pakistan and keeping the Hindu and Buddhist-dominated areas in India! Ambedkar evidently was in support of partition based on religion. Anyhow, these factors led to a lot of irritation and Ambedkar resigned from the Cabinet with bitter taste. He was dissatisfied with Nehru’s government’s inefficiency on

several matters. After his resignation in 1951, he criticized Nehru's government regularly.

One such disgruntled attack came in **an interview given to the BBC in 1953**. Some have erroneously claimed that Ambedkar supported communism in India. However, if one listens to the interview carefully, Ambedkar is actually warning the establishment about the possibility of communist revolution due to economic and social inequality and backwardness. Ambedkar is arguing that if the social structure of India is not changed in a gradual process, then the hope of peaceful change is gone. The system will eventually collapse and the alternative system that might emerge from the upheaval is communism "of some kind". While such a system might fulfil the material needs of people, it will be violent. He ridicules the western interviewer by saying that has not the western countries killed people in war for their own interests? Ambedkar argues that in India nobody "cares about the election business" and everyone wants their material needs satisfied and this might lead the country to "communism of some kind". The reason given by Ambedkar for this is mainly the lack of economic prosperity and social equality. He accepts in the interview that in America there is no chance of success of communism because "each American earns so much." As we know, this is not true today and it was even less true in 1953. Certainly, a large section of Black people and migrants from Southern American countries lived a horrible life. Still, Ambedkar argues that "each American earns so much" that communism is not possible there. Then he goes on to contend that such prosperity is not possible in India because we do not have land (incorrect claim), we have less rainfall (incorrect claim) and our forests are being destroyed (partially true for 1953). Another reason that Ambedkar gives for future collapse of parliamentary democracy in India is that people have no consciousness and they vote for a symbol, without scrutinizing whether a donkey stands behind it or an educated man. Since people want their material needs to be satisfied and since these cannot be satisfied in India, people might go for communism and the parliamentary democracy might fail in India. This is the

whole argument of Ambedkar in the said interview of 1953. Some ignorant people have claimed that Ambedkar is supporting communism in this interview, whereas the fact is that he is warning the establishment that if no steps are taken to gradually alter the social system and improve economic situation, then prepare yourself for a social upheaval. The reason for this can be found in the statements of Ambedkar given in some other interviews and parliamentary debates after this interview with the BBC.

Now look at some of the ideas of Ambedkar that he expressed during the Parliamentary debates. Ambedkar argues in one of these debates in 1954, that is, after the 1953 interview:

“Now, the background, to my mind is nothing else but the expansion of communism in the world. **It is quite impossible to follow the principle or to understand the validity and the nature of the principle unless one bears in mind the problem that the world has to face today—that part of the world which believes in parliamentary and free democracy, viz., the expansion of communism in the world.** I propose to give some figures to the House which I have collected in this matter. I am not going back into the long past but I am going to start from May 1945 when the War came to an end. By May 1945, Russia had consumed ten European States.” (Parliamentary Debates, D., Vol. 7A (Council of States), 26th August 1954, pp. 469-83.)

In the above quote from as late as 1954, Ambedkar clearly expresses his worries regarding the expansion of communism as a threat to “free democracy” which also makes clear the true implications of his warnings to establishment given in the 1953 interview to the BBC. **Now, even a layman can see that Mr. Teltumbde was brazenly lying when he said that Ambedkar’s concept of democracy was something similar to Marx’s concept!** Or, Mr. Teltumbde has lost the habit of reading, comprehending and then writing. I leave the readers to decide what might seem to be the more likely likelihood. In the meanwhile, let us ponder over another statement of Ambedkar from the same source:

“The question is: Can communism and free democracy work together? Can they live together? Is it possible to hope that there will not be a conflict between them? The theory, at any rate, seems to me utterly absurd, for communism is like a forest fire; it goes on burning and consuming anything and everything that comes in its way. It is quite possible that countries which are far distant from the centre of communism may feel safe that the forest fire may be extinguished before it reaches them or it may be that the fire may never reach them.” (ibid)

This is the same quote which Mr. Teltumbde has quoted, but out of context and selectively and subsequently has tried to prove that here Ambedkar is only expressing his irritation with the foreign policy of Nehru! Now, read the whole quote again and see whether Mr. Teltumbde is telling us the truth. Well, it does not look that way. **Instead, it looks that Teltumbde is embarrassingly and apologetically trying to save the anti-communist ideological position of Dr. Ambedkar, for which no genuine Ambedkarite should feel apologetic! However, the problem with Teltumbde is that he has never been able to decide where he stands. His situation is somewhat like “Na Khuda hi mila, na visaal-e-sanam/Na udhar kay rahay, na idhar kay rahe (I found neither faith, nor union with my lover/And now I belong neither there nor here).”**

The following quote shows the utter lack of understanding of Ambedkar regarding Marx and Marxism. He makes a very bizarre argument due to this complete lack of understanding about communism and socialism and this statement also betrays his dislike for communism. *Note bene*, the quote belongs to 1955.

“Even the Communists say that theirs is socialism and I want to know why they call themselves Communists if they are only Socialists. It would lose all the terrors which the word ‘Communism’ has for many people and they might easily have won a victory in Andhra if they had made a change in name.” (P. D., Vol. 9-B, 19th March 1955, pp. 2446-66.)

There is no need to comment on the above statement of Ambedkar. It is meaningless.

Now lastly, on the supposed love of Dr. Ambedkar for Soviet Union and Stalin. The following quote is from 1954.

“There is no room for Panchsheel in politics and secondly, not in the politics of a communist country. The communist countries have two well-known principles on which they always act. One is that morality is always in a flux. There is no morality. Today’s morality is not tomorrow’s morality. You can keep your word in accordance with the morality of today and you can break your word with equal justification tomorrow because tomorrow’s morality will be different. The second thing is that when the Russian Communist State is dealing with the other States, each transaction is a unit by itself. When we deal with somebody, we begin with goodwill and end with gratitude. When the Russians deal with somebody, they do not begin with goodwill, nor do they end with any gratitude.” (P. D., Vol. 7A (Council of States), 26th August 1954, pp. 469-83.)

I hope Mr. Teltumbde is listening! Ambedkar clearly believes that communist countries are bereft of morality and that is why these religion-less creatures cannot be trusted in foreign relations! We have already shown that the atheism of Marxism is something that Ambedkar was totally opposed to and believed that the only mode of existence of morality, ethics and spirituality is religion. You can find it in the writings of Ambedkar himself. Again, we see a total lack of understanding on part of Ambedkar, of the concept of morality, ethics and spiritual world. We cannot dwell on this any longer and will move to our last example to illustrate Ambedkar’s attitude to Stalin.

In response to a loaded-question of Mulk Raj Anand, Ambedkar expressed his agreement with former’s condemnation of the alleged acts of Stalin which curtailed the celebrated and fetishized bourgeois individual freedom. Mulk Raj Anand himself gave the details of the interview that took place in May, 1950. It goes as follows:

“M.R. Anand : State capitalism might also prove to be dangerous. You know what Stalin has done in Russia. Imposed a set of bureaucrats on the people in the name of Communism!

“B. R. Ambedkar : Of course, we must protect the individual from invasion of his rights from other individuals. Liberty of the person must always be a primary concern. That was in my mind when I urged for fundamental rights.”

It is of no consequence whether Ambedkar observed a one-day fast when Stalin died, which at any rate, is a claim by an author who provides no evidence for this. **Ideologically and politically, Ambedkar's views about USSR and Stalin were very clear and Mr. Teltumbde has apologetically constructed a mixed bag of lies to demonstrate, in vain, that Ambedkar was sympathetic to Marxism and socialist system in the USSR.**

After repeating the non-sense that Ambedkar outlined the pre-requisites for communism in India (so that, presumably, the communists will learn from it and then move forward towards communism in India!), Teltumbde claims that when Ambedkar said that social and religious revolutions always precede political revolutions, he was actually responding to the rigid use of the base-superstructure metaphor by the Indian communists and in this process he fell in their trap and claimed that caste, in fact, belongs to superstructure. The slogan of Mr. Teltumbde is “blame every mistake of Ambedkar on communists”, as if he had no independent wisdom. Though he is obliged to accept that the religious also belongs to the sphere of superstructure and the communist argument never claimed otherwise. However, it is noteworthy that Teltumbde is scared of criticizing Ambedkar by name, even when his theoretical mistakes are so glaring that even a beginner in social sciences and Marxism can see those mistakes. **The fact is that Ambedkar's argument, that caste has nothing to do with access to economic resources, has nothing do with what the communists did with the metaphor of base and superstructure. This mistake of Ambedkar clearly stemmed from his own Deweyan Pragmatist**

understanding of society. Also, the claim that Ambedkar wanted to do away with caste consciousness first, so that class consciousness can germinate, is rubbish. He is clear that the theory of class conflict is incorrect. Wherever he refers to caste consciousness and juxtaposes it with class consciousness, he does it only in a rhetorical fashion in order to show the inapplicability of class analysis to the Indian situation.

In the end of the subhead 'Ambedkar and Communism', Mr. Teltumbde makes another bogus claim, "His motivation to write such a book rather reflects a certain affinity between him and Marx. Ambedkar shared with Marx and with liberal Enlightenment thinkers a belief in progress, a conviction that history brought with it an advance in human welfare. In Marxist terms we can interpret this as the advance in the forces of production that brings with it an advance in human capacities; in liberal terms we can speak of an advance in freedom. Ambedkar also believed that human history is a history of progress, a forward movement and not simply a phase in the endless cycles or final degeneration. He differed with Marx in interpreting the motive force of human history." (Teltumbde, 2017, p. 73)

So, we are told that Ambedkar differed from Marx only regarding the motive force of history! Well, what about the dialectical materialist world-view of Marx? Can we equate it simply with Enlightenment philosophers? No! Teltumbde should read *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* by Engels where he shows that Enlightenment philosophers were the apogee of the bourgeois democratic thinking, based on militant (but mechanical materialism). Engels also shows that Marxism sublates the positives of this intellectual tradition but goes beyond it: negation of the negation. Moreover, Ambedkar was not even rational enough to be compared with the most developed and revolutionary thinkers of the Enlightenment, for instance, Denis Diderot. Marx listed him among his favourite writers. Engels wrote this about Diderot, "If ever anybody dedicated his whole life to the "enthusiasm for truth and justice" — using this phrase in the good sense — it was Diderot, for instance." Lenin argued in *Materialism*

and Empirio-Criticism, that among Enlightenment thinkers, it was Diderot, who came closest to contemporary materialism. And notably, Marx and Engels go much beyond the materialism and undeveloped dialectics of Diderot. **However, Ambedkar, due to his reliance on a reactionary conservative Edmund Burke regarding religion as the foundation of society and on Dewey regarding the need of a religious experience for a democratic and humanist society, regresses backwards as compared, even to Diderot.** Therefore, the claim that Marx and Ambedkar shared the Enlightenment ideals is only extremely partially true. Except the most generic and most general idea of 'progress' (that can be read in 'n' number of ways, by the way, as the philosophical developments of 1960s and 1970s showed!), they do not share their conception of the Enlightenment ideals. At the level of the generic idea of progress, why not include Nehru in this line? Didn't he share the idea of progress, inherited from the Enlightenment? Can we, on the basis of this presumed sharing, claim that the idea of democracy harboured by Nehru was akin to that of Marx? No! Ambedkar's idea of democracy was a non-class idea, just like his idea of the State was a non-class idea. Class for Ambedkar was nothing more than a generic categorization, as we have proven above. Lastly, Marx also presented a critique of the Enlightenment. **His was not an uncritical espousal or celebration of the Enlightenment ideal of 'liberty, fraternity, equality', but a critique of precisely these ideals where Marx shows that in a bourgeois society liberty becomes liberty of the rational-choice-making bourgeois individual and equality becomes the equality of exchange and formal equality before law and fraternity becomes the fraternity of exploiters. To equate Marx uncritically with this bourgeois ideal is the worst kind of distortion possible of Marx and Marxism by Teltumbde. And for what? To put Marx and Ambedkar in the same ideological bracket, which, as we have shown, is not possible.**

Moreover, Teltumbde's argument which equates Marx's idea of progress simply with the development of productive forces smacks of

a blend of Trotskyite and Kautskyite economism. Lenin as well as Mao had refuted this faulty reading of Marx's notion of progress. Marx's notion is a dialectical notion, without any fetish for development of productive forces, which by themselves can be progressive or regressive, depending on the production relations prevalent in the society. For instance, development of war technology also is development of productive forces. However, under the world capitalist system, does it signify progress? No. Therefore, Teltumbde makes a foolish attempt to reduce Marx's idea of progress to development of productive forces. It is the dialectics of productive forces and production relations for Marx that leads to the progress of human society with every new and qualitatively higher stage.

Building the Bridge and Falling from it, Teltumbde-style

In the last subhead 'Bridging the Rift', first of all, Teltumbde does what he does the best: stand on a pulpit of misunderstandings and lies and preach the Marxists as a self-proclaimed teacher and preacher. He claims that had the Marxists understood Marxism as 'a science of societies' (!?), rather than an 'ism' (!?), and applied it creatively, "the destiny of India and thereby the world would have been very different." (ibid, p. 74) Well, we don't know about that because the fate of revolutions do not simply depend on the correct subjective analysis by communist revolutionaries but also on the objective possibilities of the revolutionary conjunctures. However, one might agree that the intellectual weakness of the Indian communist movement exacted a heavy price, but not only in the context of caste, but in the context of overall possibilities of forward march of the communist movement in India. Teltumbde claims, "Although it (Marxism) denoted the collection of socio-economic-political theories expounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, it was not supposed to be confined to them. If there is contra evidence to its postulates, it should correct itself and still stay as Marxism." (ibid, p. 74) The funny thing is that what Teltumbde accuses other Marxists of, he himself is guilty of that sin! For instance, regarding Marx's comments about the state and the necessity of smashing the state or

using parliamentary means (in the exceptional spatio-temporality of England and America), Teltumbde clings to his conjunctural comments and does not tell us what Lenin said about it and its misappropriation by Kautsky (whom Teltumbde follows in this regard), especially when it is Lenin who has been ascribed with the greatest advance in the theory of the state even by academicians and later Marxists like Poulantzas, Miliband, etc. Therefore, it is Mr. Teltumbde who uses a very qualified and conditional statement of Marx about the nature of bourgeois state and revolution as a dogma in order to turn Marx into a common liberal and totally hides what Lenin said about it, or even, what Marx said about it in totality. Who is using Marxism as a mere 'ism' rather than a constantly developing science of history and society? I leave it to the fine judgement of readers.

Moreover, Marxism is not a collection of socio-economic and political theories of Marx and Engels, as Teltumbde claims. Marxism is an approach and method, a worldview, which is distilled by the scientific generalization of Marx's theories. It is not a simple aggregation of whatever Marx and Engels said, wrote or did. A number of theories proposed by Marx might be erroneous, even in the time of Marx; for instance, the theory of Asiatic mode of production and Oriental Despotism. That does not make Marxism as the science of history, an incorrect theory. Teltumbde's understanding of Marxism is not a rational and scientific one, but a positivist and aggregative one.

Teltumbde cannot hide his admiration for Trotskyites. He has quoted more Trotskyites in this 'Introduction' than any other tendency. He quotes Mandel and Draper to support his claim that Marxism is a constantly developing science. There was actually no need for that. Anyhow, on the basis of this valid assertion, he makes a dangerous distortion. Let us see another gem of Mr. Teltumbde's understanding: "American Marxist scholar Hal Draper pertinently remarked, 'there are few thinkers in modern history whose thought has been so badly misrepresented, by Marxists and anti-Marxists alike.' He pertinently reminded communists of their folly in calling Ambedkar as reformist as though reforms were a taboo in Marxism." (ibid, p. 75) First of all,

Hal Draper never reminded any Marxist about anything pertaining to Ambedkar! Hal Draper, as far as I know, has never even mentioned the name of Dr. Ambedkar! Teltumbde should have quoted Draper's advice about communists' attitude to Ambedkar *verbatim*. On the contrary, if we look at various Trotskyite sources of the period, we find derogatory remarks about Ambedkar by Trotskyite writers. It seems that Teltumbde is unaware of that. One specimen would be enough, "Certainly Dr. Ambedkar is a British agent with no following among the Untouchables, but anyone acquainted with the Congress *today* knows that it, too, has no base among this most depressed section of India's people because of its long betrayal of their interests." (Henry Judd, *Opportunism on India*, 1942)

However, the bigger and more criminal distortion that Teltumbde has committed here is erasing the line between reform work and reformism and claiming that Indian communists considered fight for reforms to be against Marxism. First of all, the CPI especially in its right-deviation period, like the period of P. C. Joshi and Dange, had a strong inclination towards reformism. Rather than considering reform work as opposed to Marxism, they had reduced most of the political work of the party to mere reformism. Secondly, the CPI since 1951 and the CPM from its very inception, rather than expressing any kind of antipathy towards fighting for reforms, have done nothing more than fighting for reforms. I do not think Teltumbde even knows what he is talking about! He should have quoted from the documents of the communist party to show that it believed that fighting for reforms was against Marxism; among myriad mistakes of the communist movement, this mistake was seldom committed by parties like the CPI (except the left-deviation period like Ranadive's period) before 1951 and the CPM. It is only with the emergence of the Naxalbari movement, that a camp of revolutionary communists emerged, a part of which committed this mistake, the part that can be called the "Left" adventurist communist parties/groups. This tendency owes its origin to the "Left" adventurist ideas of Charu Mazumdar who, in fact, as a negation of the massline of the early Naxalbari movement, presented his line of "annihilation of the class enemy". The funny thing is that

this very tendency of “Left” adventurism is currently surrendering before various strands of Identity Politics and also Ambedkarite political thought, due to its opportunism.

However, Teltumbde makes a blanket claim that the communists in India believed that Marxism prohibits fighting for reforms, without studying the history of communist movement in India. If need be, we will produce plethora of documents from the communist movement in India before and after the Independence calling for struggles for reforms.

Moreover, the communists always differentiate between revolutionary struggle for reforms on the one hand and reformism on the other. However, the question is what was Ambedkar’s strategy? Was it pragmatic reformism or a revolutionary struggle for reforms? One thing is clear: Ambedkar, while fighting for reforms, had no revolutionary agenda whatsoever, in mind, if we mean by revolution, the overthrow of the rule of the ruling class by smashing their state. One can use the word ‘revolution’ generically to mean anything from the number of rotations (!) to any kind of significant change. However, if by ‘revolution’, ‘reform’ and ‘reformism’, Mr. Teltumbde means what these terms mean in social science, then definitely, he is performing another sleight of hand, as an apologist of Dr. Ambedkar’s antipathy towards Marxism, in order to bring Ambedkar in the vicinity of Marx.

In the end, Teltumbde claims that after the death of Ambedkar, the communists realized (!) that they have been committing a mistake by not putting issue of caste on the forefront and by ignoring Ambedkar! And who are these repentant communists? You guessed right: the parliamentary revisionist Leftists: Ranadive (after his degeneration into parliamentary Leftism) and Namboodiripad! We have already shown that despite not understanding caste question theoretically and historically, the revolutionary communists (the CPI before 1951-52) always empirically fought for Dalits, raised the issue of caste on their party as well as mass organizational platforms, continued to fight against caste-prejudices of its own cadre and leaders, often by

taking stringent action. It was not as if after the death of Ambedkar, the communists (who were now bourgeois in deeds and communists in name, to borrow from the Lenin, the description that suits revisionists) had a sudden moment of epiphany. The truth is that even after the Naxalbari, the revolutionary communist movement failed to undertake the task of studying the production relations, class structure and mode of production of India in a systematic fashion and formulate the correct program of Indian revolution. Only towards the late-1970s, a tendency within the Marxist-Leninist movement emerged that questioned the semi-feudal semi-colonial thesis and later also undertook the study of the origin and evolution of caste through centuries and through various modes of production and the forms of articulation between class and caste that evolved in this process. However, Teltumbde without a comprehensive study of the history of communist movement in India, makes ridiculous claims, as we have shown above.

Teltumbde talks about the desirability of the convergence of the “two movements”, namely, the Ambedkarite Dalit movement and the revolutionary communist movement. I would argue that the question of convergence can and must be raised at two levels. One is the level of concrete issue-based anti-atrocities movement. At this level, there should be efforts to form joint front between the non-identitarian genuine Ambedkarite organizations and the revolutionary communists. We, as part of anti-caste movement, have always formed and tried to form such an alliance. However, we disagree that the onus to persuade and form alliance lies with the revolutionary communists only. I don't think it is the burden of any one of the two. It is the duty of any revolutionary and genuinely anti-caste organization to strive for such issue-based joint fronts, irrespective of the fact, whether they are revolutionary communist organizations or non-identitarian Ambedkarite organizations.

The second level at which the question of alliance emerges is at the ideological level. Can Ambedkarite political thought and Marxism merge or can there be a bridge between them, ideologically, as Teltumbde wants us to believe after such a long but utterly ahistorical

essay about the supposed affinity of Marxism and Ambedkar? The answer is a resounding and firm NO! The reason for that is that these two ideological streams represent two diametrically opposite approach, method and worldview. This effort to mix 'red' and 'blue' at ideological level will only lead to formation of muddle-headed and short-lived groups or movements which will dissipate as their struggle progresses. **Because the intensification of struggle always brings ideological and scientific questions to the fore and it no longer remains possible to maintain any kind of aggregative unity.** An organic unity between these two worldviews is not possible at all, whether it breaks the hearts of a number of people like Teltumbde. Anyone, who has read Ambedkar's works in totality and Marxism as a science, would never make such an infantile claim.

Now Teltumbde turns to Ambedkarites and Dalit movement. He argues, "The Dalit movement is almost decimated by its leaders who made brokering of Dalit interest into an art form. Paradoxically, Ambedkar is used by the ruling classes in accelerating this process. He is reduced to be an inert icon devoid of its radical content that could be manipulated to win Dalit votes." (ibid, p. 77) The first charge regarding turning 'brokering of Dalit interest into an art form' is something that was initiated by Ambedkar himself. The basic instrumentalist political practice of Ambedkar consisted precisely in this and it can be proven by facts: influencing the State (the most rational actor) to give certain rights to the Dalits and even when the State refuses to do so or implements policies to the detriment of the Dalits, continue to counsel the State to formulate reformist policies for the upliftment of the Dalits. **Therefore, critiquing the contemporary Dalit movement for brokering of Dalit interest and turning it into an art form is correct, but should not this critique start with Ambedkar himself?**

Secondly, we also need to ask the question how the ruling class is able to co-opt the symbol of Ambedkar and I would argue that they do so not *simply* by turning Ambedkar into an inert symbol. For instance, the RSS itself distributes 'Buddha and Karl Marx', a writing

of Ambedkar, which we have analysed and critiqued above for its complete lack of understanding of Marxism. Why? If it is an espousal of Marxism and only a critique of its means of “violence” and “dictatorship” as Teltumbde claims, then why is the RSS distributing this book of Ambedkar in all congregations of the Dalits every year? Are they fools? I don’t think so! Besides, there are elements in Ambedkar’s ‘Thoughts on Pakistan’ that are certainly problematic and lead to the conclusion that Hindu fundamentalism was a reaction of Muslim fundamentalism. If Mr. Teltumbde wishes to engage in a debate regarding this book of Ambedkar, we would accept the invitation with open mind and open arms. Moreover, his views regarding the *adivasis* also are definitely problematic, whether one likes the argument of Arundhati Roy or not. Facts are stubborn things. **Lastly, the one thing that makes Ambedkar appropriate object for co-optation by the ruling class is his pragmatist philosophy of incremental change, State as the ‘great mediator’, firm rejection of confrontational anti-establishment/anti-state politics and firm rejection of role of force/revolutionary violence.** It is true that the State especially under the leadership of Modi and the RSS is also performing a misappropriation of Ambedkar’s ideas about Hindu religion and Brahmanism. However, we also need to understand that there are elements in every political personality, movement or symbol that makes it prone to or prevents it from such appropriation.

There is a reason why the State never popularises Ayyankali of Kerala, who was a great anti-caste warrior. The reason is the fact that Ayyankali adopted radical methods and use of force in his movements, strikes of workers, etc. and did not care about the limits of bourgeois legality. **He gave primacy to action over legality and understood this basic fact of history: action engenders legality, legality does not engender action. That is why Ayyankali is not totally fit for co-optation.** Similarly, despite all attempts, the saffron brigade could never appropriate and co-opt Bhagat Singh. Any anti-state radical figure is unfit for such co-optation. There is a reason why the writings of Bhagat Singh were never published by the

governments. These writings are still dangerous. They will only install the statues of Bhagat Singh and make him an object of worship. However, his writings will never be published or popularized by the State. Therefore, Mr. Teltumbde should understand that though it is tragic that Ambedkar is being co-opted by the Communal Fascists, but some responsibility of co-optation by the State in general also lies with the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar himself. Otherwise, why does the state publish the collected works of Ambedkar and makes it easily available and accessible? Why does the government of Maharashtra run BARTI (Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute) and other institutes like this to promote and propagate the works of Ambedkar? **The reason is this: despite his concerns for the annihilation of caste and critique of Brahmanism, his ideas, prognosis and program do not pose a threat to the political rule of the ruling class, rather in some ways bolsters it by rejecting any radical revolutionary strategy to overthrow this rule. Any opposition which, as a matter of principle, always remains within the ambit of bourgeois legality, is always good for the bourgeois system and helps the system perpetuate its hegemony.**

Teltumbde claims that now some communists have regained their sanity (!) and are talking about battling caste and giving importance to Ambedkar's contributions. As we can see, Teltumbde again equates being anti-caste with Ambedkarite politics. One can fight against caste and be consistently anti-caste and also at the same time critique Ambedkar. There is no doubt that Ambedkar made two important contributions to the anti-caste movement, about which we have already talked. However, as far as, his politics and ideological position go, they are inherently incapable of presenting a coherent program for the annihilation of caste. **Any ideology which, as a matter of principle, refuses to go against the State in a radical and subversive way, can only win some piecemeal reforms for the Dalits; however, they cannot lead to the annihilation of caste.** All the state formations in India since, at least, the 5th c. BC have buttressed and maintained the caste system, including the

Muslim rulers (as Suvira Jaisawal has shown, one of last Tughlaq kings, issued an edict which ordered the demotion of a Kshatriya caste to the status of *sonar* caste!) and including the British state (we have already shown how the British rule contributed to the ossification of caste system by constructing state-sanctioned juridico-legal caste identities). The State has always played a major role in maintaining and perpetuating the caste system. Any ideology which refuses to go beyond counselling the State for introducing some 'affirmative action' (affirming what!?) and reforms for the Dalits, can never present a program for the annihilation of caste. This simple truth must be understood by every individual who is committed to the project of annihilation of caste. Otherwise, the anti-caste movement will continue to rotate in endless cycles of Deweyan pragmatism and reformism.

Moreover, there are revisionists as well as non-revisionist communist parties that are using the symbol of Ambedkar to appease the Dalit masses. Some think that by forming 'Muslim-Dalit-OBCs' equation, Fascism can be defeated, therefore they put up a face of repentance and penitence when the question of Ambedkar comes. There are others who try to mix up the political ideology of Ambedkar and Marxism in order to "rid Marxism of its determinism"! Needless to say, they only need to study Marxism, and also Ambedkar, properly, first of all! There are still others who use Ambedkar purely as a tactical move and in reality do not believe that Ambedkar's politics was correct. This, in my opinion, is opportunism. A revolutionary communist cannot make an ideological issue as a matter of tactics. Communists disdain to hide their views, as Marx has said. What is true must be stated by calling a spade a spade, as far as ideological questions are involved. **A Marxist critique of Ambedkar would not make anyone Brahmanical! In fact, such a criticism is essential for the anti-caste movement today.** Obviously, a critique of the communist movement is also needed, not only on the question of caste, but on the overall lack of a revolutionary program, which includes the question of caste, of gender, of environment, of the national question, of the question of fighting Fascism. We have done

this in comparatively much more detail than our critique of Dr. Ambedkar (<http://anvilmag.in/naxalbari-retrospection/#.Ws6vM4hubIU>). However, the likes of Mr. Teltumbde must be refuted who are trying not only to distort historical facts and spreading half-truths and lies, but are also engaging in the unforgivable sin of distorting Marx and his ideas by turning him into a common liberal.

Teltumbde claims that due to the mistakes of communists, the present forces that represent the vested interests of the small Dalit elite are able to keep Ambedkar away from Marxists. Again, a baseless argument! We have already shown above with ample evidence that it was never the intent of Dr. Ambedkar himself to ally with the communists, or even communism, in general ideological terms. Therefore, Teltumbde's cursing the communists is futile and useless. It would have served him better had he read the ideas of Ambedkar about communism in totality. May be, he has. However, he is clearly distorting facts, spreading lies or telling half-truths here in order to fulfil his political task: mixing Ambedkar's political thought with Marxism.

Teltumbde's Amusing Theory of 'Autonomous Voice'

Teltumbde considers it a tragedy that the Dalits could not win separate electorates and their autonomous voice was muffled! This argument is totally an identitarian argument and the funniest thing is that Teltumbde himself does not realize that it is identitarian logic. Autonomous voice!? Autonomous from what? **Marxism as a politics and ideology is opposed to celebration of fragments and believes that only class-based organization cutting across identities has a subversive potential. All other identity-based mobilizations, congregations, institutions, and constitutional arrangements only strengthen the *status quo*, even if their political rhetoric is seemingly radical.** I was surprised to see Teltumbde batting for "autonomous voice" of the Dalits, at the expense of class politics. Just because Gandhi opposed it for his own reactionary caste Hindu and Brahmanical reasons and

prejudices, does not vindicate the demand for separate electorates. Such an endeavour would, on the one hand, not only fail to bring any meaningful change for the Dalits, it would also cut them off, politically, from the general revolutionary movement. **If this is the way to ensure the autonomous voice for the Dalits, why is Mr. Teltumbde not making this demand for today? Secondly, if in this way the “autonomous voice” of the Dalits has to be secured, then why not raise this demand for the tribals? Why not raise this demand for the women? Why not raise this demand for every oppressed sectionality? In fact, the argument of “autonomous voice” by Teltumbde leads to the infamous post-modernist logic of intersectionality.** This is reactionary non-class logic and it is bizarre that Teltumbde even used this phrase “autonomous voice”, while in the very next line, he condemns identitarianism! This shows an utter lack of understanding on part of Teltumbde, what identity politics means.

That the small elite Dalit intelligentsia is aiding the ruling class in giving impetus to identity politics is an issue of wonderment for Mr. Teltumbde! There is no need for this stupefaction, though. The only thing that Mr. Teltumbde forgot is class analysis. Oppressed communities in every corner of the world have produced a small elite class, which as a *class*, has always betrayed the cause of fighting for the liberation of that oppressed community as a whole, has aligned with the ruling classes, has become a beneficiary of the state and the ruling class. Dr. Ambedkar also was regrettably disappointed with this class towards the end of his life when he said, “my own people have betrayed me.” However, this betrayal was bound to happen and not understanding it only shows a lack of understanding regarding class dynamics. Therefore, it is not about forgetting the teachings of Ambedkar for which Teltumbde is rebuking and cursing this shamefully ungrateful lot! After all, it was Ambedkar who had called upon them to become government servants because government is the most important institution of the society and the brain of the government is the brain of its employees! In fact, he said that if a few educated Dalit boys and girls become magistrates and collectors,

then they would act as an armoured shelter over the entire Dalit community and save them from the scorching sun! Now, that there has emerged an elite class among the Dalits, Teltumbde is abusing them for not obeying the directives of Dr. Ambedkar! This is not fair.

Thus spoke Teltumbde!

In the end, Teltumbde is again standing on the pulpit built of misappropriations, distortions, lies and half-truths and is preaching! Well, we are all ears! Let us see what sermons he has delivered us this time.

“Standing at this point, firstly, it must be realized by both Dalits as well as Communists that no *ism*, howsoever it might have worked in the past, is going to be applicable to the volatile contemporary and future world. The world is changing with an increasingly accelerated pace. Its essence may not be grasped by the frameworks that worked for its previous versions. These *isms* could only be beacons but the specific path shall have to be carved out by the people themselves in the concrete situation they find them in. With this realization the identitarian obsession should melt away.” (ibid, p. 77-78) **There we have Teltumbdeism, a new variety of Deweyan Pragmatism! No *ism*! It is the same slogan that was raised by Dewey and repeated by Ambedkar. The curious case of pragmatist antipathy to *isms* is that this itself is an *ism*! And Teltumbde has produced a new variant of this *ism*, repeating the old sweet nothings about *isms* and in the process constructing a new one.** The allusion here is clearly that Marxism was relevant in a bygone era (which was not changing rapidly, or as rapidly as today, according to Mr. Teltumbde!), but in the present swiftly-changing world, no *ism* would work (except Teltumbdeism!). The concrete situation has to be studied every time and new specific path has to be charted out! The universality of approach and method are totally negated by Teltumbde and here he reveals that he has a deep admiration for Deweyan pragmatist ideas of instrumentalism and progressive experimentation. The fact is that Marxism is not a particular program of action, or an aggregation of whatever Marx,

Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao said. It is an approach and a method. Nothing more, nothing less. **The question is whether the approach and method of dialectical materialism is sufficient to understand the present world or not.** However, Mr. Teltumbde indulges in making claims to novelty by uttering basically non-sense! **Which Marxist would disagree that we have to analyse concrete situations and make concrete plan? However, what is your approach and method of this analysis? Deweyan pragmatism or Marxism? In other words, we can ask Mr. Teltumbde in the vein of great poet Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh: what is you politics, partner?**

Secondly, look at this phrase “Dalits and Communists”! What is this? So the Dalits are not or cannot be Communists and Communists are not or cannot be Dalit? This is the kind of identitarianism that I have been alluding to. Teltumbde uses Dalit movement and Ambedkarite movement synonymously; but a wall of China is erected between the communists and the Dalits, whereas the reality is that if we take the history of entire country, more Dalits have struggled and martyred under the red flag, rather than under the leadership of the Ambedkarite movement. However, Teltumbde intentionally juxtaposes ‘communists’ with ‘Dalits’ which are two different kinds of categories. One refers to a political group/ideology, whereas the other is a social group. Such sleights of hand are common in Teltumbde, which attempt to show that the Dalits are by-default and naturally, Ambedkarites. Then it becomes easy for Teltumbde to argue that “the onus is theirs (communists’) to join hands with the Dalit masses and it must be genuine.” (ibid, p. 79). **Here Teltumbde shows the characteristic arrogance of a middle-class intellectual. So many communists have sacrificed their lives in the cause of Dalit landless, that there is no need for them to hear this kind of patronising sermonising from an armchair intellectual like Mr. Teltumbde.** Revolutionary communists (the CPI before 1951, the ML camp after 1968) has been known as party of ‘chamaars and dusadhs’ as it fought and sacrificed for their rights,

even though they failed to understand the question of caste in its historicity and contemporaneity, from Aara-Bhojpur to Jahanabad and from Telangana to Tebhaga and Punapra-Vylar. The intellectual weakness to devise a program of Indian revolution is a different issue, but as far as merging with the Dalit working class masses and fighting for their demands is concerned, the revolutionary communists do not need this kind of arrogant sermonising from intellectuals like Anand Teltumbde.

Further. The preaching continues: “the communists should realize that revolutions are not a point concept but a line concept; the numerous tactical reforms that drive the revolutionary strategy, are themselves part of the revolution. The familiar models of revolutions were fundamentally misconceived that future revolutions are certainly not going to conform to them.” (ibid, p. 78) Lo and Behold, readers! **Another revelation! The revolutions are line concept? Wrong! The revolutions follow a trajectory of a spiral, not a line. It is not a line concept, because there is an element of continuity and change in the progress of history. It does not develop along a line with every point being totally unique and unprecedented. The impact of scientism on Teltumbde, in fact, is only a part of impact of Deweyan Pragmatism itself which believed in a linear concept of “progressive experimentation”, which is assumed to be the “laboratory method”.** However, science, either of nature or of society, simply does not evolve through a process of “progressive experimentation” but on the basis of review and sum-up of previous experiments also. Therefore, the element of past is always there. However, according to Dewey, past plays no role in the construction of present, one of the assertions that Dewey had borrowed from Emerson’s Transcendentalism. Teltumbde is clearly affected by this idea of Deweyan pragmatism and that is why he has the audacity to preach this stupid principle to the communists, as if he is saying something profound.

The argument that familiar models of revolutions (Russian and Chinese?) were *misconceived* and future revolutions are not going to conform to that, shows the lack of historical understanding on the

part of Teltumbde. First of all, no revolution follows predetermined model. Neither Russian revolution followed the strategy and general tactics of 1848 or 1871, nor did the Chinese revolution follow the strategy and general tactics of 1917. This is stating the obvious.

However, the first part of the statement is problematic. What was misconceived about the model of Russian revolution or the Chinese new democratic revolution? On the one hand, revolutions are a motion or dynamics and every dynamics is a contradiction itself; therefore, no idea of revolution as smooth and perfectly planned things can be harboured by communists; however, if by 'the model of revolution', Mr. Teltumbde means the program, strategy and general tactics of revolution and the path of revolution (armed insurrection or protracted people's war), what was misconceived about the Russian Revolution or the Chinese Revolution? Obviously, mistakes are committed during revolutions and will be committed during the revolutions; as Mao said, "A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another." We can humbly add, with people like Anand Teltumbde, revolutions are no lab experiments, they are gigantic social experiments with innumerable human agencies active simultaneously. Therefore, mistakes and lapses are inevitable and that is not the issue here. The question is what is wrong with the idea of socialist revolution with revolutionary class alliance of proletariat, poor peasantry and middle class; the idea of socialist revolution with armed insurrection; the idea of socialist revolution with smashing of the state? Or, what is wrong with Mao's idea of new democratic revolution with revolutionary class alliance of proletariat, peasantry, national bourgeoisie and middle class? What was wrong with its path of revolution as a protracted people's war? Though the path of revolutions of future revolutions cannot simply copy the path of revolution of past revolutions and Lenin and Mao had repeated this argument many a times. However, when Teltumbde says that models of these revolutions were

misconceived, what does he mean? I am not sure whether Teltumbde himself is sure what does that mean. Every critique is also a positive proposal. If he critiques these models as being irrelevant and incorrect even in their own times (because only then one can say that they were misconceived), then he must be having an alternative model for Russian and Chinese revolutions, the models that these revolutions ought to have followed. What is that model, Mr. Teltumbde? Enlighten us!

Obviously, every genuine communist critiques past revolutions and learns from its positives and negatives as well. We too critically analyse the experiences of the Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet Socialism as well as the Chinese New Democratic Revolution and the Chinese Socialist experiment. However, to claim that the “models of these revolutions” (whatever that means!) is misconceived is ludicrous.

Teltumbde is shuddering at the swift pace of technological changes today that threatens the very existence of human species and thinks that the developments in today's world have become much faster and much more rapid. This too is a non-dialectical statement. It is true that the dazzling pace of technical inventions is unprecedented in some sense. However, as far as the real scientific and technological developments are concerned, there is a stasis and stagnation today. No qualitative leap is taking place in science; no new revolutions are taking place in the arena of science, the kind of revolutions which have always led to a positive “crisis” in the arena of science. In fact, a number of scientists have claimed that since the first part of the Twentieth century, we have not witnessed any tectonic shift in science comparable to invention of fire, or wheel, Newton's laws, or Watt's steam engine, discovery of micro-world, theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. One of the reasons for this stasis is the fact that we are living in the epoch of long reversal, when the first socialist experiments have collapsed, the bourgeois triumphalism has emerged with unprecedented political obscenity, the forces of revolution are scattered and demoralized, old dogma still have a strong grip over Marxist revolutionaries who are unable to

understand the changes in the *modus operandi* of ruling class in the era of Globalization and post-Fordism, the highest phase of Imperialism. The fact is that the pace of changes in history does not increase/decrease in a simple incremental process. Sometimes it is fast, at others it is slow. As Lenin said, “there are decades when nothing happens, and there are weeks when decades happen.” The pace of development is a function of the contradictory motion of history. As compared to the few months from October 1917 to May 1918, much more happened as compared to decades from 1990s to the present. I do not know what is the yardstick of Teltumbde to measure the pace of history when he says, “the world is changing with an increasingly accelerated pace.” If it is not changes in the real social relations and character and modalities of power, then this concept of historical time is positivist and empiricist, not a dialectical one.

In the end, Teltumbde claims that the incomplete writings of Ambedkar “inspire the Dalits and communists to complete this belated task to shape India’s, and the world’s future!” (ibid, p. 79) As we have showed above, that if Teltumbde means by this statement that the unfinished writings of Dr. Ambedkar show his affinity to Marxist philosophy, he is distorting history, facts, Marxism and also Ambedkar’s political thought. We have shown above with the quotes from Ambedkar’s writings and speeches from the last days of his life that he was firmly opposed to communism and Marxism, not simply the practice of Indian communists, as Teltumbde claims. Moreover, I do not think that revolutionary communists share anything more than the concern and intent to fight against caste, with Dr. Ambedkar. As soon as we move to the Ambedkar’s historical analysis of caste, his political program, his economic program, his view of society, his understanding of ‘socialism’, his notion of ‘democracy’ and ‘dictatorship’ and his concept of an ideal society, there is nothing that revolutionary communists share with Ambedkar. Therefore, as far as the question of what Ambedkar can teach revolutionary communists philosophically, ideologically and politically, the answer would be – ‘Nothing.’

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MARXISM AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

The question of identity has remained a debatable issue among Marxists-Leninists since at least four decades. The question, in effect, pertains to a Marxist understanding of social oppression based on identity. The Identity Politics theorists claim that Marxism ignores or plays down the role of various forms of social oppression and reduces everything to class. Even some Marxists-Leninists had a moment of epiphany following such claims by Identity Politics theorists, Privilege Theorists, and in general by Postmodernists and Post-Marxists in the 1970s and 1980s and accepted that Marxism in its current form is class reductionist and economistic and lacks the ability to understand the question of social oppression. By the beginning of 1990s, such 'common sense' had become axiomatic in academic circles in the developed world and by mid-1990s, it was beginning to infiltrate the major academic centres of excellence in India and other so-called 'Third World' countries, especially in the form of the Subaltern Studies. The only difference is that due to a different location in the Imperialist chain, the so-called 'Third World' countries never witnessed the flourishing of identity politics in real movements in a big way, though there are notable miniscule exceptions.

This paper attempts to probe this very question: Can Marxism understand social oppression and the question of identity in general? Can communists fight against social oppression? What is Identity? What is social oppression? What are the roots of various forms of social oppression? What is class? Is it just another identity intersecting with other identities? What is the relation between class-based exploitation and oppression on the one hand and the other forms of special oppression based on race, gender, caste, sexuality, etc? What is the relation between capitalism as a system and different forms of social oppression? These questions need to be answered also in view of the revival of interest in Marxism and the first signs of revival of popular movements against capitalism,

especially in the so-called 'Third World' countries since the beginning of the current economic crisis in 2007-8. The lull in the working-class movement is breaking, though in the lack of any political and ideological leadership, the movement faces a crisis and has not been able to go beyond spontaneous outbursts. However, this much is certain, that the descent is about to be over, though the ascent is yet to begin. At this specific historical juncture, it is imperative for Marxists to answer the above questions. This is what this paper humbly aims to do. In this process, I will also attempt to present an understanding of the caste question in the context of Indian society and how the question of the caste is articulated with class struggle, with some concrete facts.

Historical Context of the Emergence and Rise of Identity Politics

First of all, let me point out that the question of identity came to prominence only towards the end of the fateful 1960s in the developed world. If we look at the *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* of 1968, written most likely in the mid-1960s, we find that there is no entry under the word 'identity'. The only entry pertaining to identity is about the 'psychosocial identity', which talks about the kind of identity crisis which the adolescents have while entering youth. This is only one allusion to the fact that the question of identity became a polarizing question only after the so-called 'new social movements' of the 1960s and later with the theorizations of these social movements by different Postmodernist scholars in the 1970s and by Post-Marxists like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in the 1980s. By 1990s, the question of identity had become the dominant fetish of academia in the developed world and the same was happening in India, when I entered university in 1999, though on a much smaller scale.

Secondly, it also needs to be reminded that all of this was happening in a particular historical context. By 1953-56, the capitalist restoration took place in the USSR. The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU (B) in 1956 was an open declaration of this restoration. Khrushchev came

up with the theory of 'three peacefuls' (peaceful co-existence, peaceful competition and peaceful transition) as the modern revisionist theory. It did not take much time for the revisionist USSR to show its true character at the international level. The USSR had turned into an imperialist power from a socialist country and her imperialist ambitions were exposed in her interventions in a number of countries, often in competition with the US imperialism. The incidents in Hungary and later in Czechoslovakia came as a shocker to the progressive students, workers and intelligentsia in general. The communist parties in a number of European countries took a revisionist position in the Great Debate, which took place between the Soviet revisionist party and Communist Party of China, under the leadership of Mao. Once they took a revisionist position, these parties supported the misdeeds of the Soviet social imperialism and were obliged to take opportunist and chauvinist positions in the politics of their respective countries too. The reaction of the progressive and radical students and intelligentsia was pathological. Barring a few saner minds, most of them mistook the crimes of Soviet social imperialism and social chauvinism for the inherent tendencies of Marxism; the call for something 'more radical than Marxism' was raised. The petty-bourgeois class position of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia and students played a role in their pathological reaction. At the same time, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was interpreted by certain "Maoists" in an anti-Leninist "massist" perspective in Europe; such "Maoists" had the seeds to fall into the pit of Post-Marxism eventually from the very beginning and claim that the GPCR was 'revolution against the party' marking the beginning of an era when the categories of party, state, class etc. had become irrelevant for the human emancipatory project. Maoism must be saved from such "Maoists". The capitalist restoration in China with the defeat of "the gang of four" gave impetus to such tendencies. The Tiananmen Square incident in China was taken as a vindication of the pathological reaction against Marxism. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the social imperialist USSR brought this process to a culmination. It must also be noted that the revolutionary communists around the world, except

may be a few notable exceptions, could not present a balanced sum-up of these defeats and a critique of modern revisionism after Mao due to their own economistic and class-reductionist errors. Defeat of Socialist experiments in the USSR and then in China and the rise of economism and class reductionism in the revolutionary communist movement forms the first co-ordinate of the historical context that gave rise to identity politics and its various strands, and their philosophical bases were provided by Postmodernist theories churned out from the confused political atmosphere of 1960s, especially in the developed world.

The other co-ordinate of this historical context was the beginning of neoliberal onslaught in 1970s and 1980s. Thatcherism and Reagonomics were the most explicit political expressions of the era of neoliberal globalization. These neoliberal policies began as a response to the Crisis of the 1973 and were characterized by deregulation and financialization, flexibilization of the labour markets, attack on the labour rights. These were the policies which were later characterized collectively as the policies of neoliberal globalization. The era marked beginning of the emergence of the increased flow of capital across national boundaries, revolution in information technology, transportation and communication, the so-called post-Fordist assembly line (a fragmented global assembly line) and contractualization and informalization of labour. The economism and trade-unionism prevalent in the working-class movement disarmed and disabled it from responding to these changes in the *modus operandi* of world capitalism. One of the expressions of this economism and trade-unionism was the narrow sectarian focus on factory worker and work-place organizing, rather than concentrating on the entire working class and neighbourhood-based organizing, along with work-place organizing. Consequently, the defeat and retreat of the working-class movement, characterized best by the defeat of the iconic coal-miners' strike in England in 1984-5, led to an atmosphere of demoralization and pessimism among Marxists-Leninists, many of whom turned to the so-called "more radical theories" of identity politics, Postmodernism, Post-Marxism, post-

colonial theory, etc. **Thus, the collapse of socialist experiments, rise of revisionism and economism, the neoliberal onslaught and the defeat and retreat of revolutionary working-class movement in the developed world form the two co-ordinates of the historical context in which Postmodernist theories of identity politics, privilege theory, intersectionality theory flourished and infiltrated the progressive mass movements that had come into being in the 1960s against racism, sexism, colonialism, casteism, etc.**

It is necessary to understand this overall historical context in order to comprehend the contours of the theory of identity politics and that is why it was imperative to present a very brief account of the political developments between the 1960s and 1990s.

Identity and Social Oppression

Let us begin from the beginning. The question that must be asked at the outset is: what is identity? The question can be answered in many ways, but to answer it in the simplest form, identity is a sense of belonging to a particular group based on the difference that is constituted by physical attributes (like gender or race), geographical attributes, or socially-constructed or ossified attributes like caste, religion, ethnicity, etc. or a mix of these. It is essential to understand that the difference based on the physical or geographical attributes do not in themselves and by themselves constitute a social antagonism and therefore a root of social oppression. These differences became the basis of identity-based social oppression at a particular moment of history. For instance, sexual difference became the basis of oppression of women only with the emergence of surplus production, private property, emergence of class divisions, need of determining a definite line of inheritance, and the beginning of monogamous heterosexual family and patriarchy. Therefore, the oppression of women has a history. Of course, the oppression of women assumed different forms under different social formations as it was co-opted, re-adjusted and re-moulded according to the new relations of production and reproduction of life. However, this much

is certain and can be historically proven that the oppression of women began at a definite stage of development of human society and the sexual difference does not automatically lead to oppression of women. The same goes for other forms of social oppression based on difference constituted by physical attributes, like race. If we look at the origin of racism, it becomes clear that racism too has a history and racial difference became the basis of social oppression only at a particular juncture of history. It came into being as an ideology to justify the enslavement of blacks by Europeans and early-European settlers in America. **Thus, the identities based on difference constituted by physical attributes become the site of social oppression only in the moment of class exploitation and oppression. In other words, it is class antagonism that leads to the emergence of these special forms of social oppression.**

Similarly, the difference based on socially-constructed or ossified attributes, like caste, were constituted by the very process of class formation. Varna/caste division came into existence in the North-Western part of the Indian subcontinent in the latter part of the Early Vedic Period (1700 BC – 1000 BC) around 11th c. BC to 10th c. BC. It originated in a society under transition from nomadic pastoralism to agriculturalism. The varna divisions at their point of origin represented the labour division and embryonic class division of the late-Early Vedic society, undergoing the transition to agricultural civilization. In other words, varna divisions were the class divisions of the late-Early Vedic society. They became a socially-constructed identity only with a religious-ritualistic ossification of this labour division by the ideologues of the emerging ruling class, the Brahmins. Every ruling class undertakes the task of constructing an ideological justification for its rule. In the context of the late-Early Vedic society, this legitimation took a peculiar form – religious-ritualistic ossification, or codification of the labour division of a particular period into religious scriptures. This, on the one hand, provided a “divine aura” to the class division and the rule of the ruling class and, on the other, ossified/fossilized the labour division of a particular period. In this process, varna/caste became a socially-

constructed identity and, rather than of overlapping, a relationship of correspondence developed between class and caste. Caste relations were relatively less dynamic and relatively autonomous from class relations; however, their dynamic was also constrained by changing class relations. That is why, temporally as well as spatially, one can witness significant variations in the varna/caste system, which is due to the different class structures of different periods or different regions. In this way, caste became an identity. As we can see, this identity was socially-constructed in the framework of the class dynamics of the late-Early Vedic period, when class, state and patriarchy were emerging. We cannot go into the details of this process (interested readers can refer to my paper on history of caste here:

<https://redpolemique.wordpress.com/2014/01/18/historiography-of-caste-some-critical-observations-and-some-methodological-interventions/>), however, **this much is certain, the socially-constructed social difference which later became an identity and site of social oppression, was constructed at the site of class struggle.**

There is another kind of identity that is based on the life-style choices of individuals. Cross-dressers, who are not necessarily transmen or transwoman, are one example of such identities. Transmen or transwomen are examples of socially-constructed gender identities. It is noteworthy that even the transmen or transwomen face social oppression due to the set standards of family and sexuality, which are essential for capitalism. The heterosexual monogamous family helps capitalist to 'privatize' the time, labour and money costs of reproduction of cheap labour-power. Any kind of sexually-deviant behaviour is seen as a threat to this family structure, which is essential for capitalism for reasons pertaining to its class domination. As a result, the capitalist system perpetuates oppression of the transgender people in formal and informal ways through innumerable channels, in a systematic fashion. Evidently, such identities too, become a source of social oppression only in a particular class framework.

In short, we can say that identity becomes a site of social oppression only because of class antagonism, or, all forms of social oppression have a history and they are caused by class antagonism. Not understanding this would tantamount to etherealization and eternalization of identity-based social oppressions and will lead to a deep sense of pessimism.

Second point to understand is that once difference becomes the basis of identity-based oppression, it assumes a relative autonomy and reacts back upon the dynamics of class exploitation and oppression, though in the final instance, they are determined and constrained by class. Social oppression and ideologies of social oppression come into being because of class exploitation and oppression and because of the needs of the ruling class; but they percolate among the masses for a variety of reasons including the illusory sense of supremacy promoted by the ruling classes among certain sections of the working masses, the construction of an 'imaginary enemy' to deflect the anger of the masses from the real cause of their hardships, dividing the people in order to conquer them, etc. The ruling classes are able to do all this because they have control over the means of mental production too and therefore their ideas become hegemonic in the society, including the working masses. Thus, a process of 'othering' is inherent in the construction of antagonistic identities. These identities are not based principally on what their members have in common. Members of an identity generally do not have much in common except not being 'the other'.

Third important characteristic feature of identity is that every individual in a class society has many identities based on their race, caste, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. Unless and until we are told that we cannot belong to multiple identities simultaneously, it comes naturally to us that we have multiple identities, none having primacy over the other. Usually people do not have any problem with that, rather, they do not even bother about it until and unless they are asked about it. For instance, before the rise of identity politics, most of the Americans, 54 percent to be precise, were either unable or unwilling to answer questions about their ethnicity. However,

between 1960 and 1990, the number of Americans reporting themselves as American Indians/Native Americans quadrupled from half million to two million, an increase which is far more than could be explained by normal demography. It only shows that identity politics does not come naturally to people. It becomes an issue only when it becomes a site of oppression and therefore a site of resistance and consequently a site of politics.

Fourth important basic feature of identity is that it is not fixed. They shift, mutate and can change. For instance, many non-ethnic groups suddenly assumed an ethnic identity like the Southern Christian Baptist Church under Martin Luther King; or the 6 million Mahars who constituted a new religious identity after converting to Buddhism.

Fifth identifying feature of identity is that it depends on the historical context of its construction. For instance, Eric Hobsbawm talks about the case of a Protestant professor who was expert of German Classical literature in Berlin. After the rise of the Nazis to power, he suddenly discovered that he was a Jew! Not only him, many protestants discovered that according to the new standards set by the Nazis, they were Jews and they were either ghettoized or fled Germany.

In sum, it is essential to understand that differences (natural or socially-constructed) that constitute an identity does not give rise to special forms of social oppression by themselves. Identity becomes a site of social oppression only within the framework of class; moreover, the identities are not fixed, but mutate and change and the reason for this mutation too, is changes in the political and social class struggle; identities and their expressions also change with changing political and historical contexts. If we do not take into consideration the historicity of identity, we would not be able to understand their contemporaneity. The result will be reification of identities, their fetishization and their uncritical celebration.

Identity Politics, or, The Politics of Depoliticization

Identity politics today is an ensemble of different theories. However, the basic tenets of identity politics shared by all these theories can be summarized fairly well. Identity politics claims that only those who experience a particular type of social oppression, can understand and fight against it and all others are part of the problem or benefit from it, even if at the unconscious level. The second basic argument of identity politics is that various forms of social oppression based on identities are autonomous and independent social antagonisms. Consequently, all these autonomous and independent spheres of oppression demand autonomous and independent struggles, comprised of those who face those particular forms of oppression, because vis-à-vis each particular form of oppression, all others are beneficiaries, privileged, etc. Therefore, identity politics emphasizes that there should be an independent and autonomous movement of each oppressed section of society, it should be led by the people from that oppressed section itself and it should be independent and autonomous from other particular struggles against oppression and also class struggle against class-based exploitation and oppression.

Another characteristic of identity politics is that, with it, social oppression becomes a subjective entity rather than an objective material reality. The very notion of oppression inherent in identity politics is based on the self-experience of the oppressed. This notion is self-referential, self-defined and subjective. The result is an idealist understanding of oppression rather than a materialist and historical understanding. The most important questions are not asked or are even prohibited: how and why did various special identity-based oppressions come into existence? How did they evolve through history? In identity politics, identity-based oppression becomes a mere discourse and comes to depend upon the self-experience of the oppressed. This makes oppression a subjective and relative thing, rather than an objective and structural relationship of subordination and domination. That why the panacea suggested is

change in one's self, as Patricia Hill Collins said. For instance, the "anti-oppression training", "self-awareness", "creating safe spaces", "to learn to speak in non-oppressive language", etc. This reminds me of Marx's remark on such subjectivist understanding where he says that for the broad masses of working people to rise from their knees, *"it is not enough to do so in thought and to leave hanging over one's real sensuously perceptible head the real sensuously perceptible yoke that cannot be subtilized away with ideas."* (*The Holy Family*)

One important sub-category of identity politics is Privilege Theory. This theory focuses on personal relationships as the basis of understanding of oppression. The emphasis here is more on the beneficiaries of oppression, rather than the oppressed themselves. 'Privilege' here refers to the 'unearned benefits' that a group of people enjoys because of its particular identity. For instance, a privilege that a white person enjoys due to being white, or a savarna enjoyed due to being savarna, and so on. The beneficiary might be unaware of these privileges and they might function at the level of the unconscious. That is why, the privilege theorists focus so much on making the beneficiaries 'aware of their privilege', 'making the privilege visible', etc. Peggy McIntosh, a privilege theorist has identified 46 areas of social life where she enjoys the privilege of being white and compares this privilege with a 'knapsack without weight'. If we get to the bottom of her description we find that these are expressions of racism in the social life. Identifying the ways in which racism functions in social life is only the recording and collection of facts. It is observable to naked eye that men get higher wages than women, white people or savarna people are less likely to be harassed by the Police as compared to the blacks or Dalits. *A mere recording of this reality does not tell us anything about how and why these forms of oppression came into being.* Was it there from eternity? Or does it have a history? Does it belong to the reign of subjective experiences or is it rooted in the material objective reality of social relationships? As Marx had noted long ago, "All science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincide." Privilege theory, like all other strands of

identity politics, does not go beyond seeing and recording the apparent reality and in this sense are *subjectivist positivism*. Privilege theory argues that since men are beneficiaries of oppression of women, they cannot and would not fight against the oppression. As we can see, the basic premise of this theory is deeply pessimistic and disarming. It reifies each oppressed section and fetishizes it. Individuals enjoying privileges cannot rise above their benefits and prejudices owing to their social position. Thus, they are denied any political autonomy because identity replaces politics. Thus, the only option left to them is to become “sensitized”, “self-aware”, etc. Besides, this view of oppression and ‘privilege’ makes the very notion of oppression very ambiguous. Since the notion of oppression itself is based on subjective experiences, anything can be defined as oppression or ‘privilege’. Thus, the *Transformative Justice Law Project* of Illinois has listed a number of forms of privilege that should be checked, including ‘body size privilege’, ‘life on the outside privilege’, ‘passing as white privilege’, etc. The amusing thing is that most of the privilege theorists are themselves highly privileged and belong to the university academia. Their privilege flows from their class position in the society, however, this fact is never recognized by them, whereas the fact is that it is the bourgeoisie and the higher echelons of petty-bourgeoisie which are the most privileged sections of society, even when they belong to an oppressed identity. This privilege stems from their access to and monopoly of material resources and also their access to the privileged conclave of the university, where most of these theories are churned out.

Another strand of identity politics is *Intersectionality theory*. In our part of the world, a joke was going around when Hillary Clinton was running her presidential campaign and was expected to win the elections. A guy from the US says to a guy from West Asia, “Thanks to the beauty of democracy, first we had our first black president, and now we are going to have our first woman president; now, what do you call it?” The guy from West Asia responds, “intersectional imperialism!” This joke succinctly sums up the core of

intersectionality theory. From time immemorial human beings have known that they have multiple identities and based on this there is an “intersection” between the forms of social oppression that they face. Claiming novelty on the basis of making this argument, is like inventing the wheel all over again and then exclaiming, “Eureka, Eureka!” The theories of intersectionality emerged with the black feminist thought. Later, these theories were systematized by Kimberle Crenshaw and more importantly Patricia Hill Collins. Hill argued that the intersection of different forms of oppression does not create an “additive” impact but lead to a new form of experience of oppression. *This theory does not have any analytical power, but only descriptive power.* This too, does not go beyond describing the apparent reality. Of course, a good description makes our knowledge more nuanced, but by itself, even the best description can only be a placebo for a real materialist and historical analysis. Despite intersectionality of different forms of social oppression, the struggle against each form of social oppression would be autonomous and independent from each other, because even when different social oppressions intersect each other, they do not have a causal relationship and are autonomous from each other. Therefore, there can be at best temporary aggregative unity of struggles against different forms of oppression. The fetishization of the fact of intersectionality among different forms of social oppression and between social oppressions and class-based exploitation and oppression, prevents us from undertaking a rigorous analysis of how exploitation and special oppressions articulate, how class antagonism leads different identities to become sites of social oppression. There is no historical and scientific analysis of the overlapping and intersection of different forms of social oppression and class exploitation. The reality is that different forms of social oppression exist and intersect in the moment of class, which is not a separate identity (we will come to this point later).

Identity politics is also characterized by its fetish for political correctness and logic of tolerance. There is immense emphasis on using the ‘politically correct language’ in order not to be oppressive.

This fetish exacts a heavy price by replacing the real material fight against oppression with a kind of linguistic fundamentalism that is out-and-out elitist and exclusivist. Most of common people with no access to university education do not know about this linguistic political correctness and use the 'politically incorrect' language. Consequently, they become the enemy. In fact, the ability to know and use the 'politically correct' language itself is a privilege! Moreover, since the very notion of oppression is subjectivized, 'culturalized' and considered as a discourse rather than an objective reality, another logic put forward by identity politics is the logic of tolerance. The problems of racism, casteism, sexism become the problem of tolerance and intolerance. **The logic of linguistic correctness and tolerance becomes an ersatz for struggle for real material change in the material situation. Such a logic creates a buffer-zone of political correctness between the oppressed people, between individuals, and between movements and precludes any possibility of real and organic solidarity. In this sense, the logic of political correctness and tolerance is actually anti-solidarity.**

Another characteristic feature of identity politics, which flows from above-mentioned characteristic features is depoliticization. Since oppression becomes a subjective, self-defined, self-referential thing rather than an objective material reality, since the location of oppression is in inter-personal relationships and since all identity-based oppressions are autonomous and independent, the political struggle against the entire system and the state is replaced by personal struggle, life-style changes, the struggle for recognition, representation and accommodation. Thus, the state is out of the dock! Even, the bourgeois liberal state can be an ally in a number of struggles, since the issue at stake now is not overthrowing the entire capitalist system and the capitalist state, but recognition, representation and accommodation. Of course, the capitalist class and state welcome this logic! The politics of Catherine Mackinnon is a representative example of the disastrous results of such a politics.

In sum, identity politics believes that (i) only those who experience a particular form of identity-based social oppression can understand and fight against it; (ii) different forms of social oppression are autonomous and independent from each other; (iii) therefore, to fight against different forms of autonomous and independent social oppressions, different autonomous and independent struggles are needed; (iv) those who benefit from any form of oppression, even if unconsciously, cannot become a part of struggle against it and the maximum they can do is become “self-aware” and “sensitized” from anti-oppression training, etc; (v) different forms of oppression intersect each other and give rise to new types of experience of oppression but still they are autonomous from each other and require different struggles; (vi) even when the different anti-oppression struggles form fronts, they are aggregative fronts and they still remain autonomous from each other; (vii) the source of oppression is identity itself and therefore it is constituted by the subjective experience of the oppressed, in other words, oppression is self-defined, self-referential and subjective, rather than an objective social relationship rooted in the overall exploitative and oppressive system of capitalism; (viii) such a notion automatically absolves the capitalist class and state from any culpability and consequently the struggle for revolutionary political and social transformation is replaced by separate struggles of different identities for recognition, representation and accommodation or even not raising any demand to the state and retreat to the sphere of the personal in the form of life-style changes, anti-oppression training, “safe spaces”, etc; (ix) class itself is an identity and the oppression based on the identity of class is manifested in “classism”, “snobbery”, etc.; (x) no identity, including class, has any primacy over the others.

As we can see, such a politics of depoliticization can only lead to endless and continuous fragmentation of movements. The reason is identity politics is based on methodological individualism, subjectivism and solipsism. The empirical evidence proves this. All the movements against different forms of social oppression that came into existence in the 1960s in the

developed world, like the feminist movement, the gay movement, the black liberation movement (though to a lesser extent), the Dalit movement in India ended up into innumerable fragments. The organizational anarchism (in the name of non-hierarchical structure) of these movements contributed to this process of fragmentation. The reason is that the basic logic of identity politics is reification and uncritical celebration of fragments. Such a logic can only lead to this result.

Now let us move to the philosophical and theoretical roots of identity politics in order to understand the theoretical foundation of the notions of identity politics.

Theoretical Foundations of Identity Politics

"It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

-Shakespeare (Macbeth)

The theoretical foundations of identity politics come mainly from two interrelated sources: the Foucauldian Postmodernism and the Post-Marxist thought of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Let us first discuss the first source, that is, Michel Foucault's Postmodernist theories.

Foucault is one of the high priests of Postmodernism and is especially known for his works on madness, crime, punishment and his critique of Enlightenment modernity. One of the most important philosophical sources of Foucault is Nietzsche, known for his critique of Enlightenment modernity and his anti-humanism. We cannot deal with entire Foucauldian theory here. Here Foucault's concept of Power is most relevant which informs most of identity politics. Foucault argues that Power is decentred and everywhere. It is not held by a ruling class or its state. It is distributed throughout the society. Rather than being unitary, Power is a multiplicity of specific and localized relationships that infiltrate and percolate the entire social body. Moreover, Power is impersonal and is not held by a particular individual or collective, but it is constituted by a combination of localized discourses, institutions, tactics, practices,

etc. in accordance with the dominant apparatus of Power-knowledge. Every power-relationship creates its own forms of knowledge, which in turn presupposes a particular kind of power-relationship. Secondly, power is not simply repressive, but it is productive. It does not function by repressing people but by constituting them as subjects. Wherever there is power, there is resistance. However, since power itself is dispersed and localized, the resistance also has multiple autonomous points.

The second important tenet of Foucauldian theory is his rejection of any theory of subject. In fact, and Foucault accepted it, he takes the challenge to the theory of subject beyond Althusser or Levi-Strauss. Foucault argues that it is Power that constitutes the subject, which then becomes its carrier. Now, if the subject is constituted by Power and is its carrier, then it can resist Power only when allowed by Power! At the same time, Foucault says that wherever there is Power, there is resistance. Then what is the source of this resistance? The particular examples of resistance that Foucault discusses reveal his instrumentalist and functionalist understanding of resistance as something which allows Power-knowledge apparatus to change and restructure itself. Obviously, this tenet is in contradiction with the first characteristic that we discussed. But such contradictions abound in Foucault.

Thirdly, Foucault critiques the very notion of objective knowledge and science. For him, knowledge is subjective and constantly changes according to the changing apparatus of power-knowledge. The very notion of scientific knowledge, universality, generalization is rejected as part of the domination project of the Enlightenment modernity and Marxism is implicated as a part of it. Foucault's notion of knowledge somehow relates to the relativism of Nietzsche's notion of knowledge, according to which every knowledge is judged according to the particular will to power which it embodies. However, this creates a contradiction again. Because if every knowledge is based on some will to power, what can be the vantage point of Foucault's theory? Which will to power does it represent against which it can be scrutinized? Anyhow, according to Foucault, Marxism also is based

on the notion of 'totality', characteristic of the power-knowledge apparatus that came into existence as the result of the Enlightenment modernity and scientific reason. With its totalizing stress on class struggle, Marxism fails to address the need of multiple points of resistance to oppose multiplicity of oppressions. That is why, Foucault saw May 1968 as a thoroughly anti-Marxist event. Such a critique of the notion of universality and totality, taken to its logical culmination, was bound to reject any idea of collective resistance, because every collective is formed on some sort of generalization based on a notion of totality. Therefore, every collective resistance is bound to lead to an oppressive structure. Therefore, the only site of resistance that we are left with is individual and personal relationships.

These are some of the basic foundations of Foucauldian theory which became the guiding light of identity politics.

The other and immediately more important theoretical source for identity politics was the Post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, which was deeply influenced from Postmodernism. The publication of their work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* can be considered as the inauguration of Post-Marxist thought. We have already described the global political climate of the period from the late-1960s to the 1980s. It was in this context of historical defeat, retreat of the working-class movement, the rise of revisionism in the USSR and then in China, the revisionist betrayal of a number of European communist parties, the pathological response of the radical progressive intelligentsia of Europe to this reversal and betrayal, rise of movementism and the search for "something more radical than Marxism"; that this book was published. It soon assumed, along with the writings of Foucault and other Postmodernists, the status of a classic among the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia of the Western world.

In this work, they argue that the collapse of socialism in the USSR and then in Eastern Europe, Campuchia, etc. was due to essential lacunae of Marxism. They argued that the whole analysis of Marxism

is based on the idea of 'totality' and 'universal'. These ideas, according to Laclau and Mouffe are insufficient to understand the society. They reject the emphasis of Marxism on class analysis and class struggle, which for them is a narrative based on totality. For them, the society is constituted by many 'partial discourses' of social relationships. The authors here follow the Postmodernist idea that there is no such thing as 'universal' or a 'totality'. The impact of Althusser is unmistakable here, who in his project of refutation of economism, went so far as to claim that society is constituted by many autonomous structures, social, political, ideological and economic with their own autonomous movement and these structures do not have a direct causal relationship, but a conjunctural relationship. The economic structure plays a determining role only in the 'last instance' which never comes. The second Althusserian idea which has a partial influence on the Post-Marxist theories is the idea of history as a process 'without a subject'.

Laclau and Mouffe under the multiplicity of influences conclude that society is not constituted as a totality of economic, social and political relationships, as a socio-economic and political whole, but is a 'field of criss-cross of different antagonisms' in which class struggle is just another antagonism and does not have any primacy over other antagonisms or any determining role. The concept of state that follows from such an understanding is very obvious: the state too, is an autonomous and independent body from class. It is not simply an instrument of domination because power itself is dispersed and decentred. Therefore, there is not one struggle against the state but a multiplicity of struggles against a multiplicity of social oppressions. These multiple antagonisms do not constitute a 'diversification' but a 'diversity' from which we cannot be led back to a point of totality. Consequently, either there is no need to put demands in front of the state, or at most the demands for recognition, representation and accommodation in front of the state that does not represent any class: a liberal state above classes. At worst, such "struggles" take place only in the personal sphere and are limited to life-style changes, self-awareness, creating "safe spaces", anti-oppression

training, etc. The state is effectively absolved and can even become an ally in case of particular anti-oppression struggles.

Laclau and Mouffe argue that the working class does not have any historical consciousness stemming from the lack of access to ownership of the means of production and commodification of their labour-power, on the basis of which it can be considered the 'productive' revolutionary agent. Instead, there are multiple 'subject positions' based on the multiplicity of oppression. Since there are no historical objective class interests, there are no 'privileged' subject positions and therefore the working class cannot be considered a revolutionary agent.

Once causality in social relationships is abandoned, history becomes a series of contingencies and accidents, a free-floating set of criss-cross of totally autonomous antagonisms with no root in any primary source of exploitation and oppression. Each particular form of oppression is reified, dehistoricized and fetishized and becomes the result of 'an ensemble of social practices, of institutions, and discourses' which produce the subject (women, blacks, Dalits, etc). Thus, a kind of phenomenalist and impressionistic understanding of oppression is presented, where the very notion of oppression becomes self-referential, subjective and self-defined, having no basis in the real social relations of production and reproduction of life.

Laclau and Mouffe go even further and claim that any relation of subordination does not by itself constitute a relationship of oppression. It does so only when it is consciously articulated through a 'discourse' by the oppressed themselves as a relation of oppression. Thus, 'slavery' or 'serfdom' are just relations of subordination and they become relations of oppression only when they are constituted as such by a 'discursive discourse' like the inalienable 'Rights of Man', etc. Thus, exploitation and oppression are not objective and structural social relationships but subjective things based on 'discursive discourse'.

Moreover, the notion of oppression is generalized in an anarchist fashion to include the relationship between the leader and the led even within an organization of the oppressed. Thus, a general 'anti-authoritarianism' is preached in an anarchist fashion. No distinction is made between the authority of the state institutions based on class exploitation and oppression and coercion on the one hand and the authority of an elected leadership of a revolutionary or anti-oppression organization, on the other. Who and why wields the authority is immaterial in this notion. Needless to say, such a theory will lead to an organizational line that would either lead to continuous fragmentation or will make the organization a debating club or society. A part of this line of argumentation is also the rejection of the very notion of a vanguard party. Since there are no objective historical class interests, there can be no revolutionary party representing these non-existent interests, and if there is, it is bound to become authoritarian. Some of the followers of Laclau and Mouffe are even uncomfortable with the idea of a movement based on a 'grand narrative', a 'grand political program' because there can be none!

We can easily guess the political prescriptions of such a theory. Since there are multiple autonomous and independent spheres of oppression, therefore, we need multiple autonomous and independent spheres of struggles. In other words, the call is for autonomization of struggles. These autonomous struggles, in the opinion of Laclau and Mouffe, will lead to a 'new kind of radical politics' that in turn would lead to a 'democratic revolution'. This, by them is considered 'a step forward from Marxism'. The overthrow of capitalist state with use of force by the proletariat under the leadership of its vanguard is a thing of past for them because the state itself is not an instrument of class domination but an autonomous and independent sphere itself. This liberal, pluralistic, democratic state can even become ally in certain particular struggles against a particular form of oppression. The whole struggle is now not for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and capitalist state, but a struggle for representation and recognition, at most. The

struggle is now against 'bureaucratization', 'homogenization' implicit in modern social life. In 'the great imagery of liberty and equality', according to our authors, the emphasis now is on liberty and that is why many struggles are not taking the form of collective struggles against state, but a kind of 'armed individualism'. These are the basic tenets of the Post-Marxist theory of Laclau and Mouffe. As we can see, it is not actually "Post"-Marxist but anti-Marxist. It attacks the revolutionary core of Marxism-Leninism, that is, the notion of class, class-struggle, class dictatorship, the state, the party. Along with Foucauldian Postmodernism, the anti-Marxist theories of Laclau and Mouffe form the theoretical foundation of identity politics.

In India, these theories along with the linguistic turn introduced by Edward Said's *Orientalism* found manifestation in the post-1986 *Subaltern Studies*. Before that the *Subaltern Studies* was broadly within the framework of the British historiographical tradition of 'history from below'. However, after 1986, when Spivak and Said wrote preface to a volume of *Subaltern Studies*, this project of history-writing collapsed into Postmodernism and post-colonial theory. The basic argument of the *Subaltern Studies* was simple: Enlightenment modernity is a project of western domination; this includes all theories based on the notion of scientific reason, totality, the concept of universal; thus it includes Marxism too; the Indian Nationalism was a derivative discourse of the western modernity and that is why it was a still-born project; there is only one alternative, namely, resorting to the spheres and identities which are uncontaminated by Western modernity and Enlightenment reason; like the domestic sphere of Hindu family, or the spontaneity of the tribal people, the spontaneous activity of the Subaltern Hindu communities, etc. This is a very short introduction of the basic logic of *Subaltern Studies*. Such a logic led the theories of these Subalternists to objectively lend support Hindutva Fascism and *karseva* which led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, which was taken as an outburst of subaltern energy! It is not surprising because we cannot expect anything else from the reification and uncritical celebration of fragments. The *Subaltern*

Studies was a project which applied Postmodernism in Indian history-writing. It is largely discredited now, though some of these trenchant critics of western modernity are still churning out their obscurantist theories in the centres of western modernity and western domination.

The Marxist Understanding

The Marxists without being apologetic claim that their project is universalist. Some Marxists, in the name of learning from Postmodernism and identity politics, become apologetic about it and begin their blabbering that their project too, is “pluralistic” acknowledging the multiplicity of oppressions, etc. Such Marxists end up practising aggregative equationism. For instance, in India, there are so-called Marxists who have been trying to strike an equation of Dalits + Muslims + Tribals + Women as the magic formula to defeat Fascism and neoliberalism! Winning majority is not equal to adding up minorities. The very idea of non-organic aggregative unity between identities is flawed and it is bound to end up in frustration, as many ‘eager to learn Marxists’ are slowly learning. Only class can be the basis of an organic unity between all exploited and oppressed. Let us elaborate why.

First of all, let me refute some ‘common sense’ notions about Marxists, prevalent among the progressive intelligentsia influenced by identity politics.

Marxists are not opposed to struggles against oppression. They know and understand that multiple forms of social oppression based on gender, caste, race, sexuality, etc. do exist and Marxists know the need to fight against these special oppressions. In fact, Marxists globally have been at the forefront of the struggles against these oppressions. Class-reductionism was never the argument of Marxism, notwithstanding the economistic deviations that prevailed in the Second International, against which Lenin fought, and during the period of Stalin in the Bolshevik Party, with which Stalin himself continued to grapple. In fact, even in the late-19th century, the

Social-Democratic movement of Europe was in the leadership of all the movements of oppressed sections of society. Social-Democrats were involved in all struggles against all forms of oppression and exploitation in all countries. In countries where industrial development was not considerable, and proletariat constituted a small minority in the population in the late-19th century, the Social-Democrats won 30 to 47 percent votes. The reason was that they were leading not only the working-class movement for its economic demands, but were leading the political movement of all oppressed and exploited people against capitalism. That is why Lenin called the Socialist movement as the 'tribune of the people' and said, "Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse, no matter what class is affected – unless they are trained, moreover to respond from a Social-Democratic point of view and no other." Similarly, Marx criticized the British working-class movement for its inability to take a revolutionary position on the oppression of the Irish people in these words, "This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working-class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And that class is fully aware of it." Therefore, the basic Marxist logic was never ignoring or downplaying the forms of social oppression but to understand their material history and their causal link with class antagonism.

Marxists do not say that class is the only form of social division and know that there are other forms of social division based on identities. Class is not an identity, but a social relation based on production, which is independent of the subjective experiences of the exploited and oppressed. It is an objective social relation. When Marxism claims that the role of the working-class was central to the cause of revolutionary transformation and human emancipation, it was not based on the sectional interests of the workers, as a section or identity. The trade unions pursued the particular economic interests of the working-class and that is why the relationship between the party and trade unions was always in a constant dialectical tension.

The logic of communist parties was not like that of the trade unions, while emphasizing the centrality of the working class as the revolutionary productive agent. The Marxist logic depends on two things: (i) working-class has a central role as a revolutionary agent in revolution against capitalism, because capitalism as a mode of production and a socio-economic and political system, depends on the exploitation of the labour of the working class. The surplus extraction from the working class through the commodification of the labour-power of the worker and monopoly of the capitalists over the ownership of the means of production is at the root of the rule of capitalist class and reproduction of capitalism as a system; without this surplus, the ruling classes would be deprived of their means of rule as well as their means of subsistence; working-class, therefore, is in a unique position due to its contradiction with the bourgeoisie, to play the role of productive agent; (ii) the second reason is that all forms of identity-based social oppression came into existence, evolved through history and intersect with each other in the moment of class. It is class antagonism that makes identity the site of social oppression and is articulated with this social oppression. In this articulation, it is the changing class dynamics which play the determining role ultimately. The political line of the revolutionary organization must take notice of this articulation of class-based exploitation and oppression and different forms of social oppression; but it is political line which must take precedence over identity. Due to these two reasons, it is essential to understand that class is not just another identity based on the subjective notions of the oppressed; it is a social relation of production that is constituted through the process of production and reproduction of life. It is an objective relation independent of what one perceives or not perceives.

When economism hegemonized the communist movement during the period of the Second International and then during the period of Stalin, who was grappling with this error till the end but could not reach the solution, the sectional pecuniary interests of the working class became dominant in the working-class movement. In fact,

everywhere in the communist movement, communists have to wage constant struggle against economism which is bourgeois ideology that infiltrates the ranks of communists. *Wherever the communists fail in this struggle, economism becomes dominant and leads to trade unionism, anarcho-syndicalism, non-party revolutionism, autonomism, workerism, some of which are a form of identitarianism themselves. These forms of workers' identitarianisms ossify the social class into an identity.* Such alien tendencies, wherever they became dominant, disabled the working class from becoming the leader of the working masses in the revolutionary movement against capitalism. It denied the working class the chance to become the leader of all exploited and oppressed masses. In India, we have been witnesses to the disastrous results of this economism since the late-1920s itself and especially during the rise of Fascism in India. Leaving apart the revisionists, even the revolutionary communists who were active among working-class could not go beyond militant economism and workerism. Similarly, in Britain, the militant economism prevalent in the working-class movement antagonized the other sections of the society to such an extent in the period of crisis that they drifted towards Thatcherite Toryism.

Some Marxists have claimed that it was only due to the economic mistake of communists that identity politics became dominant. This is only the part of reality and reducing the whole failure to the subjective mistake of communists would be subjectivism. *It is true that the economism prevalent in the communist movement contributed to the rise of Postmodernism and Post-Marxism, however, there was a fertile historical context for this. Otherwise, these ideologies could have emerged in the late-19th century itself. In that period too, economism was active in the communist movement. Therefore, we need to understand the dialectics of subjective and objective dimensions of the whole historical context in which identity politics emerged and became dominant.*

Moreover, some Marxists in the process of refuting class-essentialism and class-reductionism tend to prove too much and go

to the other extreme of *de-economizing class*. It is true that workerists (operaists) reified social class and ossified it as an identity and led to what can be termed as workerist identitarianism. We need to make a distinction between spontaneous workers' consciousness and proletarian consciousness which is constituted through constant political struggles. The former is only potentially progressive and prone to hegemonization by an ensemble of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies. *However, it is the social class of workers that is historically at a vantage point to internalize proletarian consciousness through political struggles.* Otherwise, one would be obliged to argue that any class can internalize the proletarian consciousness and lead the revolution. It would be divorcing the political class from the social class. *The social class becomes political class through real struggles which first lead to the constitution of the vanguard, which itself is a result of a particular moment in this process of becoming, and then develop further under the leadership of the vanguard.*

The real Marxist-Leninist project is universal because it does not aim to fight against one or two particular forms of oppression, though it supports all struggles against oppression. Since it sees all forms of social oppressions originating and evolving in the moment of class antagonism, which itself is constantly in motion, it sees the causal links between class exploitation and oppression on the one hand and all identity-based oppressions on the other. Consequently, it fights against the entire capitalist system which breeds, sustains, co-opts, re-adjusts, re-structures, moulds and remoulds different forms of identity-based social oppressions.

Identity politics (Postmodernism and Post-Marxism in practice) reifies, de-historicizes and fetishizes the fragments, the identities, and uncritically celebrates them. In this way, these identities are also eternalized and etherealized. They are completely separated from their material history. Consequently, their notion of social oppression reduced to the multiple autonomous sites of identities, totally divorced from their material basis, prevents us from comprehending the essence and the inner dynamics of oppression. Identity politics

depoliticizes social oppression by making them a subjective thing and divorcing it from the capitalist system and state. In this way, the state is absolved and all anti-oppression struggles are reduced to the sphere of inter-personal relations, like anti-oppression training, creating safe-spaces, becoming self-aware, etc. The state would not only welcome it but might even help in this! In fact, almost all the NGOs involved in such activism are getting funds from governments of imperialist countries and imperialist funding agencies.

If we fail to see the fact that all forms of identity-based social oppression originate, evolve, and intersect in the moment of class, we cannot devise a revolutionary program for the elimination of all forms of social oppression. It is only by a historical materialist understanding of the origin and evolution of different social oppressions that we can see that it is the capitalist system that causes, sustains, co-opts, re-adjusts all forms of social oppressions and only with this realization can we devise a program for the revolutionary unity of all exploited and oppressed people for the revolutionary overthrow of the system that breeds and sustains class exploitation as well as social oppressions. It is class struggle that is the key link in overthrowing capitalism as an exploitative and oppressive system, not the separate struggles of multiple identities. A class-based movement against all forms of social oppression is needed. The demand for autonomy embodies a deep sense of pessimism that the working-class movement cannot fight against various forms of oppression and even the acceptance that even all oppressed cannot unite. The very logic of identity politics is 'othering', autonomy, isolation. This precludes any possibility of building a broad-based movement that can lead to the end of oppression. Only class provides a basis that can unify all oppressed and exploited and build a movement that has the potential to overthrow capitalism and thus all forms of oppression and exploitation. Even the working-class cannot succeed if it does not unite with all oppressed people in their fight for liberation. *However, this is not an aggregative and coalitionist unity, but an organic unity along class lines.* A socialist revolution will lead to the liberation of all

women, but all women do not fight for the socialist revolution against capitalist system. As Alexandra Kollontai said in *The Social Basis of Woman Question*, “The women’s world is divided, just the world of men, into two camps: the interest and aspirations of the one group bring it close to the bourgeois class, while the other group has close connections to the proletariat, and its claim for liberation encompass a full solution to the woman question. Thus, although both camps follow the general slogan of the ‘liberation of women’, their aims and interests are different.”

Summing up the revolutionary Marxist position, it can be said that Marxism believes that production and reproduction of human life forms the foundation of society. The class struggle is the driving force of history and various forms of social oppression come into existence, evolve, overlap and intersect in the framework of class antagonisms and are articulated with class struggle. In this articulation, class dynamics plays the dominant role in the last instance. Marxism shows that various special forms of oppression came into existence at different moments of the evolution of the class society. For instance, women oppression came into existence with the evolution of private property, monogamous family, class and state; similarly, caste came into existence with the religious-ritualistic ossification and codification of the embryonic class division of late-Early Vedic Period. Racism on the other hand came into existence with the emergence of capitalism and modern slavery. Capitalism has co-opted women oppression and caste-based oppression by re-adjusting and restructuring them according to its own class framework. Today, it is capitalism which causes, sustains and co-opts all forms of social oppression and therefore is the root cause of class-based exploitation and oppression as well as all forms of identity-based oppressions. Working-class is the revolutionary productive agent because capitalism as a system depends on the exploitation of labour of the working-class, without which it cannot reproduce itself. Since the existence and reproduction of capitalism depends on the working-class, it is in a unique position in relation to capitalism and as far as revolutionary transformation is concerned.

Class unity across identities to fight against exploitation and all forms of social oppression is the only revolutionary way to end all forms of oppression. Working-class as revolutionary agent is not a given or foregone conclusion for Marxists, but a real potential. Capitalism compels workers to organize and fight against capitalism, but it also divides and disorganizes them by obliging them to compete with one another in the labour market. This competition among workers creates the ground for growth of 'false consciousness' amongst them, that is, the influence of bourgeois ideologies of racism, casteism, etc amongst them. It is an empirically proven fact that racism, xenophobia, casteism, misogyny often soar in the periods of economic crisis. In India's post-independence history, it can be shown with fair amount of preciseness, be it the *Ram Janmabhoomi Movement* of the 1980s, the *Mandal Movement* of 1990s, or the Maratha, Jat and Patel agitations for reservation in the 2000s and 2010s. All of these periods witnessed serious economic crises. At the same time, it can be shown that such ideologies become, at least, less effective in the periods of intensification of class struggle, especially under a correct political line and leadership. *The transformation of the objective potential (class-in-itself) into subjective agency (class-for-itself) is a historical process which requires intervention of revolutionary organization in political struggles, which itself emerges at a definite moment in the process of becoming of the spontaneous working-class consciousness into proletarian political consciousness.*

Who is the Enemy?

To answer this question, we need to answer who benefits from social oppression. The privilege theorists would argue that vis-à-vis every particular form of social oppression and its victims, all the others are beneficiaries and are complicit in this oppression and therefore they are the enemy. However, it can be shown with fairly conclusive evidence that men are not the *objective* beneficiary of oppression of women, non-Dalits are not the *objective* beneficiary of Dalit oppression and Whites are not the *objective* beneficiary of racism.

That they are affected with the ruling class ideologies of sexism, Brahmanism, and racism is a different question altogether. The fact that even workers fall prey to ideologies of sexism, racism, casteism, etc. only shows that the spontaneous consciousness of workers is not automatically and always-already proletarian and is prone to fall prey to bourgeois ideologies. *However, such behaviours are subjective and vary from individual to individual, unlike the objective interests of the working class as a whole, which remain the same for all workers.*

In India, it can be shown that the oppression of Dalits also makes the working masses among other castes much more vulnerable to caste-based oppression as well as class exploitation. It can be demonstrated that wherever the women are oppressed, get less wages, are confined within the ambit of the household, the male workers also get less wages, are faced with the task of economic sustenance of the family alone, and the working-class family as a whole is much more vulnerable economically. Similarly, it can be proven, as the study by Michael Reich shows, that wherever the wages of the Black workers are depressed, the white workers too get less wages.

The second way in which these ruling class ideologies work against the working masses and in the benefit of the capitalist ruling class is that it allows the capitalists to over-exploit the oppressed sections of the society. In India, the average wages of the Dalit workers (89 percent of Dalit population is either rural or urban worker) is lower than the overall average wage in India. This also creates a downward pressure on the wages of non-Dalit workers. The result is higher rate of exploitation for the capitalist class as a whole. Regarding the articulation of class and caste in Indian society, I would like to present three theses here: *(i) Every worker is exploited, but the Dalit worker is over-exploited due to the excess of vulnerability caused by the particular form of caste-based social oppression that they face; (ii) Every Dalit is oppressed, but it is working class Dalits who face the most barbaric forms of anti-Dalit atrocities and caste-based humiliation on account of the excess of*

vulnerability caused by their class position; and, (iii) the ruling class Dalits as a class, even when they face anti-Dalit verbal humiliation, do not and would not militantly fight against casteism as it brings the question of the culpability of the entire capitalist system to the centre eventually, of which they are beneficiaries as well as functionaries.

Thirdly, such ideologies of the ruling class allow the capitalist class to 'divide all to conquer each' in the words of F. Douglass. The clearest example was the recent movement of Marathas for reservation in Maharashtra. Recent years have seen unprecedented rate of unemployment in India; at the same time, capitalist development in agriculture has led to the ruination of a huge number of marginal and small peasants in Maharashtra and other parts of India. This has created a situation of extreme social and economic uncertainty and insecurity for working masses, giving rise to demands for reservation of seats in government jobs and education by a number of peasant castes. The Marathas are one of them. The reality is that 200 elite Maratha capitalist families control most of sugar mills, huge farms, factories and government posts in Maharashtra. The huge bulk of working masses among Marathas are deprived of all opportunities due to this Maratha ruling class. To blunt this increasing class contradiction, the Maratha ruling class fanned the flares of casteism among the Maratha working masses by arguing that it is the Dalits who are taking away the job opportunities of Marathas due to reservation. The immediate incident of rape of a Maratha girl, in which the accused were from Dalit background, sparked off huge Maratha Marches all across Maharashtra demanding either the end of reservation for Dalits or reservation for the Marathas in government jobs and education. This is how the ruling classes use the casteist ideology in dividing the masses, whenever there is an economic crisis, threatening to become a political crisis. *The class contradictions are misarticulated as caste contradictions by the political leaders and ideologues of the ruling class. To be more accurate, whenever class contradictions do not find correct political articulation they are misarticulated as caste, race, or gender-based contradiction by the ideologues and politicians of the ruling class.*

The same thing happened with the Jim Crow segregation laws: the result was that the blacks as well as white workers lost, whereas the ruling class benefitted. Similarly, the oppression of women and confining women within the ambits of household, allows the capitalist class to 'privatize' the costs of reproduction of cheap labour-power, in time and money, that it desperately needs. Even when a section of women become part of work-force, their wages are depressed due to their primary function of reproduction and child-rearing. And finally, the onus of being breadwinner falls completely on the male, which creates the fear of being unable to provide for the family. All of this *objectively* benefits the capitalist class. *Working-class as a whole does not have any objective interest in any form of identity-based oppression.*

Contrary to the claims of identity politics which believes the enemy to be 'white male power structure', or 'white male heterosexual power structure' or 'Brahmanical Manusmriti', it is the capitalist class which is the common enemy for all oppressed and all exploited. A sizeable (almost 9-10 percent) Dalit population has become the part of capitalist power structure in India; they do not have anything common with the immense majority of Dalit working masses, who face the worst forms of casteist atrocities. Their only complaint is that despite rising the economic and political ladder, they are not treated as socially equals by their savarna counterparts in the bureaucracy or high government jobs. They never agitate on the question of anti-Dalit atrocities, but raise a lot of hulabaloo for purely symbolic issues like changing the name of some university to the name of Ambedkar or some other anti-caste symbol. Obviously, it is their right to demand it. However, if their entire political activism is limited to this hollow symbolism, while they maintain a conspiracy of silence on the most heinous anti-Dalit crimes, then serious questions about their loyalty emerge. The truth is that this small Dalit section of the ruling class is much more strongly linked with the system and therefore except paying lip-service to the cause of equality, does not do anything for the cause of liberation of all Dalits. The same goes for a small Black ruling class. The class-based anti-caste movement will

also fight against the issues of caste-based humiliation of, for example someone like Mayawati, as a part of struggle against the casteist ideology. However, the focus of class-based anti-caste movement will be struggle against the anti-Dalit atrocities and humiliations faced by 90 percent of Dalit working masses. In nutshell, the small ruling class that has come into existence in all oppressed identities does not share anything with the immense majority of the oppressed and exploited working masses belonging to these identities. *From the example of Mayawati and Ramdas Athawale to Obama and Hillary, it is clearly visible, if we leave apart the ridiculous logic that the Dalits “feel empowered” when Mayawati became the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh; the truth is that this feeling of “empowerment” is illusory and elusive for 90 percent of working class Dalits.*

Conclusion

Whenever the ruling class ideologies like racism, casteism, sexism, become dominant it is the working class in particular and working masses in general that lose and the capitalist class which benefits. The vice-versa is equally true. We saw how casteism, racism, sexism etc. serves the interests of the bourgeoisie. *However, these ideologies are not crafted in a planned fashion by the bourgeoisie.* They have a relative autonomy from the economic base but are also constrained by it. They are formed in generations according to the class interests of the ruling class, by the ideologues of the ruling class, but in a very complex dialectics of the objective and the subjective. These ideologies continue to exist even after the economic base that they originally served is gone, and are co-opted and remoulded by new economic base, if not eliminated in a gradual process.

The only way to fight against the influence of these ruling class ideologies among the working class is through real political struggles. It is only in unified struggles against the system that breeds exploitation and all forms of social oppression, that the working masses can fight against racism, sexism, casteism etc. As

Marx said, *"The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice."*

Ruling class ideologies and backward ideas can only be challenged and fought against in the process of unified, broad-based mass struggles against the entire system based on exploitation and oppression. When people come to fight against any social oppression or exploitation, they come with an ensemble of ideas, some of which are progressive, others reactionary and still others confused. It is only in the process of struggle that people understand how capitalism utilizes the forms of social oppression, identity politics, their own prejudices, and how capitalism as a system functions. It is only through this understanding that they can fight against these ruling class ideologies, not by moral preaching, of "self-awareness", "sensitization", "anti-oppression training", "creating safe spaces", etc. Here it is essential to understand the difference between the antagonistic contradictions against the enemy and the friendly contradictions among the masses in order to handle them correctly.

Finally, it can be said that (i) all forms of identity-based social oppression originate, evolve, overlap and intersect in the framework of class antagonism; (ii) identity-based social oppressions articulate with class antagonism in a dialectical fashion; (iii) class struggle plays the ultimately determining role in this articulation; (iv) the causal link between class-based exploitation and oppression on the one hand and identity-based social oppressions shows that the root of all forms of oppression and exploitation is class antagonism; (v) today, it is the capitalist system which causes, sustains, co-opts, re-adjusts, re-structures and remoulds all forms of social oppression and therefore is the common enemy; (vi) class is not an identity but an objective material social relation based on production; (vii) in the

struggle against capitalism, the role of the working class is central not because of primacy of its sectional interests, but because of the unique position it has vis-à-vis capitalism and the bourgeois ruling class; (viii) the working-class is the revolutionary 'productive' agent because the reproduction of capitalism as a system is based on the exploitation of labour of the working-class; (ix) the working-class cannot become political in the genuine sense if it does not unite with all oppressed masses; (x) the different socially-oppressed sections of society cannot liberate themselves without a broad-based revolutionary movement against capitalism which causes and sustains all forms of social oppression; (xi) the separatist, autonomous and independent anti-oppression movements cannot liberate the oppressed masses and are doomed to go through endless fragmentation and splits and retreat to the sphere of the personal life-style changes; (xii) to end all forms of social oppression as well as class-based exploitation and oppression, a revolutionary Socialist movement under the leadership of the working-class is necessary; (xiii) even under Socialism, the various forms of social oppression cannot be eliminated immediately and it will take many cultural revolutions before the inter-personal disparities can be eliminated and the hegemony of ruling class ideologies can be decisively broken, through 'perpetual revolution' in the sphere of superstructure, constant development of productive forces and the revolutionization of production relations; (xiv) the present immediate task for communist revolutionaries is building *class-based militant revolutionary movements against social oppressions*, which exposes the capitalist system and brings it to a point of impossibility and resist the attacks of chauvinists, in every sense of the term.

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THE TRAGEDY OF 'DALIT' POLITICS: HOLLOW-HEARTED SYMBOLISM AND RITUALISM

The Path to Dalit Liberation goes through Workers' Revolution and not through Shallow Politics of Identity

The Parliament witnessed a storm on past May 11. All of a sudden, the whole of bourgeois Parliament was seen to be in unison! One failed to comprehend as to what demonic force all these criminals, profiteers and corrupt people were all at once up against! This furor, however, was not caused by the fact that everyday thousands of children of labouring poor in this country die of hunger and malnutrition; nor was this outcry caused due to the fact that more than 95 percent of the total dalit population of our country, even after around three decades of reservation, is compelled to toil hard on farms or in industrial units for twelve-fourteen hours a day and face humiliation and disgrace at the hands of upper caste on a daily basis; neither was this upheaval caused because of the fact that the fifty crore strong agricultural and industrial proletariat (whose sizeable section comprises of dalits and backward castes) are deprived of even the basic necessities of life! No! This storm was not caused on any of these issues! What caused this explosion was a cartoon published in the political science textbook meant for class 12th students in which the slow pace of making of constitution was satirized. This cartoon depicted Ambedkar sitting on the constitution shaped like a snail, and behind him is standing Jawahar Lal Nehru with a whip in his hand! This textbook was in syllabus right since 2006 and was passed by a government appointed committee in the first term of the present government. The said textbook did not evoke even a single question in last 5 years. However, in 2012, Mayawati questioned this cartoon in the Parliament and iterated that it insults Ambedkar. In no time, all electoral and non-electoral jugglers claiming to represent the interests of the dalits jumped on the

bandwagon. Ramdas Athawale (who, at present, is sitting in the lap of both Shiv Sena and BJP in Maharashtra!), Thor Tirumavalavan (leader of Dalit Panthers in Tamil Nadu, who keeps himself busy in hobnobbing with either this or that electoral party in keeping with the electoral gains involved), and even Ram Vilas Paswan, all joined in the chorus of creating uproar on this cartoon. The government, at once, assumed a defensive stance and promised to take some prompt action on this entire issue. Suddenly, all parliamentarians were one on this and within next three days, a resolution was passed to withdraw this textbook and take prompt action against the people who prepared it or else remove them from office. Later on, a committee was also constituted to assess all textbooks. On July 3, this committee put forth its recommendations that all such cartoons which make comment on politicians and parties of the country be withdrawn from all textbooks as India is a country with diversity and any such cartoon can “hurt the sentiments” of either one or the other community!

All political parties registered their protests in one voice on the controversy over Ambedkar’s cartoon and stated it to be an insult to dalit identity. Ambedkar cannot be criticized. As soon as someone draws attention towards the limitations and contradictions of the political project proposed by Ambedkar from revolutionary perspective, not only the dalit intellectuals and organizations but those “revolutionary” communists, who harbour the dream of winning over the dalit populace through appeasement and ideological surrender, too, in no time pounce upon him/her and in a jiffy, brand him/her anti-dalit, casteist, etc! The electoral clowns sitting the Parliament have precisely behaved like this though the cartoon in which Ambedkar was commented upon was in no way any revolutionary, anti-system or radical cartoon. However, this was the golden opportunity when everyone entered into the race of projecting itself to be the greeted well-wisher of the dalits. Anyhow, Mayawati as well as BSP were confronted with a crisis following the debacle in Uttar Pradesh elections. In order to gain ascendance in the general elections to be held in 2014, Mayawati seems ready to do anything.

In view of the state in which BSP presently is, the logic of 'drowning man catches at a straw', too, seems to be working.

The Ambedkar cartoon controversy has given an issue to Mayawati as well as to other dalit identity-based organizations facing the crisis of existence. An entire critique of Ambedkar's politics and ideology can be put forth from the perspective of working class which demands a separate and detailed discussion and space. However, this can be certainly said that his constitutionalism, radical reformism, bourgeois humanist reformism notwithstanding, Ambedkar was not an advocate of building new icons. Ambedkar was not a revolutionary statesman and philosopher either. His objective was to gain better and better rights for dalits through constitutional means and methods within the bourgeois system itself. Ambedkar had undoubtedly remarked that as long as socially as well economically, dalits do not get democratic rights and are treated as equals, political democracy would not hold any significance meaning for them. However, this, too, is true that Ambedkar did not have any project for the social and economic emancipation of dalits. But all these limitations notwithstanding, Ambedkar had this much element of American bourgeois liberalism within him that at least theoretically he did not consider any individual, organization or ideology so 'sacrosanct' that it is beyond criticism. However, today precisely this is being done to Ambedkar—Ambedkar and anything associated with him has been made as much sacred and sacrosanct as religious symbols are for Hindutva-vadis. And if someone raises question on it or criticizes it, he/she is targeted in the same manner as fascist Hindutvavadis target their enemies. This was clearly demonstrated by the members of the Republican Panthers when following the cartoon row, they attacked Suhas Palshikar, one of the intellectuals and educationists responsible for preparing this textbook. Clearly, an Ambedkarite undemocratic fundamentalism has been born in response to the Hindutvavadi fascist fundamentalism. No prudent political being would choose one kind of authoritarianism and reaction in response to another kind of authoritarianism and reaction. This is akin to rendering wisdom speechless, however, this cannot

cause thoughts to die. Certainly, the viewpoint of the working class cannot be that of idolizing Ambedkar, or for that matter, any individual or organization, nor can it be that of practicing any kind of idolatry; on the contrary, it vehemently opposes any such measure.

The moment Ambedkar cartoon controversy was hogging the limelight in media and all the jugglers indulging in identity-based dalit politics were raising much hue and cry about it, at that very instance, a bench of Patna High Court acquitted all accused in the Bathani Tola Massacre. It must be well-remembered that the illegal armed militia of upper castes, Ranvir Sena, brutally murdered 21 innocent dalits in this gruesome massacre. The High Court acquitted all the 23 persons who carried out these killings. The court dismissed the evidence of all the eye-witnesses on the ground that they could not present at the crime scene because had they been present, they too would have been killed! The Patna High Court released all these murderers on this ridiculous ground. However, acquittal of the murderers of poor dalit workers did not evoke any reaction from any dalit leader, party or organization. The Nitish Kumar government performed its customary ritual by going on the record saying it will challenge this verdict in the Supreme Court. The leaders of a few parties got rid of their liability by expressing their “disappointment” in faint voices. However, in the main, there was complete silence on this verdict in the bourgeois political circles. The reason was obvious—no party was willing to lose its vote bank among the upper and forward castes in Bihar. According to the electoral mathematics, it was better to either keep mum on this judgement or else expend a few ceremonial statements in faint voices. And precisely this is what happened. Moreover, various parliamentary and non-parliamentary Ambedkarite organizations claiming to be the champions of dalits, even ritualistically, did not perform anything properly; expecting any sharp condemnation, campaign, protest, demonstration or movement from them on this issue is still a far cry. The same happens with all other anti-dalit crime and violence. Take for instance, Karamchedu case of Andhra Pradesh, or for that matter, Khairlanji or Laxmanpur Bathe Massacre. In each instance, either no

justice was done or if done, was half-baked. However, all these issues are not as much significant for the organizations (parliamentary and non-parliamentary) practicing Ambedkarite politics and politics of dalit identity. But each one of them was hell-bent upon leaving the other behind in raising uproar on a cartoon of Ambedkar. A similar kind of pandemonium was on display as had been recently created by different religious fundamentalists on the cartoons involving Mohammad and Christ as well as Ramanujan's essay on various versions of 'Ramayana'. Or something similar to the mayhem caused by Sikh religious fundamentalist on a scene in a film where is Sikh hero is making love to the heroine with his turban on. In such scenario, one fails to differentiate between fanatic, fundamentalist dalit Ambedkarite organizations and religious fascist fundamentalist organizations.

What conclusions can be drawn from this entire situation? The first conclusion is that the various dalit as well as Ambedkarite organizations practicing the politics of identity have neither time nor any intention to struggle on the real issues affecting dalits. All of their time, attention and energy is consumed by the issues pertaining to Ambedkar's statues, pictures, cartoons, etc and whatever of it remains is expended on creating hue and cry for the small morsel thrown in the name of reservation. Whereas the experience of the past three decades of reservation has demonstrated that dalits cannot get anything significant out of it. Had the demand for reservation been a intermediate democratic demand which could have assisted in advancing the revolutionary project or else had the character of this demand been of any partial reform, it could still have been supported. However, if after all these years, only 3 to 4 percent of the entire dalit population has been able to secure employment, then it is worth pondering that as to how long reservation must be kept in force so that all dalits can have access life and livelihood? Secondly, the fruits of reservation are only reaped by this uppermost 3-4 percent of the dalit populace. The offspring of those who have already secured jobs under reservation are the ones who benefit the most from it and the ones who make lot of hullabaloo

about it. The poor and the lower middle class population among the dalits do not get anything out of reservation. Certainly, similar arguments can be presented against those who oppose reservation from upper-caste prejudice and in its guise extend the argument of merit. However, both kinds of argument prove only one point—that reservation is a non-issue which the ruling class has deliberately made an issue. And to a great extent, it has succeeded in its design because not only those organizations which practice the politics of dalit identity are consumed by this issue, but most of the revolutionary Left organizations too, owing to the temptation of drawing dalit populace towards them through appeasement, fall prey to the polarization which takes place on this non-issue. All in all, one can say that the whole of the energy and time of myriad organizations practicing the politics of dalit identity is swallowed up in worshipping, guarding and conserving the symbols of Ambedkar as well as clamouring for a non-issue such as reservation.

However, today the character of this entire hollow-symbolist politics should be unmistakably clear to the dalit working class because the killings, oppression, concrete basic questions related to the livelihood of dalit workers are either no issues for it, or else, issues of mere ritualistic and ceremonial significance. As a matter of fact, its reason is inherent in the class character of the Ambedkarite organizations engaged in the politics of dalit identity. These organizations are, by and large, organizations of urban middle class dalits. These represent only them. A section of urban lower middle class and poor dalits, in a false hope of securing employment and education through reservation, too, trails behind them. However, in reality, these organizations do not represent their interests. They fight on various symbolic questions and the issue of reservation. The benefit of both of these falls into the lot of the top 4-5 percent urban well-off dalits whose class interests today are not only completely divorced from the majority of dalit toiling masses but rather stand in opposition to them. These do speak in the name of the interests of all dalits, however, their objective is to serve their own class. Therefore, the dalit working class people must realize the reality

behind the politics of organizations practicing the politics of dalit identity, be it then electoral parties such as BSP, Lok Janashakti Party or for that matter non-parliamentary organizations like the Republican Panthers. At this point, it is utterly useless to talk about things like honesty and dishonesty. The real as well as the essential factor is class character and all organizations engaged in the politics of dalit identity must be measured against this yardstick. The moment we undertake the class analysis of the cadre policies and leadership of these organizations, their reality becomes as clear as crystal.

At present, almost 40 percent of the working population of our country comprises of dalit and castes. This section is the poorest, most oppressed and repressed section of the working class too. Precisely because of this reason it has tremendous anger and resentment against the present power system. The revolutionary communist movement today needs to organize this population, however, not on the catch-phrase of caste, but rather on the question of class. These are the people who face the most naked, repulsive and despicable forms of dalit oppression. In the massacres and carnages, it is not the urban dalit upper middle class that lose their lives but poor labouring dalits who die. This dalit oppression too has a class character. Without this understanding, no effective resistance can be mounted against this dalit oppression. The poor dalit population is the victim of both kinds of exploitation and oppression of the bourgeois state power—economic as well as caste-based. This is a section, which having got organized, can, in a radical manner fight for dalit liberation. This is a section which needs to be united as well as mobilized and organized on the project of the proletarian revolution. This is the section which understands the reality of class through its life experiences and knows that there is world of difference between its pain and that of urban upper middle class dalits and that in fact, this class, which is comfortably placed in the social hierarchy has nothing in common with it, except for shallow catch-words and symbolisms. And a perpetual, intensive and extensive propaganda campaign must be waged against these

hollow catchwords and symbolisms, against identity politics among the dalit workers. The resolution of the dalit question is possible only from class perspective. Looking at the dalit question from a viewpoint blind to class realities, ultimately leads to symbolism and in fact deprives the dalits of the instrument as well as agency of their emancipation. Even if one speaks of a solution to dalit question, while taking into consideration its autonomous character, he/she too eventually will have to look at this entire question from class point of view. The entire historical project of dalit liberation can, as a matter of fact, reach fruition only with the liberation of the working class and then the communist project of the liberation of the entire humanity. A society in which there is no economic equality, all talk about social and political equality, in the end, prove meaningless. Only an economically and politically just society can resolve the question of social justice. We need not talk about the equality or equal opportunity between forwards and backwards, dalits and upper castes, and high and low; we must work towards the objective of eliminating these divisions forever. This objective can only be attained through one path—the path of establishing socialist system and workers' state through workers' revolution. Ninety-seven percent of the dalit population which still works as agricultural, urban industrial labour can only be liberated through the workers' revolution. It can easily be understood by simple and straight-forward logic, no abstruse, intricate philosophical or political jugglery of phrases is needed. Today the entire dalit identity politics serves the capitalist system itself. The Ambedkarite politics centred on non-issues, symbolism and ritualism, can, in no way, deliver and genuine rights since it fails to raise the real concrete issues. On the contrary, it enfeebles the process of establishing the unity of working population and thus weakens the strength of labour and strengthens the force of capital. This politics needs to be exposed at every step and a concrete, real and scientific project of dalit liberation needs to be put forth.

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