

Caste Question and Marxism

Collection of Papers Presented
in the Fourth
Arvind Memorial Seminar

CASTE QUESTION AND MARXISM

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Price: Rs. 200.0

First Edition – January, 2024

First Reprint: December, 2017

Published by: **Arvind Memorial Trust**

69 A-1, Baba ka Purwa, Paper Mill Road,

Nishatgunj, Lucknow-226006

Cover Design: **Rambabu** Typesetting: Computer Division, Rahul
Foundation Printed by: Parmatma Auto Printing Press, Lucknow Main

Distributors: Janchetna, D-68, Nirala Nagar, Lucknow-226 020

Phone: 0522-4108495, Email – info@janchetnabooks.org

Website: <https://www.janchetnabooks.org>

NOTE FROM UPLOADER

This book is made by aggregating articles from various sources including research papers and web pages of the respective authors. First 4 articles can be found on Arvind Memorial's website. The article by Praskanva Sinharay is lifted from his book 'West Bengal under the left' instead of copying it 1:1 from the hard copy of the book. This author mentioned that at the time of his presentation, his essay was still work in progress and it was published in the book without his consent. So, it was more apt for me to replicate his completed work instead of the one mentioned in this book's physical version.

Only grammatical errors, typos and repetitive words have been fixed in all the articles, but I may have introduced a few errors unknowingly, this is my fault and not the authors'.

Since this is an old book, people told me that party position on how to resolve caste has changed, so you can check out another book titled 'On the Caste Question: Towards a Marxist Understanding' by Abhinav Sinha for a more up-to-date position on caste.

This book is made for digitization and archival purposes. But weirdly, there is no ISBN mentioned on the book or on the Janchetna website, where they sell the book.

Happy Reading!

PUBLISHERS NOTE

We present this important publication in the series of collection of papers on vital questions of Indian society and Communist movement. This is a compilation of papers presented in the Fourth Arvind Memorial Seminar held in Chandigarh from 12-16 March 2013 on the topic 'Caste Question and Marxism.'

The caste question, particularly the Dalit question, is still one such burning question of Indian society, without the process of whose resolution, the class unity of the toiling masses and the success of their emancipatory-project cannot be envisaged. Therefore, it becomes imperative for all those who, even today, consider Marxism to be the guiding principle of revolutionary practice in true terms (instead of treating it as a tool of ruminating academic discourse or that of merely vote bank politics) to attempt to form a consummate understanding of each and every aspect of the caste question, research and study it and debate it from a Marxist standpoint.

There have been seminars-symposiums on this question for a long time now. However, often every aspect of this serious historical question has been settled conclusively in a 'hence proved' fashion through few position papers and brief debates. There has been an absence of serious research and unbiased lengthy debate. On the one hand, there has remained a view of looking at or rejecting the caste question from a mechanical class reductionist standpoint, on the other, an opportunist tendency of reconciling Marxism and Ambedkarism-Neo-Ambedkarism and shying away from uncomfortable questions has also been present. The scholars belonging to American sociological school have long been rejecting the method of Marxist class analysis in studying the caste question. It is required, even today, to put forth a balanced Marxist critique of such views. In the recent decades, the academic practice of understanding the question of caste and

gender through sundry "post-" ideologies including 'subaltern studies' and identity politics has been very much in vogue. Plenty of critiques of these thought-streams have been put forth from diverse Marxist positions, however, a lot needs to be written on the inconsistencies of various post-modernist, subaltern interpretations of the caste question, and the tasks of presenting a balanced critique of the criticism of Marxism advanced by these schools still remains to a large extent. There is no dearth of such Marxist academics who are trying to correct the "class reductionist defects" by creating a hodgepodge of the method of subaltern studies and identity politics with Marxist methodology. Therefore, a detailed debate and discussion on this subject is even more needed.

The first and foremost question is that are the Marxist methodology of dialectical historical analysis and Marxist categories (class, production relations, base, superstructure, sup etc.) inadequate or inappropriate to understand Indian social formation and caste question? How should the interrelation of caste and class be viewed? In what way have the Marxist historians explained the origin and evolutionary process of caste question? The caste system, right from the times of its origin to the present day, instead of perishing has continuously been in existence, however, instead of existing in situ, inertly, it has been co-opted by each subsequent socio-economic formation, there has been an articulation between them and it has been reinvigorating itself. The question which is worth considering as well as worth debating is that as to how Marxism has interpreted this phenomenological process and in what way has this been interpreted by other theoretical positions!

The relationship of Ambedkarism with Marxism is often considered an intricate and uncomfortable question. There has been an absence of comprehensive Marxist analysis and critique of Ambedkar and Ambedkarite-Neo-Ambedkarite positions to a large extent. Usually, the discussions on these have been either cursory or fragmentary. In recent years numerous Marxist scholars and

organizations have, without going into an in-depth and detailed evaluation of the philosophical-political-social positions of both the sides, been making efforts to harmonize Marxism and Ambedkarism in a populist manner. Without a detailed analysis, adverse comments have been made and charges of economic determinism and class reductionism have been levelled against Marxism from an Ambedkarite position. The need is to analyze Ambedkar's philosophical position (his world view and methodology), put forth a critique of his view of history, evaluate his political position and his economics, analyze his viewpoint on social questions and to see what is his project for the abolition of caste and Dalit liberation, and how logical, historical and practical it is! There is also a need to present an elaborate analysis of all the criticisms advanced by Ambedkar and Ambedkarites of Marxism. The same method of thorough analysis and criticism should be followed by Ambedkarite and various Dalit thought-streams too. Only then a meaningful debate can take place and it will be possible to arrive at correct conclusions.

It is very important to present a historical analysis and sum-up of theoretical positions and practical activities of communist movement on caste question and Dalit question. What is the form and nature of caste question and Dalit question in present-day India, what is the position of various communist revolutionary organizations therein, what is the relation of Dalit liberation or whole of the caste question with the liberation struggle of Indian toiling masses, and what can be the correct, scientific, practical project of the abolition of caste in Indian society - this is an important subject of detailed debate and discussion. The aforementioned agenda cannot be fulfilled without understanding the interrelations of class and caste by situating them within socio-economic-political perspective in historical context.

During the past decades, the influential political organizations running in the name of Ambedkar have remained submerged in the mire of bourgeois parliamentary politics of the basest kind. There are few others whose social base has been quite narrow.

Mostly, the position of diverse forms of 'Dalitism' influenced by Ambedkarism- Neo-Ambedkarism and "post-" ideologies such as subaltern studies, identity politics etc has remained confined to the fields of sociology and literature. Their absence in the form of a socio-political movement is worth consideration. In literature, the Dalit literature exists with its own ideology, and a lot has been written on Dalit aesthetics too. The questions worth pondering are that how does the realism of Dalit literature form a separate independent category, what is theoretics of Dalit literature and Dalit criticism, and what is the philosophical position of Dalit aesthetics?

All in all, the debatable key issues in this five-day seminar focusing on 'The caste question and Marxism' were: - Dr. Ambedkar's philosophical position, his view of history political thought and practice, economic theory and policies, views on socio-cultural formation and his projects of the abolition of caste and Dalit liberation -A Marxist critique. Critique of Marxist positions on these questions from Ambedkarite and other pro-Dalit positions. Analysis of Ambedkar's view on Marxism. Discussion on all these questions.

Dialectical historical materialist understanding of the caste question. Neo-Ambedkarite positions, their Marxist critique and discussion on them. Post-Modernist positions such as those of subaltern studies, identity politics etc. on the Dalit question, other sociological schools and neo-Marxist positions, their Marxist critique and discussion on them.

Marxist historiography on caste question, its Ambedkarite opposition and discussion on them.

- The caste question and the communist movement in India
Retrospection of history - undivided communist party and caste question, revisionist parties and caste question, positions of a few chosen communist revolutionary organizations on caste question, the communist revolutionary project for the abolition of caste.

- Theoretics of Dalit literature and criticism. The philosophical content of Dalit aesthetics.

The papers presented in the seminar contain thought provoking and well-researched material on most of these issues. Many more important issues were raised during the intense and fruitful debates and discussions continuing from morning till late night in the five days of the seminar. The seminar was also successful to initiate debates and polemics on the issues raised in it which are continuing on various platforms even now. We believe that this collection will provide very useful and thought-provoking material for all those who are concerned with this question of fundamental importance for revolutionary social change in India. The Hindi version of this collection is also being published alongside this English version.

We welcome the opinions, suggestions and reactions of readers on this volume and we will eagerly wait for these.

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THE CASTE QUESTION AND ITS RESOLUTION: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

Research Team, Arvind Marxist Studies Institute

Keynote paper presented in the Fourth Arvind Memorial Seminar on the topic 'Caste Question and Marxism' (12-16 March 2013, Chandigarh). Contact: info@arvindtrust.org

No revolutionary project of making the Indian society exploitation-free can be made by excluding the caste question. There are enough grounds to reject outrightly the belief that first the caste-system should be eradicated at the socio-political plane through certain conscious attempts and only then the revolutionary mobilization of various groups of people would be possible. Its opposite viewpoint is equally wrong that the revolutionary mobilization of various groups and the process of revolution would by itself eliminate the caste-system and therefore this question by itself does not form an important issue. It is our clear conviction that the process of the preparation of the proletarian revolution cannot move forward without clearly targeting the numerous forms of caste-based oppressions and the institutions which play the role of its carrier and agent; without this the revolutionization and mobilization of the various classes of the toiling masses suffering from social segregation is simply not possible. At the same time, the vanguard of revolution will have to present a historical, scientific and rational project for the elimination of caste which despite being long-term (which quite obviously it will be) must have some concrete immediate tasks as well. This much is certain, though, that even after the establishment of proletarian state, a perpetual process of revolution would have to be carried out at the ideological and cultural plane along with the socialist transformation of the production-relations and the prolonged process of the gradual advancement of the socialist social-political-educational-cultural edifice, for the ultimate elimination of the caste-system. In this paper, we will discuss this proposition of ours in detail

and we will also refute the prevalent propositions which are wrong, incomplete, vague and confusing in our view.

There are many questions that will confront us if we proceed towards the concrete implementation. Even though there exists a clash in the interests of the capitalists, big and medium traders, kulaks, farmers, people in the upper-middle class strata and other parasite communities—who constitute the ruling class— and its supporting classes, they stand united when it comes to the political policy decisions and actions against the toiling masses. On the other hand, besides other problems, a vital problem in the path of the unity of the proletariat and semi-proletariat of the villages and cities, the lower-middle class and the lower middle peasants—who constitute the main strength of the revolution—is that they are divided along caste-lines and there exists numerous walls of social segregation at multiple layers. The moot question is whether the causes of the caste-based prejudices and the contradictions which are almost all-pervasive in the Indian society in one form or the other are only superstructural (the old values or in the words of some, the influence of the Brahmanic culture) or there are some economic factors as well which tend to give support and strength to the super-structural factors. Quite often it so happens that behind an incident of caste-clash and caste-based oppression, the main reason happens to be the clash of the economic interests of the classes in varying intensity. But the polarization which takes place in the society in such cases is on the basis of caste only! The bourgeois parliamentary politics of vote-bank in India makes the caste polarization as one of its tools. But is this the main cause behind the sharp caste-contradictions? If caste happens to be just a burden of the past, feudal remnant or the influence of the “Brahminic” culture, then some radical social movements could overthrow it in due course. But it does not seem to be likely. The caste-system is not that static as it appears to be. It has a particular kind of internal dynamism due to which it has managed to register its effective presence even today after originating in the ancient India and crossing historical epoch of the medieval and colonial era. It was capable of adapting itself to every

socio-economic formation and the ruling classes of the different historical era have managed to adapt it for serving their interests.

The confusion regarding the inter-relationship of the caste and class prevails partly due to bookish scholars' own misgivings; partly it is due to the influence of the accepted leaders of the oppressed castes who were filled with ignorant prejudices against Marxism; some confusion exists due to the American sociological ideas and the bourgeois ideologies of post-modernism like the 'politics of identity'; some of it is due to theories concocted by the petty bourgeois intellectuals, inspired as they are by their class interests; while other confusions arise out of the mechanical materialist analyses and misdeeds of the dilettante and revisionist Marxists and still others persist because in the past the communist movement, like on the other fundamental questions of Indian revolution, did not present a concrete programme after thorough analysis on the caste question as well. However, there are several concrete objective bases of these confusions. The main objective basis, for instance, is that while the majority of the Dalit castes is proletariat or semi-proletariat (mostly rural but increasingly urban also), the majority of the proletariat and semi-proletariat does not come from the Dalit castes. Most of the *kulaks* in the villages today belong to the middle castes and they are far ahead of the feudal lords and land owners belonging to the upper castes when it comes to oppressing the Dalits, however the majority of these very middle castes is either poor or lower-middle peasant and they have even joined the ranks of the working class. People from all castes are there among the capitalists (Dalits are very rare), but even today the upper castes dominate the bureaucracy and intellectual professions, particularly on the higher positions. Owing to reservation Dalits and some middle castes have also managed to reach in this sphere, but their percentage is very less as compared to their population and this percentage has steadily declined from lower to higher posts. A practical question, thus, arises as to how should a common front against the caste-system be forged? Is it possible without spreading the democratic consciousness among the poor masses of the upper and other

castes through revolutionary propaganda and without mobilizing them on the common economic and political issues? And till this process is not moved forward, whether the revolutionary mobilization and forging a strategic united front would be at all possible? Can the caste-based mobilization of Dalits only, take them to their real emancipation and elimination of caste?

Yet another point is that the constitutional and legal provisions for some concessions, reliefs and security to the Dalit castes is one thing, but the complete end to the Dalit oppression, their social segregation and their humiliating and inferior social condition and elimination of the caste system is quite another. Does the path of the concessions like reservation ultimately go to the emancipation of Dalits and the elimination of caste? Do we see any such possibility within the purview of the Indian constitution (the experience of 62 years is before us) or within the ambit of the extremely limited, skewed and distorted Indian capitalist democracy which was born from the womb of colonialism and brought up in the era of imperialism? How much the Dalits have benefitted from reservation in the last six decades and with this pace how long will it take for them to overcome their woeful condition? Reservation, when it was given, was quite pertinent as a bourgeois democratic right, but hasn't it now become more of a means to create bourgeois democratic illusion than a bourgeois democratic right? Isn't this also an issue that the Dalit intellectuals who have been uplifted and who have become part of the urban middle class through reservation do not share any interest with the Dalit proletariat of the villages and cities and they are the ones who get the benefits of the concessions provided by the government. That is the reason why despite lashing out at the caste-system, quite often they are not prepared to think on any project of elimination of caste and Dalit-emancipation which goes beyond reservation and the ambit of Indian constitution, they are not prepared to contemplate on the Dalit movements of the past and their theoretical basis and on the role of their theoreticians and even in the present time they give thesis of producing capitalists from within the Dalits, at times they propound the idea of the united

front of the “Bahujan Samaj” or increasing the count of Dalit leaders in every party and at other times at the more theoretical level they end up celebrating the caste identities. The result of upsurge of the identities is visible in the form of increasing discord and segregation within the Dalits who are already divided in different castes and sub-castes. Intense struggles are witnessed among them on the issue of distribution of reservation and reservation within reservation. This is a bitter truth which cannot be overlooked if we are to reach to correct conclusion.

We will have to analyze and sum up the ideology, historical outlook, economic and political thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar with scientific objectivity and by freeing ourselves from all prejudices. Idol worship or making the leaders as incarnation is Brahmanic and capitalist tendency of hero-worship which needs to be shunned. It is also a moot question as to what were the reasons behind the degeneration and disintegration of the politics of the smaller and bigger pioneer parties of the Dalit politics such as Republican Party, Dalit Panthers, BSP, Puthiya Tamizhgam which have been emerging from time to time in the post-Ambedkar era of Dalit politics only to form alliance later with this or that main bourgeois Party (upper caste and middle caste dominated parties from their analytical perspective). Why is it that the motley of the radical Dalit intellectuals did not even make an attempt to build an anti-caste social movement with broad social base? We have to find out what is the project of the Dalit-emancipation and the annihilation of caste-system of the radical Dalit politics and the new and old Dalit theoretical trends and what are their forms of implementation?

Today, most of the revolutionary communists also admit, in a gesture of guilt-consciousness and self-condemnation, that the communist movement completely ignored the caste question in the past and that it adopted a class-reductionist and mechanical economist approach. This is often said in very general terms or instead of concretely analyzing the concrete facts of history, only some reference is given eclectically of a few incidents. In what form did this weakness manifest itself in the overall line and practice of the communist

movement in the past and whether it was an independent weakness or was it a part of the general lacuna in developing a strategy and general tactics of revolution after concretely analyzing the socio-economic and political conditions of India? Yet, whether there was any contribution of the communist movement in the movement for the emancipation of Dalits? Yet another fashionable statement these days is that the communists adopted wrong attitude towards the Dalit leaders and movement. This conclusion calls for a detailed consideration, only then the concrete mistakes and weaknesses could be understood. It needs to be looked as to what were the differences between the standpoints of the communist leadership and the Dalit leadership during the freedom movement on the burning questions of those days and which standpoint was correct. What also needs to be looked at is what was the attitude of the leadership of the Dalit movement towards the communist movement and the communist ideology.

Several trends are in vogue within the communist movement these days. There are some who, while cursing the class-reductionist perspective of the past and the terrible mistake of placing caste into superstructure (nobody knows who did it and when!), go to the extent of claiming that the widely accepted Marxist concept of “Base-Superstructure metaphor” itself is mechanistic, there are those who blame its mechanical understanding; some others term the mode of production itself as the base instead of total sum of all production-relations; some claim that production-relations are derived from the caste-system, while others talk of the reflection of the production-relation into the caste-system; some of them term the caste-system itself as the production-relations in the past whereas others while talking about the phenomenal plane and structural plane give a thesis that in today’s complex capitalist society, the class struggle would take place in the form of social movements (like the movements of caste, gender, environment etc.) only. In other words, there is a deep ideological confusion. There is no way out other than clearing the air of confusion. Yet another trend in vogue seeks to harmonize Marxism and Ambedkarism, this trend has multiple forms

though. In such a pursuit what is discussed is Ambedkar's contribution in the interest of Dalits, but no detailed discussion takes place on Ambedkar's philosophical moorings, his concrete project for the Dalit emancipation, his economic thoughts, his political stand on various issues, his role as the maker of constitution and as Law minister and his thoughts on Marxism. Some quotations are chosen dexterously to prove the possibility of his proximity with the communist stream. In fact, all such varied endeavours are aimed at winning the hearts of the Dalit population, to take them along by implying—look, we have adopted your hero, now will you please come along with us! No part of the population would come with them in the struggle for the emancipation of masses with such emotional tactical manoeuvres. They would come along only when one could convince them in theory and in practice that the correct and rational path of their emancipation lies with him only. Such a process would admittedly be difficult and a bit lengthy. We do not have any reservation about harmonizing with Ambedkarism, nor do we reject his role outrightly. But we will have to see as to what are the elements in Ambedkar's thoughts which can be borrowed by Marxism to overcome its lacuna. Those equipped with scientific vision do not play the politics of emotions, science calls for concrete facts and objectivity. Based on the macro and micro analysis of the total sum of the production-relations, it is our clear belief that India is a backward capitalist country and here the immediate and long-term tasks need to be set while presenting a project for the elimination of the caste-system right from the period of the preparation for the socialist revolution which would end all the remnants of imperialism-feudalism and all pre-capitalist vestiges. Caste is not just a feudal remnant. Capitalism has articulated itself with its structure, it has adopted it in a changed form to further its own interest. This is a capitalist caste-system. It is organically woven with the economic base (total sum of the production-relations) and its effective presence in the ideological-political-social superstructure remains intact.

It is the limitation of this essay that we can present our stand only briefly. Still, it would perhaps be sufficient for starting a prolonged and meaningful debate afresh. We will mainly present our stand positively in this essay. Owing to the lack of space its nature would not be polemical, yet at relevant places, criticism of wrong stands and commonly perceived notions would be presented. Our aim behind this is to start a healthy debate. This debate might be prolonged, but ultimately, we must reach at some definite conclusions.

A historical materialist perspective on the origin and evolution of caste

It is not our objective here to present the entire history of the caste-system. The history will be discussed briefly in order to understand the relation of caste with the production-relations, the relation between the caste and the class and how and where does the caste-system fit in the Marxist metaphor of base and superstructure.

Firstly, nothing can be said with certainty about the concrete reasons as to why the caste-system originated and evolved in its specific form in India only because the researches as of now do not provide any clear indication. The social division of labour of the initial or primitive type got fossilised in the form of the caste-system in India through the social customs based on religious rituals which emerged from the same objective social bases. Similarly, in Egypt also a system based on endogamy and dynastic occupation resembling the caste system got ossified in the form of guild-system, but since the codified foundation of social ethics based on religion behind it was not that systematic and since it did not have the flexibility of adapting itself as per the changes occurring in the socio-economic structure, it could not last very long. In our pursuit to find out the reason as to why the caste system originated and evolved in India only, we could ponder over the factors such as weather, climate, relatively more conducive environment for life and agricultural productivity, the slow motion of history and the labour process originating from it, relatively more dexterous division of labour between mental labour and

manual labour within the ambit of division of labour right from the beginning (and further sub-divisions within the confines of manual labour) and dexterity and foresightedness in building up a social code of conduct by the parasitic intellectuals (Brahmin priests) who had excessive free time. But this would be the sphere of guess and speculation and not of history. What can be surely discussed based on the historical researches is as to how the caste-system was originated and how and why it remained intact by adapting itself to the changing epochs of history. And we will do this in brief because at least this much is necessary for a debate on the current situation and on any project of the elimination of caste.

Secondly, often this charge is levelled on the Marxists in a very casual manner that they mechanically apply the stages of the historical social development as identified by Marx-Engels (Slavery-Feudalism-Capitalism) and their 'Asiatic Mode of Production' and 'motionlessness of self-reliant village communities'. This is sheer ignorance. The notion of Asiatic mode of production and the existence of slavery in India as in Greece and Rome was refuted more than half a century ago (first by Kosambi) and now if we leave aside the differences in the details, almost all the Marxist historians have a consensus on this issue. More or less the same is the case with the notion of stagnation of the village communities. However, it is an established fact even today that in the beginning of the thirteenth century some changes took place in the structure of the already existing Indian feudalism which resembles with 'oriental despotism' of Marx. It is also noteworthy that some significant changes took place in the thinking of Marx himself in the decade of 1870s about the homogeneity and stagnation of village community vis-a-vis his thinking in the decade of 1850s. On this topic, the essays of many scholars including **Irfan Habib** and **Suniti Kumar Ghosh** have been published way back in the decade of 1980 itself. There is yet another relevant point which needs to be discussed here. Often it is said that since the study model of Marxism was Europe, it proved to be incapable in studying the Indian society and its specificities like the caste system. This is a superficial viewpoint.

Marxism was born mainly out of studying the dynamics of the European society (which happened to be the classical model of the capitalist development) and its main source consisted of the German philosophy, British political economy and French socialism. But the vision of Marx-Engels encompassed the general orientation of the development of the entire world. Dialectical and Historical Materialism which was derived from the generalization of the historical development is a worldview and a methodology which shows the way to study life and nature and to actively intervene in them. It is because of this reason that it has been used to study the varied aspects of the socio-economic structure and developing the strategies of class struggle in many countries including of Asia, Africa, Latin America apart from Russia and China. India is no exception to it. In this context, it is noteworthy that Marx and Engels made six or seven comments and gave some explanations on the caste-system from the *German Ideology* (1845–46) to *Capital Vol-I* which provide important insight in understanding the caste-system (for the comments and explanations, **Conception of Caste in Marx**, a research paper by B.R. Bapuji and Rangnaykamma's article **Marx on Caste** can be referred).

Based on the evidence available so far, a more acceptable proposition is that the urban civilization of Indus/Saraswat was not destroyed by the Aryan invasion, but there were some other reasons for it (which could be anything ranging from changing the course of rivers, internal stagnation or internal class- struggle). The process of the entry of nomadic pastoral Aryan tribes from the north-west into India began some centuries after the fall of the Harappan civilization. For the nomadic tribes, purity of blood bore no meaning and the Aryans did not form a race based on heredity, though they were definitely aware about their separate identity on ethnic basis. Even though the urban civilization of the Indus valley got disintegrated by the time Aryans arrived in the subcontinent, but its pre-Aryan population was probably scattered in the forests and small settlements along with the priests and ordinary population. There are ample evidences of their struggle with the Aryans and their defeat

and their conversion into slaves (dasas) within the Rigveda itself. Not only this, the mythological and linguistic evidences also indicate towards the clash of Aryans with other progressing non-Aryan tribes and towards latter's defeat and their amalgamation in the Aryan social system. The excavation of the Mohanjo-daro and Harappa and the export of slaves from Meluha (Indus valley) to Mesopotamia during 2300-2000 BC have proved that a class society existed in the cities of Indus valley in which the institution of slavery did exist. The slaves were controlled through coercion and religion based social customs, hence the priests of the scattered population of this civilization were more advanced than the tribal priests of the nomadic pastoral Aryans insofar as the totems and taboos and the religious rites are concerned. Consequently, the process of intermingling of the pre-Aryan and other non-Aryan priests with the priestly class of the Aryan tribe which was set to make a transition from animal husbandry to agriculture and towards forming settlements seems to be an undisputable fact and the origin of the Brahmin varna can be seen in this process. Further, historical evidences are available to establish that many foreign and particularly Sythian priestly classes also got amalgamated at later point of time into the Brahmin varna (*Kadhda* and *Mag* Brahmins). By the time we reach the eastern Uttar Pradesh, which also happens to be the centre of the discourse of *Upnishads*, we get the evidence of thoroughly intermingled population of the Brahmins in *Vrihadaranyak Upnishad* and through Patanjali.

The earliest Vedic evidences mention two varnas viz. *Arya* and *Daas* or *Dasyu*. They did not conduct marriages among each other. *Daasas* were the common people of the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan society whose condition was not like that of chattel slavery of Rome in which the slaves were the personal property of the owners, rather it was Helot like servitude because the wealth of Aryans used to be the collective property of the tribe and the phenomenon of the private property was yet to surface. Even the land which they had begun to till and sow was still a common property of the tribe. With the transition from animal husbandry to agriculture, gradual development

of the production of surplus and the proto-type of the division of labour took place and the process of socio-economic differentiation and formation of classes ensued and moved forward. In *Daan-stutis* we get the evidence of giving away of slaves as a gift to some special groups of the tribal chiefs. With the servile labour and enriched techniques of food production, the Aryan tribes moved ahead in the Doab area in the east and began establishing new permanent settlements. During this period the production-relations within the tribal organization were in the form of four varnas—*Brahmin* (priestly class), *Rajanya* or *Kshatriya* (warriors and rulers), *Vish* (common people, mainly peasants) and *Shudra* (Helot type servants of non-Aryan origin). The earliest mention of the *chaturvanya* (4 varnas) system is found in the *Purusasukta* of *Rigveda*, although it appears to be a later addition. In all probability, the *chaturvarna* system emerged in the later Vedic period—in the period of *Yajurveda*, *Atharvaveda* and the early Brahmanic texts. One of the material bases of the division between *Brahmins* and *Kshatriya* existed since the period of animal husbandry itself. Normally two elite classes have been seen to be emerging in the pastoral tribes – the first which used to shoulder the responsibility of raiding the cattle and protecting ones' own cattle and the other which used to be experts in the rituals like animal sacrifice and gifting precious articles of the society for divine blessing for the prosperity of the animal wealth. Even in the stage of agriculture, religious rituals played a significant role, the number of deities had increased and rituals and rites of worship had got complicated. At the same time, the importance of religious code of conduct for coordinating the social system was enhanced. Apart from priestly work and being the custodians of *varna* system, the importance of calendar for regulating the agricultural activities and the monopoly of Brahmins over this skill also contributed in strengthening the position of Brahmins.

It is to be noted that the process of intermingling in the four *varna* system was not confined to the level of Brahmins only. Even *Rajanyas* or *Kshatriyas* were as much influenced by this because

due to invasions and revolts it was difficult to maintain the dynastic monopoly over the armed force. Many a times even the chiefs of the vanquished tribes were included in the *Rajanya varna*. Later on many *Shudra* kings who established their rule on a new territory (or through revolt) were deemed to be *Kshatriyas*. Evidences are also found of the acceptance of the foreign rulers as *Kshatriyas* in due course. We also find the instances of the *Shudras* getting free and becoming independent peasant by paying some definite gift. Now we will talk about *Shudras* and *Vaishyas*. The people belonging to the *Vaishya varna* were earlier performing agricultural activities and the *Shudras* used to work in the farms as Helot type servants. With the expansion of agricultural land and the progress of the production, process the division of labour became more complex and the importance of exchange got enhanced. A section of *Vaishyas* moved to trading. This process kept on unfolding. The second urban revolution which took place on the eve of the emergence of Buddhism absorbed the major part of the *Vaishyas* owing to the expansion of trade and diversification of the trade sector and several new trading castes got included into it. The agricultural work now mostly became the task of the *Shudra varna* and gradually their condition improved slightly.

Now let's see the process of the origin of the *Antyaj* castes which were outside the four *varna* system and were at the bottom of the hierarchy and who, after getting settled in the society, got the status of untouchables doing manual works and who were involved in other 'lower' level work. Many food-gatherers who got defeated by Aryans got transformed into the lowest castes. Their position was so low that they were outside the four *varna* system. In *Manusmriti* several such castes have been kept in the category of *Sankar* (hybrid) such as the *Saindhra*s who trap the animals, *Kaivarts* the boatmen, *Nishads* who catch fish, *Meds*, *Andhras*, *Chunchus* and *Madgus* who hunt the games, *Kshatris*, *Pukkakas* and *Ugras* who hunt the animals living in holes, *Pandus* and *Sopaks* who make sticks and *Karavars* and *Ghigvans* who do leather work. Manu has termed them the fifteen inferior *varnas* outside the four *varna*

system. Buddhist texts describe *Chandaals* and *Nisaads* as hunters. These were mainly untouchable castes which were the victim of apartheid right from the beginning. Even in *Jatak Kathas* we find mention of separate villages for craftsmen (metal and wood workers) and Wood workers, chariot makers and doctors too are kept in the *Sankar* castes in the *Manusmriti*. It is very much possible that during the second urban revolution, under the pressure of division of labour, a section of the tribes which was being absorbed into the wider society got separated and formed separate castes of the craftsmen and they were kept in the category of *Antyaj* or *Sankar*.

From the available evidences it appears that in the beginning the rules of endogamy did not prevail within the four *varnas* in general and within the top three *varnas* in particular. It was only later that they were consolidated into the rules of endogamy. It is very much possible that when the tribes were getting absorbed in the wider society they brought the traditions related to endogamy along with them. The emergence of castes as separate sub-groups within the *varnas* was the outcome of various historical processes. The main material basis for this was the division of labour gradually getting more complex along with the productive forces whose systematization required certain social code of conduct in the guise of religion, hierarchy and class-divisions apart from the political system. The co-option of other tribal communities within the varna-system was possible only on the condition that the boundaries of those communities are delimited by preserving their value system. *Manusmriti* emphasises that *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* are *dvij* (double born) and *Shudras* are single born. The fifteen inferior *varnas* are discussed outside this. Thus, a clear dividing line was drawn between the upper three *varnas* and *Shudras* and between *Savarnas* (including *Shudras*) and *Avarnas*. Untouchability was the logical culmination of a social hierarchy which was determined by the Brahmins from the perspective of 'pure' and 'polluted' works. The 'lower' castes were condemned to work the polluted and slave like work on hereditary basis. But most importantly the untouchable castes were available before the farmers or superior land-owners to

toil hard on low cost and there was no scope of their getting the right of ownership or the approval of becoming the regular peasants. The principal source of the deep sense of hostility towards such castes in the rest of the society was this clash between the interests and the notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' were merely a means to rationalize this fact.

The number of slaves was very less during the Vedic era. In the initial phase of the agrarian economy most of the slaves were engaged in the domestic works rather than in the productive works. According to the Pali scriptures of the period 400–100 BC and Kautilya's *Arthshastra* the slaves and wage labourers were used on a huge scale in the agricultural works in the north-west India in the post-vedic and Mauryan era. In the Mauryan era, even the farmers used to hire slaves and wage labourers on the *Rashtrabhumi* (farmers' land) and as regards the *Sita* land (state farms), the entire work was done by them.

While it is true that the Brahmins played the most important role in universalizing the caste-system and in fossilizing the social division of labour by making the caste-system a part of religion and by converting the social behaviour and segregation of the castes into religious rules and laws, the supportive role played by Buddhism and Jainism in this respect cannot be ignored. Theory of the transmigration of soul was the basic pillar of the Buddhist philosophy. It used to provide indirect justification to the caste-system and used to convince people that their miseries are the outcome of their deeds in the last birth and they can hope to liberate themselves in the next birth only by doing their *karma*. This theory is an integral part of the ideology of the caste-system in *Manusmriti*. After the establishment of agriculture in place of pastoral life and after the realization of the harmful effects of large-scale animal slaughter by Brahmins, a material ground was paved for theory of non-violence being propounded by Buddhism and its popularity among the cattle-owning *Vaishyas* was but natural. However, it also provided rationale for pushing the food gathering masses into a condition of servitude and destitution. The Buddhist literature, much like the Brahmin literature,

mentions the castes which kill the animals as inferior. Owing to this very principle of non-violence, even the *Vaishyas* who were engaged in agriculture began to be treated as *Shudras*. Much like *Manusmriti* which condemned the animal killing and *Baudhayana* who asked the Vedic readers to keep away from agriculture, Buddha also ordered the monks to stay away from agriculture because it entailed loss of life. Even Jainism preached non-violence and it had the similar impact on the immediate social life. In fact Jainism went further to develop a stringent caste-system akin to Brahmanism. According to *Aadipurana* of Jinsen and *Aadishwarcharita* of Hemchandra, Aadinath Rishabh gave birth to *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudras* from his arms, thighs and legs respectively and as per the *Niti-Vachans* of Jainism, his son and successor Bharat created Brahmins to accomplish the religious tasks. Much like Brahmin law makers, Jainism too talks about the hereditary determination of the caste-based professions, shows similar religious prejudices towards *Shudras* and craftsmen and declared *Chandals* as 'polluted'.

The caste system with its several castes and well-established rules and regulations had emerged from the *Chaturvarnya* (four varnas) system in the pre-feudal society of India itself during the period between the emergence of Buddhism (circa 500 BC) and the age of Gupta empire (4th–5th century AD) owing to the increasingly complex division of labour and a prolonged process of the absorption of the non-aryan tribes into the Aryan society. Some of these castes were falling within the hierarchy of the four *varnas*, but this was no longer the same four *varna* system as earlier and some non-varna castes (the discrimination and untouchability prevailed even among them) were kept out of this. A clear dividing line was drawn between 'pure' and 'polluted'. The rules of intra-caste marriage had become rigid. It needs to be mentioned here that the process which led to the organization of the caste-system along with the progress of the division of labour also resulted into the subjugation of women in the society and establishment of the intra-caste and intra-gotra system of marriage which played an important role on the economic plane in accumulating the expertise over generations, but on the other hand

the possibilities of horizontal movement got hampered as well. Small state and then empires evolved from within the tribal system. While the form of private property was clearer in the cities, an element of private property existed even in the village communities in the form of the division of work, products and facilities based upon caste privileges and professions. Thus, the historical process of evolution of endogamy and the families based upon the subservience of women, private property and emergence of state took place here. Considering the three aspects—relatively more stringent division of labour, determination of the forms of ownership and the laws of distribution—the caste system itself constituted a production-relation. There existed a superstructural edifice of religion based political-social institutions and conducts of religious ideologies and institutions which emerged from such production-relations and which influenced it. The classes were composed of the communities of various castes. It was like this: ruling class (mainly *Kshatriyas*), theoreticians who were the policy makers of the state (*Brahmins*), traders (*Vaishyas*), the peasant castes (*Shudras*) and the slaves (surely not like their Homeric contemporaries) and bonded labourers in form of *Avarnas/ Antyaj/untouchable castes* who constituted the population of subservient workers, who had the right to livelihood only by toiling and did not enjoy any other economic and social rights. Thus caste and class used to overlap each other, the difference was that the castes were such classes which were immobile and rigid due to heredity and endogamy. The machinery of caste-system was such that the maximum surplus could be extracted from the producers by using the minimum force, but peasants and more than them the untouchable labouring castes had to face brutal violence and humiliation in their day-to-day life. The hegemony of religious superstructure was to lessen the possibility of revolts (yet we do get a few evidences of some revolts).

Caste-system in the different phases of feudalism

Despite the slow growth of the forces of production, a phase did occur when under their pressure, the production-relations of pre-feudal India began cracking and subsequently they started breaking and it resulted into the emergence of feudalism in India. It is not possible here to discuss the differences of opinion that exist among the historians about the process of origin and evolution of feudalism in the early medieval era, nor is it much relevant in our discourse about the caste question. In course of time, it became increasingly difficult for the state of the empires to maintain its hold over the agricultural production in the ever-expanding territory and hence there was a push for decentralization and the temples and Buddhist monasteries were given land grants on large scale. The monasteries and temples used to get their work done from the hired labourers of lower castes, servants and poor peasant castes or they used to give the land to the village community on lease. There was some land under state ownership and collective ownership as well. The emperors and big kings used to collect tax from the rulers under them and these rulers in turn used to rule the village communities falling under their territory. It is very well possible that in due course of time a land-owning class would have emerged from within the villages which used to possess armed power and used to act as an intermediary rent-seeker between the state and peasantry. Whatever be the situation, these changes did not have any significant impact on the internal structure of the village community and particularly on the peasant castes and the craftsmen of the 'lowest' category and the untouchable castes.

If we look at the south Indian society (which had come under the influence of Brahmanism as early as Satvahana's era), even there, the peasant population of the village communities was getting suppressed under the backbreaking rent of the powerful feudal lords. They had been deprived of even the rights which they used to enjoy earlier under the village communities and the heads of the

communities had slowly acquired the status of the feudal landlord. The caste structure was slightly different here. There was no caste akin to the Kshatriyas here. The peasant castes (Shudras) existed below the Brahmins and the hellish condition of the lower castes was similar to that in the north. The feudal lords emerged here from within the peasant castes. The coastal cities played an important role in the economy of the south. Here the state ownership over land continued to exist under the huge empires of the Pallavas, the Chalukyas and the Cholas and the feudal lords were absentee landlords in most of the cases.

The feudal agrarian relations developed in the eastern India (the region between Bengal and Tripura which had come under the influence of Brahmanism) as well. Here too, the *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya* castes did not exist and the clashes and compromises for power took place between the *Brahmins* and the *Shudras*. Here most of the *Shudras* were kings and they even made a failed attempt to become *Kshatriya*. This process of *Sanskritization* led to the improvement in the condition of some castes over the others. Insofar as the “lower” castes are concerned, their condition was no different from that in the rest of India.

After the sixth century AD a process of degeneration of trade and the urban crafts ensued at varying pace in the feudal India and the process of de-urbanization or ruralization gained pace due to several reasons which need not be discussed here as it would not be relevant (although the situation was slightly different in the south owing to the continuance of trade from the coastal cities). Many skilled workers returned to the villages in search of livelihood and some got engaged in handicrafts. There was increasing differentiation and sub-differentiation of the castes and this new population found its way in the ‘lower’ *Shudras* and castes lower than it. In the eleventh century, Al-Baruni described eight castes including weavers and cobblers as part of the socially ostracized ‘*antyaj*’ castes. The urban guilds of skilled workers faded away. There was no longer a situation like in the past when owing to the hereditary character of the caste-system the forces of production

used to get impetus. The village communities got isolated and became self-reliant by this time. The exchange got confined to the boundaries of villages to a large extent and no longer was there any need for the village communities to give surplus produce in return of their imports. Only few articles like salt and metals had to be imported from outside. These changes increased the capacity of the village communities to give more surplus to the ruling class. As the caste-system got frozen more and more, its character for the servants of the entire village community—the lower castes—and for the artisans who too belonged to these castes and who used to get compensated for their labour in the form of goods or in the form of land grants, became even more oppressive. Max Weber termed it as the “divine labour”. It was in this period that the customs of *Jajmani* and *Balutdari* also grew which have been described as the principal form of the medieval feudal exploitation in the writings of several writers belonging to the ML stream. There were twelve traditional “Balut” including carpenter, ironsmith, barber, cobbler etc. who used to work for the entire village community and in turn used to get compensated in terms of land grants or part of crops. The process of inclusion of several tribes into the lower ladders of the caste-system in the form of untouchable or ‘ati-shudras’ continued from middle India to Gujarat and Maharashtra. Even the food gathering, animal rearing tribes which remained separate from this system were considered by the Brahmins as inferior and untouchable and they were called as ‘mlechch’. Only a small portion of this population came under the influence of Christianity during the British era. Even today the tribal community’s independent existence remains intact and the Hindutva fascists are putting a lot of effort to Hinduise them and they have even managed to achieve limited success as well. The usage of the term Hindu religion also became prevalent in the medieval era only.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century, some important changes began taking place in the structure of the Indian feudalism. One of the reasons for this was the coming of Islam. But, apart from reshuffling in the status of some castes in the hierarchy of the caste-

system and the coming into being of some new castes and sub-castes, it did not bring about any fundamental change. Despite the fact that Islam prohibits polytheism and idol-worship and it disapproves any differences apart from the difference between the free man and slave and between men and women, the caste-system proved to be particularly helpful for the Islamic rulers in revenue collection and in ensuring that the wages as input cost remain low. Hence, apart from wars and repression of revolts, they did not make any effort towards religious conversion, remained apathetic towards the repression inherent in the caste-system, gave important positions in the administration to the 'upper' caste Hindus and maintained friendly relations with the Hindu kings who accepted their supremacy. Along with the new rulers came the new and widespread technology of handicrafts, the population of the handicraftsmen got expanded to a large extent and the third "urban revolution" of the Indian history began. In the beginning, even the slave trade took place on large scale for the new trades and construction works. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the slave trade was an important component of the urban labour. After the acceptance of Islam, these slaves could be involved in any kind of work after learning a skill. In due course, being free from slavery, these people became urban craftsmen and chiefs of several working community. Even some free people accepted Islam and those 'low' caste Hindus also converted their religion who were fed up with their inferior condition and who wanted to adopt a profession which they could not do earlier. Thus the Muslim population increased enormously. However, the converted population brought the influence of the caste-system along with them. The practice of endogamy was prevalent among the weavers, butchers, barbers etc. On the lines of the 'low' Hindu castes, 'kamin' communities developed among the Muslims as well. Yet a section of the Muslim population remained outside the caste structure and even amongst those who were influenced by it, it was possible to change the profession or violate the law of endogamy. When this population spread to the villages and cities throughout the country in due course, the upper caste Hindu society used to

consider the Muslim craftsmen and labourers of the 'Kamin' community on the same footing as the untouchables and their economic condition also became similar to the latter. Later, in the British rule the landownership and top posts were confined to the Sheikhs-Saiyyads-pathans. The condition of the larger Muslim population deteriorated and the condition of the 'kamin' Muslims remains more or less equivalent to the Dalits even today in the independent India as well.

Let us return to the time span which we were discussing earlier. There was no change in the strength of the Hindu caste-system due to the presence of relatively caste-less Muslim population. The only difference was that due to expansion of the trades, some castes got fragmented into new sub-castes and became stable after adopting endogamy. The process of 'Sanskritization' also unfolded owing to the upgradation of some castes. For instance, in the 8th century AD, the *Jats* were an animal rearing tribe like *Chandals*, by the 11th century AD, they got upgraded to the position of *Shudra* and by the turn of 17th century AD, they had become respected peasants of the *Vaishya* category who used to till their land. After the *Jat* revolts of the seventeenth century, some *Jats* started putting efforts for achieving the status of landlords and *Kshatriyas*. One of the impacts of the people's monotheistic movement (the *Nirgun Bhakti* movement which will be discussed further in the context of the movements of the 'lower' castes) was that some of the castes, when they returned after breaching the boundary of the caste system, they returned as higher caste. All in all, the structure of the caste system remained more or less intact throughout the medieval era despite the existence of some elements of motion and competition. It continued to determine the form of the labour process.

But, at this point we would also like to focus the attention towards some changes occurring in the later medieval era which could open the door for the capitalist development in case the colonization had not taken place and which could even push the caste-system towards its disintegration. This issue has either been ignored or half-

baked and unbalanced explanations have been given. There is a consensus among the leading Marxist historians today on the proposition that despite being relatively isolated units, the class-division and class-gradation in the masses of the Indian villages was much more than what Marx had thought and the internal motion of the clashes born out of class-differentiation did exist. It is true that owing to the amalgamation of the rent and revenue, the state itself was the land-owner. But the surplus production of the villages was not entirely handed over to the state (or its collectors) but there existed a well-formed class which used to take its share and which was called as *Zamindar* in the *Mughal* era. Even the elite collectors who used to collect the revenue began cultivating their land on rent as the owner and *Mirasdars*. The main reason for such individual subordination was the caste-system itself which had organized a huge section of rural labourers. The peasants used to consider the *Zamindar* as the owner of the farm and the latter could even dispossess them of the farms. The elements of the private property did exist clearly in the rights of *Zamindars*, *Mirasdars* and the land owners. This approximately resembled like the feudal land-ownership which had emerged in Europe after the disappearance of the 'Fief' and 'Manor' systems. It was but natural that the Mughal empire fell due to agrarian crisis. Often the *Zamindars* led the peasant revolts against the centralized authoritarian regime of the empire with the help of big farmers and *Mirasdars* of the same caste and after its fall they strengthened and widened their right over the farmers. Even Marx's conception about the Asiatic mode of production and stagnant village community kept on changing. He did admit later that it is hardly possible that the village community existed as a stagnant and motionless system at any point of time. He also mentioned that the transformation of the collective agrarian system into individual agrarian system had gained pace even in the pre-capitalist India.

In the pre-capitalist India, there was adequate development of the rent payment in the monetary form, the saleability of the right of landlordism and the urban centers involved in commerce, banking,

insurance (widespread use of money-laundering, *hundis* and exchange letters) and in the production of consumer goods for the remote markets. Yet there was a hurdle in the path of the capitalist development because it was the surplus production of the village community which was mainly transforming into most of the consumer goods and the continued dependency of the cities and commerce on the mode of exploitation of agriculture by the state. Also, rapid and widespread commercial activities by itself cannot be considered as the capitalist mode of production. The mercantile capital generated in India used to control the artisans through *Dadni* system. That is to say that the traders themselves used to provide the loan and raw material needed for the requisite production to the artisans. Owing to such control and very less wages, the chances of adopting the new technology and tools to extract more work in less time were rare. **Irfan Habib** considers this to be the biggest stumbling block in the road of capitalist development in the medieval India. But it is surprising that he did not pay attention to the fact that there did exist a mechanism of production apart from *Dadni* system where there was prevalence of the division of labour (which remains the precondition for the emergence of capitalism) in the workshops of independent master artisans. From the time of Akbar to the eighteenth century, plenty of evidences of the independent workshops of rich master weavers, printers and carpenters in Bengal, Bihar, Awadh, Surat and Kashmir have been found where hundreds of apprentice and wage labourers used to work. According to **Satish Chandra**, the coastal regions of Gujarat, Choromandal and Malabar had entered into the early phase of capitalist development in the pre-colonial India. After the British control over the coastal regions, these enterprises were destroyed due to rupturing the fabric of the external and internal trade. Historian **Pavlov** has rightly expressed his surprise over the fact that **Irfan Habib** has not paid attention towards the possibilities of the capitalist development inherent in the village artisanship which was fulfilling the needs of the people. The proposition that in case the colonialism had not occurred, capitalist development would not have ensued in India is the one which negates the internal dynamics of society.

Capitalism is the first universal and all-encompassing tendency which has the capacity to anyhow break or subordinate every kind of pre-capitalist structure. Whatever be the path and howsoever slow be the speed, once the tendency of the commodity production and that of labour power itself getting converted into a commodity sets in and the pace of the monetary relations and development of markets picks up, this tendency embraces the entire society to its fold by breaking all constraints of natural economy. Had India not got colonized, the journey from artisanship to manufacturing which was beginning in India would have progressed, the ever growing forces of production would have torn apart the pre-capitalist production-relations, the capital would have entered in every joint of the society, the clashes between the forces of production and production-relations and between base and superstructure would have precipitated in the form of class struggle, ultimately a new base would have been established and the new superstructure would have dominated the old decaying socio-cultural superstructure. The caste-system too would have naturally decayed and disintegrated in this process. The colonialism destroyed this process and the caste system remained intact into the semi-feudal and semi-colonial base and superstructure with some changes.

The essence of people's monotheistic movement: A Re-assessment

There is a need here to re-assess the people's monotheistic movement (Nirgun Bhakti Andolan). The leaders of this movement did not come from the privileged intellectual community within the caste system dependent upon the ruling class. They belonged to 'low' castes such as *Chhipi*, *Julaha*, *Chamar*, *Dhunia*, *Nai* etc. or to some 'low' caste of the small peasants. From the class perspective, their social base was amongst the landless agricultural labourers, artisans and small traders. Irfan Habib complains that none of the followers of the diverse religious sects of this movement ever considered themselves as peasants and they did not raise the socio-economic demands of any section of the peasantry. The peasantry

belonging to one caste could not associate themselves with the peasantry of other castes and this hampered the development of class-consciousness in the peasantry. In this context, firstly we should note that this movement was not merely that of peasantry, it had multiple sub-streams. Various artisans and workers belonging to the lowest of the castes had joined it.

Their common issue was to attack the religious rites and rituals which used to provide base to the caste-system and which were determining the production-relations and which were the barbaric form of social oppression as well. Even in the European religious reformation movement, there was a liberal stream of Luther, the radical stream of Munzer raised the demands of peasants as well and the Calvin stream used to represent the demands of the most radical emerging bourgeois class. After manifesting the bourgeois worldview in the beginning, Luther criticized the initial bourgeois humanism and the principle of free trade and took the side of the rulers in the great peasant wars of 1525. Religious peasant leader Munzer was the representative of the plebian peasant side and his political programme was very close to utopian communism. It is true that the Maratha state established as a result of the revolt of Marathas against the centralized power was in no way a 'peasant state'. It gave rise to the reign of Maratha landlords, the *Meeras Pattedaris* got expanded and the conditions of *Kunbis* and the lower caste remained almost unchanged. In terms of egalitarianism and democracy, the character of the Sikh religion which gave voice to the revolt of the *Jat* peasants was most radical even though the Sikh state which came into being as its consequence was in no way a 'peasant state' and later on the Sikh religion too could not remain untouched from the caste-based discrimination. But we will have to remember that even the European religious reform movement was later on being used by the princes of several princely state and by the feudal aristocrats of England, Scandinavia and France (against the authoritarian regime of king). Similar to the manner in which the 'counter-reformation' stopped the spread of the protestant religion by the mid sixteenth to seventeenth century in Europe, in India we find

the *Sagun Bhakti* stream of Tulsidas providing logic in favour of a reformed caste-system, the greatness of Brahmins and the idol worship. It is not our aim here to search a replica of the people's monotheistic movement in the European religious reform movement. There were differences between them in accordance with the differences in the socio-economic structures. We only wish to clarify that there was an independent economic dynamic of the class-struggle in the pre-capitalist India in which the potential for a capitalist development did exist (in the event of India not being colonized) which could destroy the caste-system because there was an approximate overlapping between the caste-groupings and class-hierarchy in India at that time. It is quite possible that in case the India was not colonized, a socio-cultural movement carrying the values of humanism would have arisen from within the stagnation of the eighteenth century. Alternatively, there was a possibility that the values of humanism, nationalism and revolutionary democracy would have developed along with the gradual progress of bourgeois development like what happened in Russia. In any case, the decay and disintegration of the caste-system would have been inevitable. It is not just a question of the re-assessment of the people's monotheistic movement; it is only in this light that it can be properly understood as to how the colonialism killed the independent internal motion of the Indian society and gave a new strength to the caste-system for it to become long-lasting.

The caste-system in the colonial era.

European companies, when they arrived in India, used to sell the goods produced in India to the European markets. Soon the East India Company pushed behind other European companies in the wars and trade rivalry and it even started to control the territories of different parts of the country by taking advantage of the splits, clashes and weaknesses of the Indian feudal lords. After the battles of Plassey and Buxar, it became the biggest political power of the country. The primitive capital accumulation began to be carried out in huge proportions for the British industrial revolution by plundering the

immeasurable wealth of the kings and emperors, traders and money lenders. The despotic attitude with the artisans and craftsmen reached the level of plunder. Then arrived the phase in which the industrial revolution had moved a step ahead. The large-scale factory production could now defeat the Indian handicrafts in the competition. As the import of the British goods gained pace, the Indian handicrafts were destroyed. The cities like Dhaka and Surat were deserted. The process of ruralization began on large scale and the pressure of population on agriculture increased. The agriculture was getting destroyed much earlier because the feudal lords were compensating for all the plunder of the company by extracting abnormally high rent. Even the company started extracting unfettered land revenue from the region under its rule. Soon they realized that the extraction of the land-revenue was an immeasurable source of plunder in this huge agrarian society, hence it was important to systematize it. This task was accomplished through the systems of Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalwari. These systems established a new semi-feudal class-structure by destroying the entire structure of the village communities, even though this change hardly made any impact on the basic structure of the caste-system. The Zamindari system made the land as the private property of the Zamindars. These new feudal lords were the 'upper' caste people who had to deposit 9/10th of the rent extracted from the tenant cultivators. The Zamindars used to side-step all the rules and regulation while squeezing the tenants. The tenant cultivators mostly belonged to the middle castes. At the bottom were the people belonging to the Dalit castes who used to do *begari* on the self-cultivated land of the Zamindars, they used to serve them and they even used to work on the lands of the big tenants. Thus the caste-based social structure remained unchanged. Even though the colonial semi-feudal system destroyed the economic fabric of the village community, the caste-system remained prevalent, it just got articulated with the new system. The *Zamindars* often used to sell their right to extract land-rent to the Pattedars who in turn used to sell it to the sub-pattedars. These Pattedars used to put more and more pressure on the cultivators for enhancing their share and they

used to force the Dalit to do *begari* by committing more and more atrocities. Even the *Pattedari* used to be hereditary. At times when the *Zamindars* could not pay the land revenue either due to the pauperization of the peasants or because of their own luxuries, their *Zamindari*s used to be auctioned and which used to be purchased by the employees of the Company, the employees of the courts and the big money-lenders and thus they used to join the ranks of the new feudal lords. In Bengal and Bihar, majority of such landed property rapidly went to such urban rich who had surplus capital and who used to immediately invest it on land. Needless to say, that the peasants who were getting destroyed, used to often rebel and such rebellions were brutally crushed.

Under the *Ryotwari* system, the British rulers provided recognized as landlord not only the *Zamindars* but the *Mirasdars* (those members of the village community who were entitled to the inherited property) and all those categories of peasants which were paying land-revenue directly to the state. At times the entire village used to come under a *Mirasdar* and its position used to become equivalent to that of a feudal lord. In many cases, the peasants who came from outside, the slaves and the untouchable artisans became tenants or sharecroppers without having any right and the rent on whose tenancy could be increased any time and who could be dispossessed any time. The English officers, by treating the land as the property of the state, started treating the *Ryots* as their permanent tenants with whom the rent could be arbitrarily extracted and on whom the revenue could be imposed whimsically. Under the *Raiyyatwari* system the grazing land and the spare land which were earlier owned by the village community were seized by the state. The landless Dalits had to face its worst impact because they could no longer graze the cattle and nor could they get wood for cooking fire. Consequently, their dependence on the land-lords increased further.

Under the *Maujavar* or *Malguzari* system the entire village community was considered as a financial unit or landlord. But the tax was imposed on the individual farms and even if a single tenant

defaulted in the payment of revenue, the land of the entire village used to be auctioned which were normally being purchased by officers of the courts and goods department and thus they used to acquire the status of *Zamindars*.

After the capture of Sindh in 1843 the *Ryotwari* system was imposed in the upper Sindh while in the lower Sindh, the *Zamindars* were accorded the status of the legitimate land-lords. After the victory of Punjab in 1845–48, the British did not bring about any change in the structure of the village community, even though the rich tenants were given the so-called ownership of the community land (i.e. the permanent right to cultivate on their land provided they give the rent). Due to payment of rent in cash becoming mandatory throughout the Punjab the peasants were compelled to sell their produce in the market which led to the fall in the prices of food crops and thus the condition of peasantry started deteriorating and the influence of money-lenders kept on increasing. The Sikh feudal lords whose ownership rights had been strengthened turned into reliable social prop of the British colonialists.

In the eighth decade of the nineteenth century the ownership rights of the different sections of feudal land-lords were made completely privatized through new measurement and rent settlement. The methodologies of the land-revenue were streamlined. Most of the villages affected by the revolt of 1857 were returned to the *Tallukdars*. At the same time, those belonging to the upper echelons of the village community were accorded the status of sub-owners and brokers between the *Malguzars* and land-owners. In the areas of *Ryotwari Bandobast*, the small-scale peasant ownership was also systematized apart from the feudal land-ownership. In Punjab, the attention was paid to the interests of the upper echelons of the village community. The land ownership of the *Jagirdars* and *Inaamdars* were also curtailed and the *Tallukdars* were made the pensioners dependent on the state. In Sindh, although the owner *Jagirdars* were given property rights over the big lands but they were removed from the task of collecting rent. There was a curtailment in the numbers of the *inams* and *Jagirs* and in the landed property of

the *Inamdars* and *Jagirdars*. In the central province, apart from the old feudal aristocrat, the right of land-ownership was also given to the *Malguzars* responsible for giving the land-revenue directly to the state. Through all these steps, on the one hand the British colonialism expanded and consolidated its social props by developing a new line of feudal lords besides the old ones and by giving rise to a loyal population and on the other hand it ensured the colonial feudal monopoly on land. Its main beneficiaries were the 'upper' caste feudal lords only. In some areas, the middle caste peasants benefitted to an extent and the tendency of 'Sanskritization' developed among them. For most of the middle caste peasants and poor tenants and the landless labourers belonging to the Dalit castes and the remaining craftsmen, the inhuman exploitation and oppression continued unabated. Thus, the new changes left the caste-system almost untouched.

The biggest social curse of the colonization on Indian society was that while it maintained the old evil of the caste-system through re-culturification, it destroyed the socio-economic structure of India and imposed the colonial socio-economic structure. The embryo of natural development which was developing inside the womb of the old society got destroyed. The possibilities of the natural path of the development of 'agriculture-handicrafts-manufacturing-machinofacturing' vanished. The caste-system was apt for the colonial semi-feudal mode of exploitation and it was an effective weapon for dividing the people at socio-political level and to blunt their class-consciousness (the other effective weapon was to promote communalism). Even in the era of national movement, the indigenous capitalist class was always fearful of the increase in the initiative of the toiling masses and it was conscious of its class interest right from the beginning. Hence, despite using the people's power in the movements, it could not take the radical stand on the question of the elimination of the caste. On the contrary it was its usual tendency to exploit the distance and tensions between the castes and then to adopt the policy of intermixing, reform and 'Harijan upliftment'. Besides the Feudal lords, even the rich tenants

of the middle castes (who used to get their farms cultivated by the Dalits) used to keep a distance from the Dalits and even the middle castes and poor tenants used to keep a distance from them. The untouchability and the notions of pure work and polluted work were present as it is. Ample documentary evidences exist to prove that it was a well-thought policy of the British law-makers not to interfere with the Hindu religion and the caste-system as it was the most important ploy to make the old ruling classes as associates and to escape the social upheaval. Secondly, the arbitrary extraction of the land-revenue was an important means of the colonial plunder which was possible only by maintaining the semi-feudal oppression of the land settlement and it was the main basis of the caste-based oppression.

1857: Some important questions related to its evaluation

It is pertinent here to talk something about 1857. This great revolt had occurred at such a juncture of history when the classes arising out of the colonial socio-economic structure were yet to take a definite form and shape and the class structure of the pre-colonial India had not yet been destroyed completely. There were some seeds of the consciousness of national liberation in this struggle, but it was mainly a resistance struggle of the old India. At some places, significant role was being played by the regional heroes belonging to the peasantry, Dalits and the tribals, but the main leading force was the feudal lords only. The main forces of the struggle were the rebel soldiers (who were the sons of peasants), peasantry and uprooted craftsmen. The colonialism was their common enemy. In absence of a definite plan this battle could not be won on the old ground and it died its natural death on its own ground through natural process of negation of the negation. This was such a loss which is to be compensated till this day. If Jyotiba Phule, while looking at the recent past of the feudal oppression of the old India, could not view 1857 from a balanced historical perspective, the reason was very natural. He was of the opinion that the victory of the rebels would bring back

the old Peshwa rule and the brutal oppression of the Dalits. But even today, most of the Dalit intellectuals and some Marxist intellectuals consider the revolt of 1857 as having regressive nature on account of its feudal leadership. It is an extremely metaphysical perspective towards history. Even if the colonialists were defeated in this great battle, it was not possible that India would have receded into the darkness of its medieval past. After the defeat of the British rule, the possibility of the restoration of a strong centralized feudal rule was very rare.

The class structure of the colonial era, various political streams and the caste question

All the voices being raised against the evils of Hinduism and all the movements being waged by taking inspiration from the ideals of democracy in the European society by the first generation of the educated middle class which was born out of the British colonial socio-economic structure were confined to the urban middle class and their outlook towards the urban poor did not go beyond mercy and compassion. In fact, the majority of these reformers were the landlord themselves and leave aside the improving the lot of the Dalits, they like other landlords were their oppressors. But Jyotiba Phule was class apart. Not only was his stance radical against the caste-system at the level of propaganda, he also strived to build institutions for the education of the untouchables and women. He consistently opposed the atrocities and exploitation of the peasants and untouchable landless labourers at the hands of *Deshmukhs*. However, even this radical social reformist could not see the colonial rule as the builder and protector of the semi-feudal land system, rather he viewed it as a benefactor of the *Shudras* and untouchables. The *Satyashodhal Samaj* being established by Phule later on fell into the leadership of Shahuji Maharaj, a feudal lord whose main aim was to get recognized as *Kshatriya*. But a small section of this organization was involved for some days in organizing the peasants and workers. In 1890, Lokhande, a follower of Phule,

built a workers' organization named 'Bombay Mill Hands Association', although it was an informal (without any rule) organization made for the improvement in the condition of the workers. Lokhande was also a member of the 'Factory Labour Commission' formed by the government.

The urban Dalit population was impressed with the day-to-day behavior of the Christian British masters as they did not practice untouchability, even though they used to get the job of watchman, gardener, cook and servant. Their kids were not discriminated in the missionary schools. They also used to go to the government schools, but they had to face insult there. After getting education from these schools, a population of educated Dalits also came into being (particularly in Maharashtra) which used to get the jobs up to the clerical level. Yet, they mostly used to get the lower-level jobs in the cities. Sanitary work was assigned to them only. Even in factories, they used to get the lowest level of jobs and they had to face discrimination at the hands of the non-Dalit castes. In the entire country, there was only one Mahar regiment which was of Dalits, in all other regiments, the Dalits used to mostly get the non-soldier works like cleaning etc. Even these extremely limited changes were confined to hardly two percent of the Dalit population. The majority of the Dalit population which was living in the villages still suffered from the exploitation and oppression under the feudal system as before. Leaving aside some rich tenants, the situation of caste-based discrimination and oppression apart from the feudal exploitation remained prevalent even for middle-caste tenants and landless people, although their condition was different from that of Dalits and even they used to keep a distance from Dalits and nurse the feeling of hatred towards them (leaving aside some extremely backward castes). The Dalit political leadership which was articulating the interest of the small Dalit middle class which arose in the colonial India, put forward its claim for the entire Dalit population and gained their support by making the caste-based oppression as an issue. But it neither gave any economic and political programme against the root of the caste-system viz. the land-system nor did it target

colonialism which was the protector of the land-system. We will discuss about Ambedkar and Periyar in this context at the appropriate place.

It was the bourgeois rationality which formed the philosophical basis of the uniform nationwide system of law and order, education and administration being established by the British colonialists. But it was hampered, controlled and distorted in innumerable ways owing to the narrow colonial interests. The basis of the administration and law was no longer the caste-system and the divine sanction, but the caste-system was left untouched in the social life (we have already discussed as to how it was given a new economic base through land-system) because the social unrest in its wake could have threatened the very survival of colonial rule. The colonialists chose to develop their social props from within the ex-rulers themselves. The successor of the old land-owners, the new urban middle class, was adjusted in the bureaucracy. They even dominated the independent intellectual professions. In due course, if the nationalist feelings and ideas grew from within a section of this middle class itself, it was due to the contradictions inherent in the objective motion of the social development which remains independent of the will of the ruling class. Although even these nationalist ideas were either the feeble reformist ideas or they entailed the elements of revivalism and traditionalism. Instead of the militant democratic ideas, their ideas were either reformist or extremely conservative. A revolutionary nationalist stream also developed from the middle class when the social-development progressed further and a section of them even joined the working class by adopting the scientific socialism. But, even these streams carried so many birth-marks of the colonial social structure that their theoretical basis was too weak.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the British capital investment began in Railways and textile and Jute mills. Its main aim was to use the Indian raw material to manufacture goods at low cost in India itself and thereby maintain their lead in the competition of the world market. The second important sector was the construction of irrigation canals in those areas where the crops were grown for

export (e.g. cotton and wheat farming in Sindh and Punjab). The mining industry became the third sector for investment and the plantation of tea, coffee and rubber became the fourth sector. The next phase was that of the steel factories, other infrastructural industries and the factories producing consumer goods. Unlike in Europe, the labour-supply needs of these factories were not met with the population uprooted due to the capitalist development in the villages. The British industries continued to get the cheap labour power which was much cheaper than that in Europe from the destroyed artisans of handicrafts, the Dalit population suffering from the feudal oppression, the bankrupt small peasants and the victims of hunger and famine caused by the continuation of the colonial plunder. It did not have any impact on the caste-based social system of the villages. Along with these industries, the indigenous middlemen, traders, moneylenders and commission agents also accumulated a lot of money. Often, they were Marwadi, Parsi, Gujrati and Jain traders. Afterwards, these comprador capitalists started investing in the ancillary enterprises of the British industries. Gradually, their character started changing. Taking advantage of the involvement of the colonialists in the world capitalist competition and crises, the first world war, the economic crisis and then in the second world war, the Indian industrial capitalist class expanded its industries and its aspiration for the competition in the market got a fillip. Like every capitalist class, the nationalism of the Indian capitalist class also got originated in the market. This capitalist class did not evolve through the phases of agriculture-handicrafts-manufacturing but it started as a comprador and trader from within the colonial socio-economic structure and later on developed as industrial capitalist class. The logic of Renaissance and Enlightenment and militant democracy did not belong to its heritage. Its path was not that of bourgeois democratic revolution, not even that of a militant national liberation struggle. It chose the path gaining political independence by adopting the strategy of pressure-compromise-pressure in accordance with its increasing power and by taking advantage of the inter-imperialist rivalry and the crisis of colonialists. In the process it suppressed the people's initiative and

betrayed the people by pushing the mass struggle towards compromises at every step. It was not a coincidence that the leadership of its principal party the Congress consisted of the representatives of the upper caste landlords and rich tenants apart from the urban middle class. It was not a coincidence that the social ideas of its leading theoretician Gandhi were extremely orthodox, he used to call himself as a *Sanatan* Hindu and a strong supporter of the reformed *varnashram* system, his programme towards Dalit did not go beyond the welfare of the untouchables, his secularism did not go beyond the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. His humanism was sugar-coated with religion and immersed in the filth of revivalism. In this sense he was much behind his teachers—Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy—their “Sanatan Hindu” follower. *Gram Swarajaya*, opposition to machine culture, upliftment of the untouchables, the Gandhian utopia of trusteeship were all geared towards involving the poor into the national movement and to apply balm on the wounds of the untouchables, it was aimed at weakening the pressure of the class struggle and thereby placing the masses behind the bourgeois leadership. When implemented, it could only take the form of capitalism and the same happened later in the leadership of Nehru. The Congress, on the one hand, used to assure the peasants of carrying out land-reforms and on the other hand, it used to guarantee the land-owners of safeguarding their interests. Its attitude towards the working-class struggle was always that of opposition, pressure for the sake of compromise and that of betrayal. Such a political party of such bourgeois class could never adopt a radical economic program (anti semi-feudal land system) which could attack the roots of the caste system, nor could it build a militant democratic social movement against it.

The communist stream during the national movement

The other main stream of the national movement was that of the Communist Party. Hence it is pertinent to know its standpoint and conduct on the caste question. In order to clearly understand this, it

is important to know as to what were its weaknesses due to which the Communist Party of India could not become the leading stream of the national movement and could not accomplish the task of the people's democratic revolution. The ideological basis of the communist movement was weak in India right since the beginning (we have discussed above the objective reasons inherent in the historical development) and this weakness continued to prevail. The declaration of the founding of the Party was made in 1920 in Tashkent and an All-India communist conference having very loose structure also took place in 1925. But even after this, the communist groups active in various parts of the country could not be organized under a centralized leadership. The dull leadership at the time, instead of determining an anti-imperial and anti-feudal programme and path of revolution in India by examining the concrete condition, mostly used to take decisions and actions on the basis of India-related articles published in 'Imprecore'—the main organ of the Communist International and in the letters of the Soviet Party and the articles written by Rajnipam Dutt of the British Party. In 1933 a provisional central committee was founded for the first time for preparing a structure of a Leninist Party on the suggestion of the Communist International and the parties of China, Britain and Germany. It can be said that the initial process of the Party formation itself got completed in 1933. Even after this, the first congress of the Party was held in 1943, i.e. after ten years. The irony was that even at that time the Party did not have a programme of revolution nor did it have any agrarian programme. In 1951 a policy statement and a document for programme was released by the Communist leadership for the first time after a dialogue with Stalin and the representatives of the Soviet Party in Moscow which was passed in the All India Party Conference in 1951 and the third-Party Congress in 1953. Despite being mainly and essentially correct about the path and general orientation of the revolution, the evaluation of this programme about the character of the Indian capitalist class and the State and the transformation of the agrarian relations and general orientation of the social development were not in tune with the reality as was clearly proved later. Anyhow, this programme was only for

keeping in the cold storage now because after the defeat of the Telangana struggle the Party had now taken full steps towards revisionism and had by now become an open parliamentary Party. In 1956 it also got the international certificate from the Khrushchevite revisionism.

It was because of this ideological weakness that the Party repeatedly missed the favourable opportunity during the national movement and failed to grab the leadership of the mainstream of the national movement from Gandhi-Nehru's Congress. In the decade of 1920 when Gandhi was yet to regain his lost reputation and the compromising character of the Assemblist Swaraj Party was exposed, when it was the period of forming the Workers and Peasants Party and the rapid expansion of its influence, the Party was not so organized and equipped with clear understanding to take the advantage of the situation. The inability of the Party to organize a nationwide exposure and mass mobilization against the Gandhi-Irwin pact and the subsequent Government of India Act of 1935 was also due to its organizational weaknesses. Subsequently, during the P.C. Joshi's period of right-wing deviation the Party missed several opportunities to take the initiative in its hand. In absence of a dialectical policy towards the united front, it was natural to have a compromising attitude towards the bourgeois national leadership. When the provincial governments of Congress and League were causing widespread disillusionment among masses, the Party could have moved to organize a mass movement and take the initiative in its hand. But it was not to be. The most unfortunate was the transition period between 1946 to 1950 when on the one hand the Indian bourgeois parties, the Congress and the League, were engaged in the negotiations for the transfer of power, the constituent assembly representing merely 11 percent elites was preparing the constitution and on the other hand it was also the period of nationwide workers' strike, naval revolt, the indications of the brewing of revolts even in the Army and Air Force and most importantly it was the period of the great peasant struggles of Telengana, Tebhaga and Punapra-Vayalar. Small and big peasant

revolts were taking place even in other parts of India. Had there been an organized Leninist Party in the true sense, the country's history would have been different. But it was the same period when Ranadive was on the one hand implementing the "left" adventurist line and on the other hand he was building castle in the air by borrowing the idea from the Yugoslavian revisionist Cardelz to merge the stages of democratic revolution and socialist revolution. The Dange faction in Bombay was already immersed in the mire of economism. The Andhra Party committee was relatively on the right track and was stressing on the nationwide spread of people's war on the pattern of China. But the central leadership rejected the 'Andhra Thesis'. In all these struggles of peasants and workers the communist cadres were in the leading front with their unmatched chivalry and sacrifice but there was a lack of central leadership which could make these struggles nationwide by joining the dots. Ultimately all the isolated struggles were either scattered or were suppressed. Nehru sent the army to brutally suppress the Telangana peasant struggle.

Many Dalit intellectuals have been levelling the charge on the communist movement of ignoring the caste question (and at times of having caste-based prejudices as well) and these days such line of thinking has become prevalent amongst some Marxist nouveau-riche intellectuals as well. Even some communist revolutionaries, while saying this, are presenting different shades of the harmonization between Marxism and Ambedkarism without going in detailed analysis as if to obtain absolution of past sins, as if they would win the hearts of the Dalit population just by doing this. This is either defeatism or cheap populism. It is not that the Communist Party did proper theoretical work and systematically decided the policy and strategy on the other aspects of the Indian society and other problems of the revolution and it only ignored the caste question. How can one expect a Party to have a complete position document and clear direction only on caste question when it did not even have a programme for Indian revolution and an agrarian programme till 1951? So, the weakness of the communist movement was just a part

of its larger weakness related to the programme of Indian revolution. Yet it needs to be mentioned that in its document on the 'United Front for action' in 1930, the Party has discussed the caste-system and untouchability in detail, it linked the anti-caste-system struggle with the struggle against feudalism and the British rule and it appealed the toiling "untouchable" masses to stay away from the conspiracy of dividing them on caste lines and to fight against feudalism and colonialism along with the workers throughout the country. At the same time, it has declared to fight against the caste-system and all sorts of caste-based inequality. Again, this question has been raised in the paper on the political thesis in the second congress of the Party in 1948 and five paragraphs have been devoted to the problem of untouchability. In this document it has been said to the untouchables that along with carrying out uncompromising struggle against the "upper" caste bourgeois class they must also carry out struggle against those opportunist and separatist leaders who separate the untouchables from these struggles by taking the side of the exploiting classes. Clearly, apart from other Dalit leaders of Congress and Periyar it is mainly Ambedkar who is being alluded to here. Subhash Gatade (see his article 'Caste Away Caste: Breaking New Grounds') and many others are quite hurt that the Communist Party while talking about fighting untouchability declared Ambedkar as separatist, opportunist and British supporter without even giving a concrete programme for elimination of caste and it created caste-based prejudices. The fact that the Communist Party did not present a concrete programme for the elimination of caste is a separate issue. Even Ambedkar did not provide any such programme which will be discussed later. But how could one turn a blind eye to the reality at that time. While opposing the 'upper' caste leadership of the Congress, Dr. Ambedkar did not organize the Dalits on their demands against the "upper" caste Zamindars, nor did he do this against the British, their patron. He kept a distance from anti-colonial struggle, continued to oppose the gaining of independence and while sitting in the Constituent Assembly representing 11 percent of the elites with the support of League and then of the Congress, he was making the Constitution

and was expressing lavish obligation towards the Congress (see, his speech in the Constituent Assembly) at a time when Nehru Government was brutally repressing peasants and landless labourers in Telangana. We will evaluate his role in totality separately, but in 1948 how else could one describe him if not opportunist and separatist? What was required to take along the Dalits was not to embrace Ambedkar by whitewashing the reality but to derive the concrete tasks of the prolonged struggle for the elimination of untouchability and the caste-system within the task of the democratic revolution. The Communist Party failed to do this and this was its lacuna. Also, it is important to mention here that even AITUC had made untouchability and caste-based discrimination as an issue in its fourth–fifth–sixth conferences and even later it was included in the ‘charter of the workers’. The central council of the Kisan Sabha also included the anti-untouchability demand in its charter of 1945. These facts should not be ignored outrightly, but it in no way means that there was no lacuna or weakness. The Communist Party failed to present an outline of the concrete strategy on the caste question in the stage of the democratic revolution while undertaking the Marxist analysis of the social bases of the origin of the caste system and its presence till the colonial era and the inter-relationship between the caste and the class; it did not give perpetual, widespread and systematic programme against the caste-based social divisions and the culture of discrimination, nor did it tell as to what would be the process or general orientation of the complete abolition of the caste after the establishment of the proletarian state! This weakness was not a separate and isolated one; rather it was due to the ideological weakness due to which the Party did not have any programme of revolution till four years after 1947.

But we will do justice with history only if we do not ignore the other side of the picture. Despite the weakness of ideology and line, communists fought valiantly against the oppression and discrimination of the Dalits and other oppressed castes in the twentieth century in all the areas where they had influence. No one

else did it better than them. The upper-caste land-owners in-fact contemptuously use to term them as “the party of Chamars and Dusadhs (the Dalit castes)”. The main base of the communists was actually among the landless labourers of villages most of whom were Dalits. In the Kisan Sabhas, the tenant farmers used to go along with the communists as they were the ones who used to raise their demands militantly (although among the landlord farmers, the Congress had more influence). But even the tenants used to consider them as more friendly towards the Dalits. The communist organisers carried out the movements against the discrimination or oppression against the Dalits at hundreds of the places in the country. The tradition of the professional revolutionaries was in existence till 1952–52 in its true sense and such activists, even those belonging to an upper caste, used to live in the Dalit settlements only. This tradition was continued for some time even during the era of revisionism. It needs to be remembered that during their work in the Andhra Mahasabha while preparing the prelude for the Telengana peasant struggle, apart from other social evils the communists also raised the issues of caste-based discrimination, untouchability, the religious superstitions and the slavery of women and strengthened the class solidarity through the powerful social movements. Hence instead of making sweeping allegation on the communist movement, what is required is to go to root of the issue. The root cause of the ideological weakness of the communist movement and it needs to be seen as that only.

The stream of Ambedkar and Periyar

Now we move to the role of Ambedkar and Periyar during the national movement. Ambedkar had an exaggerated view of the possibilities of liberation of Dalits from their bondage to the caste-based profession owing to the opportunities got by a minuscule population of the Dalits due to the British education system and the development of industries and he had a hope that the condition of the Dalits would change and the Brahmanic hold of the upper-caste would break if the British rule continued. He failed to understand this

fact that all such steps could only produce a tiny section of the middle class among the Dalits and the naked caste-based oppression of the urban Dalits would be lessened to some extent. The majority of the Dalit population was the victim of the exploitation and oppression by the upper-caste landlords who were the products of the semi-feudal agrarian system being implemented by the British themselves. The emancipation of the wider Dalit community was impossible without the revolutionary attack on the roots of this agrarian system and Ambedkar never had any such programme. As regards colonialism, while he used to express extreme obligation towards it at times, at other times he used to express his anguish over the fact that the British did not do enough to improve the condition of the Dalits and while discussing famine, poverty and the plunder of the country he at times used to condemn the British policies for being an impediment in the development of industry and trade. However, even when he used to be bitter towards the British imperialism, his stand was that we could not fight two enemies together, so our immediate priority is to fight against Brahmanism. As regards the Congress leadership, he never discussed its bourgeois class-character; his objection was to the dominance of the upper-caste and particularly the Brahmins in it. Instead of identifying the roots of the caste-system inherent in the entire socio-economic structure, his prime understanding was that the participation of the Dalits in the state power could bring about change in their condition. As per his understanding, the end of colonialism would lead to the rule of Brahmanism and hence he always stayed away from the national movement. If the Congress leadership was Brahmanic and the colonial rule was not in the interest of the Dalits, they could be organised against colonialism and feudalism on a radical programme as a separate stream; but instead of doing this, Ambedkar chose the alternative of mainly staying with the British through dialogue and negotiation by staying away from the national movement. Insofar as the social movement is concerned, all the projects of Ambedkar remained confined to minor anti-Brahmanic movements to seeking the solution of the caste-system in religious conversion.

At a time when people throughout the country were boycotting the Simon Commission, Ambedkar was filing petition before it. He was a nominated member of the Bombay assembly from 1926 to 1934. In the round-table conference he said that the Dalits had welcomed British as people who liberated them from the age-old atrocities of the orthodox Hindus and by fighting against the Hindus-Muslims-Sikhs they gave this empire to them (although it is factually wrong that the Dalits constituted the majority in the British army, they were very few in number), hence Dalits and Britishers are tied in an extraordinary bond and the Britishers were the protectors of the Dalits. (**Ambedkar, collected works works, volume 5, page 16**). Later on, even when he was criticizing the British colonialism, he was opposing the participation of the Dalits in the freedom struggle with the argument that this struggle was being waged for the establishment of the upper-caste Hindus.

Often some Dalit and neo-Marxist scholars give the proposition that the famous strike of the Bombay textiles mill in 1929 was broken because the union under the leadership of the Communists ignored the demands of the Dalit workers and hence they separated themselves from the strike. The facts need to re-checked. The strike was held because due to the introduction of new machines, three looms were being run by a single worker and the workers were being laid-off. The Dalit workers were with the strike. It is true that there was discrimination with the Dalit workers in the mill and they were not allowed to do certain kinds of works on the ground of untouchability. It is a separate issue that the Communist Party should have carried out a sustained work of education and propaganda on such issues as well and should also have presented the demands before the management. But at a time when all the workers went on strike on an imminent crisis, Ambedkar insisted on adding the special demands of the Dalit workers and the Dalit workers went back to work due to which the strike was broken. Actually, as per his autobiographer Dhananjay Keer, Ambedkar used to consider the strikes as being inspired more by political motive than economic and this would have worsened the economic condition of

the Dalits. He was a nominated member of the Bombay assembly from 1926 to 1934. Ambedkar was not a part of the nationwide protest against the infamous Government of India Act of 1935 also. He founded an Independent Labour Party for participating in the election held as per this act whose influence was confined to the Bombay province only. He sat in the opposition in the assembly. It was the only period when Ambedkar, who used to nurse extreme hatred towards the communists took part in the workers' and peasants' movement with them. He did not put any condition on the issue the Dalit workers and this strike was won due to widespread solidarity of workers. On this occasion he gave statements in favour of the democratic rights of strike and he even went on to say that if the Congress really carries out anti-imperialist struggle, he would join it. But his radical gesture was short-lived. During the Second World War, as soon as it became apparent that the crisis-ridden British could leave India and go back and when 'Wavell Plan' was brought, Ambedkar dissolved the Independent Labour Party and built 'Scheduled Caste Federation' and prepared a proposal named 'State and Minority' which was later presented before the Constituent Assembly. In this duration, he acted as administrator of the Governor General in the labour department from 1942 to 1946. The talks of carrying out struggle against with the imperialism were left way behind. The new stand of Ambedkar was that the British should not leave Indian before doing proper arrangement for safeguarding the Dalits. This was the time when he became a staunch supporter of the division of India (later on his stand was changed and he toed the lines of the Congress), which not only pleased the British rulers and the Muslim League but Savarkar as well.

Ambedkar, an admirer of European-American democracy, did not bother to recall universal adult franchise when the election of the constituent assembly was held under the Government of India Act of 1935 by an electorate of only 11 percent of the population and he became a member of the constituent assembly after being elected from Bengal with the support from the League. After the formation of Pakistan when the constituent assembly was divided, the Congress

hurriedly got a seat vacated for Ambedkar and got him elected from Mumbai. The Congress made him the president of the drafting committee. Two bureaucrats prepared a draft on the basis of the Government of India Act 1935 and Ambedkar prepared the final draft by decorating the same. Reading the speeches of Ambedkar is an interesting experience in itself. He is seen overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude and unity with the Congress; he lavishly expresses gratitude even to the conservative members (which included even the representatives of the feudal elites) of the assembly. It is noteworthy that while Ambedkar was busy preparing the draft of the constitution, a nation-wide mass-uprising was taking place throughout the country, workers' movements were unfolding, the peasant struggles of Telengana-Tebhaga-Punapra-Vayalar were going on and it was the same duration in which the army, sent by Nehru, was carrying out brutal and bloody repression of the Telengana struggle. The *raiya*s and landless people against whom the goonda gangs of landlords, Razakars of Nizam and the Indian army carried out wild atrocities in Telengana mostly belonged to the Shudra and Dalit castes. But Ambedkar was not seeing anything, nor was he listening, nor saying anything; he was writing the constitution and was gracing the post of law minister in Nehru government. Most of the proposals presented by him before the constituent assembly were rejected by it and yet Ambedkar did not show any displeasure about it. It is the same constitution which guarantees to safeguard private property (how could property-less Dalits have benefitted from it?). It is the same constitution which also contains the provision to impose emergency by doing away with even the remaining space of democracy. The drama of electing the people's representatives through money-power which has today taken the most disgusting shape is also provided by the same constitution. The constitution also contains the provision of ending untouchability (and in 1955 a law was also made to this effect), but it was merely on paper. The reduction in untouchability which has taken place so far is not due to constitutional or legal provision, but it is due to the autocentric motion of the capitalist development. Ambedkar was in total agreement with the provision of giving compensation to the rulers of

princely states for taking over their property and that of privy-purse. For all the hypocritical claims of democracy in the constitution, the common people have to face the law and order machinery in their day-to-day life and the Indian bourgeoisie has kept the colonial structure of the law enforcement machinery (IPC, CrPC, Jail Manual, Police Manual, property related laws etc.) intact (later on the newer draconian laws kept on adding one after another).

The system of taxation, right from the beginning, was such that the capitalists could derive benefits from it as per their convenience and most of the burden of governance falls upon the people by way of indirect taxation. Being a law minister himself, Ambedkar did not have any objection to any such issues. The reason for Ambedkar's falling out with the Congress was not theoretical, what actually happened was that he wanted labour ministry instead of law ministry and Nehru did not fulfil his wish even after waiting for long. Subsequently, Ambedkar tendered his resignation in 1955. Now, going totally against his speeches in the constituent assembly, he started discussing about his compulsions during the making of the constitution and the constitution suddenly looked so worthless to him that he announced, 'I shall be the first person to burn this constitution.' In the last days of his life he announced the formation of Republican Party (which came into existence after his death). Even this new party did not have any radical socio-economic programme. Its programme was merely to show the day-dreams of changing the condition of the Dalits by enhancing their stake in the ruling establishment through election. It is not surprising that it was on the basis of this very logic of participating in the ruling establishment, the numerous factions of the Republican Party and the myriad Ambedkarite parties which arose later did not exhibit any hesitation in aligning with any of the parties from time to time be it Congress, 'Hindutvavadi' fascist BJP, Shiv Sena, SP—a party of the middle-caste kulaks and farmers which happens to be the oppressor of the Dalits and the parties of kulaks and regional land-owners such as DMK and AIADMK. In fact, these parties represent the interests of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois class which has emerged

out of the Dalits who manage to get the Dalit votes in the name of caste and Ambedkar but who have nothing to do with the interests of the majority toiling Dalit masses. The conduct of these parties is not a deviation from the path of Ambedkar, rather its logical culmination and extension.

Ambedkar's economic policies, with the rubric of state socialism (see, his proposals before the constituent assembly), was not even Fabian Socialist. It contained some utopian proposals and the rest of which was in no way different from the so-called socialism of Nehru which was a mixed form of state capitalism and private capitalism—the mixed economy capitalism. Ambedkar's proposal was that all the major industries and insurance would be owned by state and the basic industries would be owned by the state corporations. The whole of agriculture would be nationalized. But he did not forget to add that while taking over the factories and land of the capitalists and land-owners, due compensation would be paid. The small enterprises would be privately owned. The state farms would be given to the families of villages on lease without any discrimination. Firstly, in this system interest, rent and private ownership was to remain unchanged, only the biggest individual owner was to be the state. Even an average student could tell that this would be nothing but state monopoly capitalism. Instead of ending the system of exploitation, it would have exacerbated it, would have created a powerful group of bureaucrat capitalists, would have given the opportunity even to the small enterprises to grow bigger and would have paved the social base for an autocratic totalitarian state. The Dalits would have continued to be wage-slaves in the proposed state enterprises and farms. Insofar as making agriculture as the state enterprise, even the capitalist class wishes for the same, but its state cannot do it because the closest allies of the capitalist class and the small partner of the state—the kulaks-farmers-landlords—would never want that to happen. The “state socialism” of Ambedkar, who was previously influenced by rabid anti-communist American thinker John Dewey (he had been his student as well), transformed in 1952 (in the election manifesto of the Schedule Caste Federation) and

came even closer to the Deweyian pragmatism. Now he was of the view that the rapid industrial development was necessary, the state control should be applied wherever it is better and the private ownership should be promoted wherever it is effective. The utopian idea of the nationalization of agriculture was abandoned and now Ambedkar took exactly similar stand as Nehru on the economic policies. Even if Ambedkar had not said, the capitalist class was eager to carry out rapid industrial development at any cost. The caste-system was weakened to the extent as was possible as a consequence of the autocentric motion of capital. But what is important is that capitalism articulated the caste-system as per its interests and embraced it by refining it, the oppression, alienation and humiliation of the majority Dalit masses continued unabated not only in villages but in the cities as well and a small bourgeois and middle-class Dalit population was co-opted in the system as a part of the ruling class and its social prop. We will discuss it further.

Ambedkar had unwavering faith in the western Bourgeois democratic system, his thinking could never cross its horizon. Even in that his ideals did not include Diderot, Voltair or Thomas Paine, nor Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw. The list of his sources of inspiration spanned from Edmund Burke to the Pragmatist American thinker John Dewey. His understanding of a class-neutral democracy was in no way different from the logic of bourgeois political science. He failed miserably to understand that every democracy has a class-character. It is either bourgeois democracy or socialist democracy. Bourgeois democracy is a dictatorship of the bourgeois class over the majority masses and the proletarian democracy happens to be a dictatorship of the working class (with the support of other toiling classes) over the minority exploiters. He gets startled by the proletarian dictatorship as if it is a negation of democracy or an authoritarian rule of the Party. Reading his writings on Marxism, one gets convinced that apart from the superficial criticisms of the bourgeois sociologists and the quotations given in them he had not studied a even a single work of Marxist classics. The dictatorship of proletariat is not what he describes. He was not clear even on the

difference between socialism and communism. Because of his lack of understanding of the class-character of the state he could not understand the fact that if the agriculture and industries are nationalized while the class-character of the state continues to be bourgeois then it would not be socialism but state monopoly capitalism; nor could he understand the fact that only by forcible overthrow of the state of one class that the other class can establish its rule. None of the ruling classes in history have transferred power peacefully. Violence in a revolutionary class war is a necessity, not a wish of anybody. When communists talk of violence, they do not mean individual violence but class violence, it is to forcibly smash a state which is established by force, operated by force and maintained by force (even if this process does not entail bloodshed, it would amount to violence in the philosophical sense). Similarly Ambedkar, despite being an economist, did not have any idea about the Marxist interpretation of the processes of commodity-production, surplus-appropriation or capital accumulation. He was not even aware of the dialectics between the economic base (total sum of the production-relations) and super-structure, qualitative leap during the constant struggle between the forces of production and production-relations and the definition of social revolution as the establishment of new production-relations as a consequence of the rupturing the production-relations by the forces of production. Like a casual scribbler he levels a charge of economic determinism on Marxism—which incidentally evolved during the struggle against economic determinism, a product of mechanical materialism—and says that Marxists consider human being as merely economic animal. What Marxism says is only this: the productive activities are fundamental activities of human beings for which they bind themselves in production-relations. It is the total sum of these production-relations which forms the base of society on which the huge edifice of super-structure of political-ideological-cultural-social institutions gets erected. Once built, the super-structure has its independent motion, on its turn it also influences the base and its clash with the new base and the new super-structure goes on. Throughout the period of socialist transition various forms of capitalist base remain and

constant struggle with the old superstructure also goes on along with the long process of continuous transformation. Because of not being aware of this proposition, Ambedkar, in an article written in *Janta* in 1938, made a childish comment that if the edifice of cultural and religious factors rests on the economic base, first the edifice needed to be broken in order to destroy the base. Even this criticism is made without having an understanding. Even communism talks of smashing the central political super-structural institution—the state—first in order to destroy the economic base and constant struggle needs to be waged against all religious-legal policies, values-beliefs and the institutions along with the struggle and politico-economic propaganda till the time people's consciousness is raised and organised to the stage of smashing the state. Marxism only says that any superstructural system can be smashed completely and finally only when its economic base is broken down. Marxism only says that ultimately the decisive factor is the base. We will return to this discussion later. Ambedkar considers religion to be necessary in any civil society by dismissing the conception of human being as merely an "economic animal". This "civil society" of Ambedkar is behind not only with the conception of the civil society by Hegel but also that of Locke and Rousseau which was an idealised form of the state of rationality and used to outrightly reject the presence of religion in the socio-political space. In fact, Ambedkar was not even aware of the thinking of the militant materialist bourgeois thinkers before Marx about formation of religion in definite circumstances and about the history of religion. He used to consider religion as something above humans, eternal guiding principle and was ignorant of its social origin. On this matter he was as conservative as Gandhi. He was only looking for a better religion than Hinduism and finally he zeroed down to a 2000-year-old primitive Buddhist religion. He did not go towards the anti-Brahmanic ancient materialistic philosophies like Ajivaks, Lokayat or Sankhya because they were not organised religion. It was Ambedkar's spiritual bankruptcy that he used to consider religion as the only spiritual wealth. Far from treating man as only "economic animal", Marxism considers a man who is devoid of spiritual wealth as not fulfilling the criteria of being human and its

aim is that the social structure needs to be destroyed in which the majority toiling population is deprived of the spiritual wealth owing to being fully engrossed in toil just for the sake of survival and on the other hand even the parasite classes who are devoid of the natural human characteristic of labour have only a degenerated culture of lust and luxury on the name of spiritual wealth. Marxism considers culture, art-literature, music, philosophy as spiritual wealth, the human essence. Had he read the works of Marx-Engels such as 'Economic and Philosophical manuscript of 1844', 'Holy family', 'German Ideology', 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' ('Grundrisse' was not published in his lifetime), had he been familiar with the references occurring here and there in 'Das Capital', had he been aware of even one hundredth part of the works on theory of linguistics, literature, art, music etc. till 1950 by dozens of people ranging from Lenin, Stalin, Mao to Gorky, Lunacharsky, Brecht, Lukacs, Vorovosky, Voronski etc. and the experiments in the field of socialist art-literature-music-cinema, his views about the spiritual wealth of Marxism would not have been so shallow.

What after all was Ambedkar's project of Dalit emancipation? Rapid industrialization. That even capitalism would want, but it could not do so by breaching the frontier of theatre of history and the strength of capital. Whatever it could do, it has done in last 60 years. What is the outcome? Ten percent of the Dalits have been elevated to middle-class (even they have to face social-segregation and alienation), some became the social props of the system and 90 percent of the Dalit population is condemned to do wage-slavery and face caste-based discrimination, segregation, humiliation and oppression, the only difference is that the situation has improved a bit. We are faced with a refined caste-system with the capitalist character. Whatever be the improvement, it is not only due to industrialization, but reservation also has a role in it. It was indeed a contribution of Ambedkar. When the demand of reservation was first made and when it was implemented, it was a bourgeois democratic demand looking at the conditions of Dalits (and even the backward castes). Today reservation has become a labyrinth. Most of the

clashes for the distribution of reservation are taking place between the Dalits and backwards, between the various castes and sub-castes among the Dalits and among the castes considered to be backward. That too in the era of neo-liberalism when the government jobs are continuously getting curtailed. In the sixty years, reservation has made ten percent of the Dalits as middle-class and two percent among them as upper middle-class and bourgeois class. Now the reach of reservation is confined to them only and this is the section which even though causes much furore against Dalit oppression but it has gone away from the rest ninety percent of the Dalit population after being co-opted by the system or by becoming the social prop of the system. Every capitalist system carries out this process of co-option and expansion of its social-props. Often reservation is opposed from the upper-caste mindset, but when reservation in itself dominates the agenda of Dalit emancipation and begins to divide them on the name of false hope, one would have to admit that it has become a tool of maintaining bourgeois democratic illusions rather than a bourgeois democratic demand. Reservation today is a non-issue, it needs to be replaced with 'education to all, employment to all' on the agenda of the Dalit emancipation. Till now we were talking about the reservation in the jobs. Insofar as the reservation in the government machinery (in the election seats) , it is a reactionary anti-Dalit demand. When a few Dalits enter the parliament and government, what happens is that they become the cogs of the bourgeois state, they could not carry out even the radical reforms for the Dalits by breaching the overall framework.

Insofar as the project of the elimination of the caste-system is concerned, Ambedkar never had a thorough idea about it. His famous essay of 1936 'Annihilation of Caste' is a maze of contradictory things whose ultimate conclusion is that the annihilation of caste is impossible. He says that in every country the intellectual class remains the most dominant class and among Hindus it constitutes only Brahmins who would not be ready for its elimination at any cost. Even the secular Brahmins, owing to their familial links would not stand against the priestly Brahmins. Even the

other castes of the Hindu society would not be ready for ending the caste-system. Then he proposes the inter-caste marriage as its cure, but since it is contrary to the religious principles and beliefs, it would not be possible without freeing people's mind from the yoke of religion and holy books. Towards this task, Ambedkar does not suggest any cultural movement, instead he says that elimination of caste system is almost impossible and it would take ages for it. The only way out of this is to wait for ages. Till then we need to put pressure within the existing system itself for some reliefs and concessions and wait for the lessening of the influence of the caste-system along with the capitalist development (industrialization).

He also considered religious-conversion as one of the solutions and in his last days he became a Buddhist. Although very few Dalits followed him but there was no improvement in the social status of even those who followed him, they ended up forming a category of the 'Neo-Buddhist' within the Dalit caste. Ambedkar did not take anything from the materialistic outlook of the Buddhist religion as regards the relation between man and nature, but like a devotee he discussed in detail its metaphysical idealistic narratives as regards individual and social code of conduct. It is in no way clear as to what would be the difference in the social status of the Dalits if they conduct themselves according to the *Ashtang Marg* of Buddha. He was not aware of this fact of history that even Buddhist and Jain religion had a role to play in the degraded social status of the untouchables and they too used to give recognition to the secondary social status of peasants, slaves and women. Later on even the rulers who embraced these religions were no less oppressors. We are not sure whether Ambedkar's attention was drawn to the fact that the fascist (and today's imperialist) Japan, China before revolution and other Buddhist countries did not remain behind any other capitalist country in the capitalist plunder, injustice and misconduct. It was a strange contradiction of Ambedkar that while on the one hand he was a staunch supporter of the democratic system and constitutionalism of the western countries, a follower of Edmund Burke and John Dewey, on the other hand he ultimately saw the

solution of the most important social problem in the 2000-year-old religion of the era of ancient republics. It is not possible here to discuss the entire historical-outlook of Ambedkar, but what could be certainly said that he was miles behind not only the historians of the age of revivalism—Thiery, Minye, Guizot and Thiers but also Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau who were born 150 years before his time. In other words, his historical outlook was nothing more than a vulgar idealism and speculation. Instead of investigating the material basis of the production-relations he believes the endogamy (intra-caste marriage) to be the root of the caste-system which was started by the Brahmins (which means they existed before the caste-system). Similarly, he explains the reason for the emergence of the caste-system to be the degeneration of the Aryan civilization. He does not proceed to explain the reason for the fall of Buddhist religion and simply concludes that after the victory of the Buddhist religion the rule of Brahmanism and caste-system were firmly established. We have discussed above the history on this question from the Marxist perspective. Here we only wish to clarify that in the fields of history, philosophy, politics and economics, Ambedkar's thought process was unoriginal, non-serious, full of contradictions and mostly incorrect. He was mainly and essentially a bourgeois reformist (to say this is not to insult him but to determine the category of his thoughts), a committed constitutionalist, he believed the great men and intellectuals and not the masses to be motive force in the making of history and he was not interested in exploring the definite science of the development of history because he did not believe that there are definite objective laws of social change. He indeed had a positive role in creating awareness among the Dalit population, in exposing the Congress leadership to an extent and in gaining a bourgeois democratic right like reservation in his time. But ignoring his negative roles would not help to serve the cause of the Dalit castes. Today it is the cause of ruling classes which is being served by making Ambedkar something beyond questions, by branding anyone to be anti-Dalit if he indulges in a rational debate on him and by making the "constitution-maker" Ambedkar to be a messiah. It is increasingly getting difficult to take any conversation on a

revolutionary project of the caste-annihilation to the Dalit population, the Dalit population keeps on moving in the maze of reforms and the labyrinth of the bourgeois parliamentary politics and a tiny population of the Dalit intellectuals who are being co-opted by the state are playing an important role in this. The Marxist intellectuals and groups who, instead of going in the depth and details of the analysis of thoughts, are presenting varied schemes of the abstract mixture of Ambedkarism and Marxism by eclectically selecting some quotations from here and there or by undertaking confession in the Christian manner by cursing the communist movement itself, are the utopian people who dream of alluring everyone by blowing magic pipe. Then there are some cunning intellectuals who are serving a new recipe of identity politics. We will discuss about them further.

After ending the discussion on Ambedkar here let us move to the politics of Periyar who happened to be his contemporary. The entire political life of Periyar was extremely inconsistent. He started with the politics of the Congress Party in 1919 and he separated from it as a protest against the dominance of upper-caste mentality in the Congress leadership and it not waging a social movement against the social evils. He founded 'Atma Samman League' in 1926 and waged social movements against Brahmanism and social evils. He was a staunch atheist. He visited Soviet Union in 1936 and after returning he even carried out the propaganda of socialism with Singaravelu Shettiar. But after a few days he became an opponent of the national movement and started to believe the presence of the British imperialism to be favourable to the Shudras and Dalit castes and in 1934 he joined the British supporter Justice Party. Afterwards he founded 'Dravid Kazhagam'. Going against the fact of history, Periyar believed that Brahmins are the successors of the external aggressor Aryans while non-Brahmins belong to Dravidian origin. On 15th August 1947 he observed a day of condolence by commemorating the day of the establishment of the Brahmin rule and in 1957 he even burnt down constitution for being silent on the annihilation of caste. Periyar was a supporter of rationalism and he even used to talk about egalitarian society, but in practice his

politics was confined to anti-north, anti-Hindi, anti-Brahmin and anti-religion. He used to raise the demand of separate Tamilnadu having more autonomy within the Indian union even before independence. However, the rational and atheistic thoughts of Periyar could not be effective at all in finding solution to the problem of caste-discrimination and in towards the emancipation of Dalits because his understanding of social contradictions was faulty and he did not have any concrete socio-economic programme. It was the reason why his political conduct was also full of contradictions. He extended his support to the Congress chief minister Kamraj who belonged to Nadar caste. When Anna Durai government of Dravid Munetra Kazhagam, which emerged out of the Dravid Kazhagam itself, came to power, he supported it. The first phase of the Periyar's political career was the time when Brahmins' social hegemony prevailed in the Tamil areas, but the economic prosperity was coming even to the non-Brahmin castes. It was from these castes that the rich owner farmers-Kulaks and regional capitalists evolved after independence; the parties such as DMK and AIADMK used to represent these classes only and the politics of anti-north was helpful in putting pressure on the capitalists in power at the centre. The so-called Shudra castes among whom these parties had base were in no way behind the Brahmins in the oppression of Dalits. Subsequently several parties evolved out of these parties which had bases in different castes. These parties did not have any problem in indulging in manipulation and forging coalition among themselves and with the parties such as Congress and BJP. After getting disillusioned from them several smaller parties of Dalits emerged but they only played the role of being a tail to either the DMK alliance or AAIDMK alliance.

Capitalist development in the post-colonial India and the Caste-System

Indian capitalist class, born as it was from a colonial socio-economic structure and brought up as it was in the imperialist world, could not hamper the interest of imperialism beyond a point (even the most radical of the capitalist classes of the newly independent countries

could not make a radical rupture with imperialism) nor could it carry out the bourgeois land reforms in a radical manner. From the British, it had inherited the administrative machinery and legal system of a unified country. It had also prepared a feeble constitution. Initially, the British imperial capital had more influence on it, but slowly it expanded its economic alternatives by taking advantage of the inter-imperialist rivalry and attempted to gain capital and technology on better conditions. Subsequently, it developed its own technology by Indianizing the same technology. Due to the lack of capital with the capitalist class here and in order to lessen the pressure of foreign capital, it utilized people's hard-earned money to erect the edifice of basic and infrastructural industries so that the development in private sector is expedited. This was the path of 'import substitution industrialization'. The banks were nationalized to facilitating more and more capital to the capitalists. The path of raising huge sum of capital from the share market was paved along with the growth of the well-off middle-class strata. When the strength of the capital of the capitalist class in India was enormously increased, the process of selling the state enterprises at paltry sums ensued. This era of privatization-liberalization of Indian capitalism was indicative of its necessity, compulsion as well as its increasing confidence. In this era of neo-liberalism, even the crisis-ridden international capital had put pressure to end the protectionist policies. Indian capitalism on the one hand gave the open opportunity to the imperialists to take its share in the vast and continuously expanding Indian market and on the other hand it also gradually began to invest more and more outside the country in the globalized world market. The condition of the Indian capitalist class in the global capitalist system is that of a Junior Partner of the imperialists. It manages to get a small portion of the surplus extracted at the global level, but at the country level it remains the big stakeholder even today. It is standing in the ranks of such post-colonial countries that possess relatively more developed productive forces.

The character of the Indian capitalist class evolved in the historical conditions in such a manner that it could not make a decisive blow

on the interests of the small and big land-owners by carrying out radical land reforms. Hence it implemented an Indian edition which was a mix of Germany's Junker-type transformation and Russia's Stolypin-type land-reforms. It gave opportunity to the old exploiters to change the modus-operandi of exploitation. The estates of the old kings and princes were taken over but their immeasurable wealth, forts-banglows and landed-property were left out. Besides, they were given privy-purses for two decades. It was on account of this wealth that the kings joined the ranks with the big capitalists as sleeping-partner either as the owner of the hotel or as big share-holder in the industries, or they became the capitalist landlords. The abolition of Zamindari was carried out at slow pace and the feudal landlords were given opportunity to transform their character from being rent dependent to bourgeois landlord who produces for the market, could save most of their land from ceiling or join the ranks of urban upper middle-class. A large section of even the erstwhile rich and medium tenants also became capitalist farmer-kulak after becoming land owner. Most of them belong to the middle castes such as Reddy, Kamma, Thever, Maratha, Jaat, Kurmi, Kushwaha, Sainthwar etc. As their economic condition improved, their Sanskritization process moved forward. In the bourgeois parties, the blocks of kulaks-farmers were formed and their parties came into existence at regional level. The caste played the most important role in preparing the mass base of such parties. In terms of oppressing the Dalits, the farmers of these middle castes (so called shudra castes) were much ahead of the bourgeois landlords belonging to upper-caste who were successors of the old feudal landlords.

The so called green and white revolutions on the one hand prepared the fertile ground for the entry of capital into villages and agri-business and on other hand provided ample opportunity to the capitalist landlord-kulaks of surplus appropriation as per the strength of capital. The agro-based and allied sector developed throughout the country. Even the urban rich invested the accumulated capital into agriculture. The tendency of capital-intensive modern agriculture moved forwards. The differentiation of the peasant population was

intensified. The remaining traces of natural economy and local markets were finished and even the remotest corners of the country got attached with the national and international market. Even the old system of land-tenure which was prevalent in some places, did not become an obstacle in the path of capitalist development (as clarified even by Marx and Engels). If we see the character of rent, it has become totally capitalistic. The capitalism in agriculture has either broken various pre-capitalist structures or it has co-opted them. The sphere of the existence of the pre-capitalist remnants has been shrinking. This tendency has given way to labour migration from villages on a large-scale. For the industrial capitalists it becomes easier to buy labour-power at lower price. The hell-like labour colonies of the industrial metropolitan cities were flooded with adhoc, casual, daily-wage, contract and piece-rate workers and huge population of semi-proletariat.

Thus, a mediocre, distorted-skewed capitalism was developed in India through an excessively painful path which either broke the various pre-capitalist formations in a gradual manner or subordinated and co-opted them. Such a capitalism was totally incapable of creating healthy democratic values and beliefs. Its democracy was itself extremely limited and distorted-skewed. This was the reason why it did not touch the pre-capitalist values and institutions. The Khap Panchayats and the Caste Panchayats continued to exist and the shackle of orthodoxy continued to prevail in society. If they are weakened to some extent, it was not due to the conscious attempt by the state or the provisions of the constitutions but the independent objective motion of the capitalist development had a role in it. The interference of religion has not ended; it was merely loosened a bit. On the other hand, some newer modern sects have arisen which are not only an effective medium of propagating superstitions and status-quoism but a medium of capital accumulation and investment as well. In the capitalist system the objective basis of religion is the invisible power of commodity production and even today religion is an extremely effective superstructural instrument aiding the political hegemony of the ruling class. But the question of the caste-system is

not only linked to the superstructural plane. It is deeply entangled and articulated with the capitalist production-relations. The issue is not confined to being a feudal remnant or continued effectiveness of the feudal superstructure. A new economic base of caste-based values-beliefs and segregations-prejudices has been prepared.

This is because the capitalist production and distribution system has established its hegemony without breaking the casteist equation of the different sections of population. For instance, today the old upper caste people almost dominate the bureaucracy and the independent intellectual professions and caste becomes a bond for their unity for protecting their shared interest. As a reaction the officers-clerks and independent intellectuals belonging to the Dalit and backward castes organize themselves by making caste-based blocks. In the villages, the upper-caste capitalist land-owners and the middle caste Kulaks-farmers carry out caste-based mobilization for suppressing the Dalit labourers and poor peasants. The biggest advantage they get from this caste-based mobilization is that even the poor belonging to upper castes actively or passively tend to take side of the exploiters belonging to their caste. The Dalits too tend to stand behind the leader of a party inheriting Ambedkar's legacy for defensive unity on the question of their identity and self-respect.

The situation of the cities is slightly different. But the caste-based segregation exists there as well and also its material basis. The proportion of Dalits in the organized working-class population having better living condition is quite less. Among the unorganized workers they have significant presence and even there they have a monopoly over all the works considered to be unhygienic. Besides, they have to do most of the burdensome and low-paying jobs. Even in the government jobs, the sanitary workers are Dalits. The reservation has benefitted ten percent of the Dalit population but as one goes upwards in the job hierarchy their percentage gets reduced to one to two percent. Administration, army, police, judiciary and independent intellectual profession — everywhere the condition remains the same. If there is any community which stands at equivalent position,

it is the Muslim community whose majority is poor and most of them are involved in independent handicrafts.

Among the factory-workers, those belonging to upper and middle castes who have not yet been uprooted completely are in huge numbers. Whatever little farms they are left with, they somehow manage the loss-making agriculture through their wages. The shade of peasantry is clearly seen in the proletariat character of such workers and it also blunts its class-consciousness and maintains the casteist prejudices. Most of the Dalit workers are either completely uprooted from the villages or even if they are attached their family's condition in the village is that of rural proletariat or semi-proletariat. But the caste-based segregation and humiliation creates the consciousness of uniting on caste-basis even among them. Even in the cities, the residential apartheid of the Dalit castes is clearly visible although not to the extent as that in the villages. It is seen not only in the working class but in the middle class as well. In the residential co-operative societies it is almost impossible for Dalits and Muslim to become their members. Even in getting house on rent the biggest obstacle is that of caste (or religion) even in the metro cities.

The bourgeois parliamentary politics in India does not work on a socio-economic programme but with the help of the open game of capital and some cheap populist promises or the wave of prevailing mood, but caste-based polarization remains its most important pillar today. The bourgeois parties, through policies, do not serve any caste, but to the whole ruling class. They consist of small and big capitalists, blocks of kulaks and landlords, the kulaks and regional capitalists have their own regional parties as well, their class-interest also clash with each other, but they have consensus on general bourgeois economic policies and the parliamentary system. But every big bourgeois party has leaders from various castes in order to take advantage of caste equations and candidates in the constituencies are chosen by looking at proportion of their caste in the population. Insofar as the parties representing the interests of the regional capitalists are concerned, their main vote bank rests with

the middle castes. All the parliamentary parties which claim to represent the Dalits are extremely opportunistic parties at the policy level, the well-to-do Dalit middle class gets its place in their leadership, the Dalit bureaucrats and intellectuals give support to this or that party among them and they make the Dalit population which has been oppressed for millennia as their vote-bank on caste basis. These parties raise new hopes by adopting radical posture and are ready to make an alliance with the Congress, BJP or any party an opportune moment. In the bourgeois politics of coalitions, they play the role of weighing-stone of weighing machine to be put on this side or the other side. The logic of overcoming the social status of oppression and humiliation on the basis of share in power has reached to this level in the last sixty years; let the ideological vendors of identity politics celebrate as much as they want in the auditorium, the ordinary toiling Dalit masses are not going to achieve anything. It has not achieved so far, nor will it achieve anything in future.

The inter-relationship of caste and class and ‘base-superstructure’ Metaphor: Marxist formulation

Before discussing the thinking and role of the communist movement on the caste question in independent India and a critique of some “Dalit/Ambedkarite-Marxists” and some Dalit ideological streams, it would be better that we positively put forward our stand on the interrelationship between caste and class in framework of the base-superstructure analogy.

It is the basic understanding of Marxist political economy that there are three aspects of production-relations: (i) form of ownership, (ii) people’s role in production and their interrelationship (division of labour), and (iii) the form of distribution of product. From all the three-perspective caste-system has been a form of production-relations since the period of ancient India till the later medieval era (before the colonial era). In other words, despite relative internal

motion and the 'Sanskritization' of some castes, the caste system in fact constituted the production-relations. The situation changed slightly after the coming of Muslims, a model of caste-system was developed even among them. To an extent the same happened even with the Sikh religion. So, till the medieval era the caste-system formed the economic base of society and the political-religious-social superstructure used to be in relative conformity with it, that is to say that the values of caste-discrimination used to play decisive role in the social life. It can be said that the spectrum of caste-groups was more or less completely overlapping with the spectrum of class. Owing to inheritance and endogamy, the conditions of caste-groups were that of dynamic or static classes. Such a condition used to arise from conservative and rigid division of labour and in this sense, it was different from any other society in the world. The condition of Muslims and Sikhs was slightly different, but among the followers of Hinduism the caste-groups themselves formed class in which the Dalit castes were landless labourers, middle castes were peasants, the 'vanik' castes were traders and the upper-castes were divided between land-owning classes and intellectual class.

For the first time there was some turbulence in the colonial socio-economic structure, particularly after the development of industries, administrative machinery and the numerous urban professions. The spectrum of the caste-groups and that of the class-groups instead of almost completely overlapping with each other got displaced to some extent. Most of the people belonging to upper-caste were land-owners even now and the petty-bourgeois class including the intellectual community developed from among them only. But different strata of the petty-bourgeois class developed even from within the Dalits and middle castes, although their proportion was very less. Most of the middle castes were Raiyat-tenants and the Dalit castes were farm labourers or belonged to the working class which used to do 'lowly' and 'unhygienic' works. On the other hand, there was entry of upper caste and the middle caste tenants who were gradually being uprooted in the industries and their numbers began to grow. Even at that time, the caste basis of division of labour

and production relations was stronger in the villages. Thus, the situation of overlapping between caste and class began to be disrupted. That is to say that the caste-system was still a part of the economic base (total sum of the production-relations) but it alone did not remain part of economic base. Insofar as superstructure is concerned, mainly and essentially it remained feudal with its main base as semi-feudal land-relations. The feeble capitalist ideas and institutions which got developed, did not have the strength to affect the caste-system. Even the educated people belonging to petty-bourgeois class who were modern in some sectors of social base not only used to follow religious rites faithfully but used to believe in the tradition of endogamy and caste-based discrimination. We have discussed above that it was a conscious policy of the colonial rulers not to touch the Hindu religion and caste-system.

The all-round capitalist development in the post-colonial India brought about significant changes in the situation. Along with the broad expansion of industries a vast service sector also got developed and the capitalist transformation of the land-relations continuously speeded up the differentiation, proletarianization and migration of rural population. The situation of inter-penetration and interweaving of caste and class remained prevalent. It is the upper castes which dominate the bureaucracy and the independent intellectual professions even now, but the Dalits and middle castes have interfered in these spheres. The landlords, kulaks and farmers mainly consist of upper caste and middle caste people but there are lower-medium and small peasants and workers belonging to the middle castes. A large population of the middle castes consists of small farmers only. Ninety percent of Dalit population consists of the proletariat and semi-proletariat, but the majority of the proletarian and semi-proletarian population are not Dalits. The so called 'impure' works are still performed by Dalits only. The handicrafts sector has shrunk a lot, but even now the "Kamin" Muslim castes and the Dalit and extremely backward artisan castes work in this sector and there is negligible presence of other castes in it. How to formulate such a situation? Even now a portion of the 'total sum of production

relations' (economic base) is the caste-based division of labour and the caste-based ownership. In other words, the caste-system is still a part of the base, albeit smaller. It is true that even now the caste-system has presence, in fact strong presence at the superstructural plane. Even now, owing to the barbaric slavery of women and the religious values and beliefs which are nurtured by the capitalist mode of production, the inter-caste marriages are rare and the main trend is intra-caste marriage only. Marriage in different castes having the same economic status is difficult. The tyrannical regime of 'Khap-Panchayats' and 'caste-Panchayats' and 'Honor Killing' are the realities which render even the civil rights provided in the bourgeois constitution as worthless. Hence, the caste-system, even though it forms a small part of the economic base, is intact in rigid and strong form as a form of social structure on the superstructural plane. It is preserved not only by its old inertia but the capitalist system has given it a new vigour. Although untouchability and forms of day-to-day repression are left in lesser extent, the social segregation and humiliation of Dalits continues unabated and the brutal incidents of atrocities over them keep on happening. In the villages, often the upper-caste landowners and more than them the Kulaks belonging to middle castes commit atrocities on the Dalit labourers and then they strengthen their position by doing caste-based mobilization. The workers belonging to other castes do not take the side of the Dalit workers. Thus, the clash of economic interests is coloured with casteism. The essence remains that of class-struggle and it gets expressed in a distorted manner as caste-struggle. The upper-caste and middle-caste land-owners being the junior partner of the ruling establishment, any legal action against them is taken either for the namesake or out of compulsion of the bourgeois politics. As far as the tyrannical Khap Panchayats are concerned, they do not have independent political power (as some neo-Marxists such as theoreticians of the New Socialist Initiative think), they are the strong social-props of the bourgeois nation-state and are umbilically attached to the bourgeois politics. As we have discussed above, the entire game of vote-bank in the bourgeois parliamentary politics is played on the caste-based and communal polarization, then on its

turn this game enhances the mutual hostility and segregation of the castes and strengthens the social structure of the caste whose victims are obviously mostly the Dalit castes. While the caste-system distorts and disfigures the class-struggle in the rural areas and breaks the unity of the broad toiling masses, it becomes an obstacle in the class-unity of the toiling masses in the urban areas. Although, unlike the rural areas it is not the main obstacles in the urban areas. In none of the spontaneous or organized struggles of the unorganized workers waged in the recent times, the caste-based discrimination was found to be a problem for unity. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that the walls of caste-based discrimination and segregation exist even among the urban proletariat which is exploited by the trade union leaders of the bourgeois parties. Secondly, the Dalit workers involved in the 'impure' works stand isolated, both in the struggles and in the social life.

Wrapping up all the details it can be formulated that caste-system even today forms part of the economic base and its presence is fiercely effective at the level of social-cultural-ideological superstructure. It is not a pre-capitalist superstructure, nor its remnant. It is a capitalist superstructure. It is a capitalist caste-system. The caste-system has been co-opted through articulation. Using the Hegelian terminology, it can be said that the caste-system has been sublated, that is from a lower-level phenomenon it is become a higher (complex) level phenomenon in which the substance of past development is present. Even now small sections of the spectrums of caste-groups and the classes overlap each other.

On some incorrect and some incomplete and half-baked formulations

An accurate formulation of the interrelationship between the caste and class in the context of production-relations and social superstructure is not found in the official documents and write-ups of the communist movement from beginning till the era of revisionism; what is found is only some general description and discussion of

tasks. In his article *Caste, Class and Property-Relations* written sometime in the decade of 1970s, B.T. Randive escapes from theoretically formulating what is mentioned in the title itself. The historians such as Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and Irfan Habib have given clear and more or less accurate formulations with regard to the caste and production-relations in ancient and medieval India, but after the development of capitalism in the post-colonial India, the attempt to understand this began after quite a while.

From the last century till today, various communist-revolutionary groups have written extensively on this question and even the neo-Marxist and post-modernist Marxist “thinkers” have been involved in a lot of discourse. There is an abundance of mechanical and anti-Marxist stand in the formulation of the communist-revolutionary groups and there are lot of things which create illusions. On the other hand, the mix and match done by the neo-Marxist clique is nothing but a somersault to craft a “new Marxism”. Here it is possible only to discuss some representative trends and we will stick to that only.

First of all, let us consider a formulation by the late general secretary of CPI(ML)(Liberation) Vinod Mishra which twists the very basic Marxist understanding of base and superstructure itself. In the April 1994 edition of ‘Liberation’ while writing a critique of Thomas Mathew’s book *Caste and Class Dynamic—Radical Ambedkarite Praxis* he puts forward many correct criticisms about the concept of ‘Dalit democratic revolution’ and about Ambedkar, but at the same time he also gives some surprising propositions. In this article he writes: “So, class is the basic category. In certain historical situations it may express itself in the form of castes, in other situations the two may be interwoven, overlapping and at the same time crisscrossing each other, and in yet another situation castes are disintegrated to crystallize as classes. This is how the antithesis between two proceeds, until the caste as the regulator of mode of distribution stands annihilated.”

Here we get to know that caste is not in the division of labour or property-relations but a regulator of the mode of distribution. Now the

question arises as to where should we put this “regulator”, in the economic base as a part of the mode of production or outside it. He answers this when he writes another comment in the January 1995 edition of ‘Liberation’ on the response given by Mathew on this critique. In this comment he writes, “For me, the caste system itself was the product of a certain mode of production and the corresponding level of production relations. Class relations here assume the form of castes, which, in their turn, are given a divine sanction by priests. Their ‘permanence’, however, is determined primarily not by any divine sanction but by the static social organization of the village community which again is the product of a definite level of productive forces. The caste and class here appear in an apparent harmony. This harmony of class and caste, this correspondence of base and superstructure is apparent because the two are distinctly separate categories rooted respectively in the base and the superstructure, in the mode of production and regulation of distribution.”

Till now we knew from the famous quotation of the preface of Marx’s work *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that Marx used to consider the total sum of the production-relations as economic base and not the mode of production. Mode of Production refers to the unity of the forces of production and production-relations which shows the achieved level of production of the means of production and consumer goods in particular time duration. It is the dialectics between the production-relations and the forces of production which is the fundamental contradiction of class society. While there are many Marxists who create confusion by referring the mode of production as the economic base, Vinod Mishra gives an “original” proposition by referring to mode of production as base and regulation of distribution as superstructure. As per the basics of Marxist political economy the form of ownership, role of people in production and their interrelationship and the form of distribution of the product, all three are the three aspects of production-relations. Vinod Mishra has invented a new Marxist Political Economy by putting the distribution (that is its form) in the arena of

superstructure, while Marxism till now has been putting the political-legal-social-cultural institutions and the definite forms of social consciousness (ideology, values etc.) in the arena of superstructure. Even Marx had said the same. The series of Vinod Mishra's mistakes goes like this: the mode of production (production-relations + forces of production) is base (wrong); the regulation of distribution is superstructure (wrong); caste is related to merely regulation of distribution and not with the mode of production (this also is wrong). Now he conveniently reaches to the conclusion that the dialectics between class and caste is the one between base and superstructure. Further he writes, "As the level of productive forces develops and the mode of production undergoes a slow change, the harmony is broken; class and caste, base and superstructure come into conflict, each trying to define the other."

Here it seems to be suggested that class stands in base (and caste in superstructure). Yet another confusion! There are many who commit this mistake of describing the class as only an economic category or referring it as base itself. Class is a basic social category. The production-relations are the cause of its rise and its determination. In Lenin's words, "*Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in the historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.*" (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.29, page 421). As Marx wrote in the famous preface of the above-mentioned book, "*In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will.*" After these relations are established, men get divided into classes. In itself classes are not production-relations so that we could call it as base.

One of the streams of neo-Marxists reject the analogy of base-superstructure itself as mechanical and describe it as inadequate to understand the questions such as caste and gender.

In this context, an article by the two representatives of this stream—Subhash Gatade and Umashankar (published in 'Sandhan-1', paper read in the Seminar of the 'Saajha Sanskritik Abhiyan')—titled 'The question of Dalit Emancipation' is cited. When they come to the question of class and caste, initially one gets the feeling that the thinker-duo have reservations against the mechanical understanding of the economic base and superstructure and the economic understanding of the class-struggle. But later on it gets clear that they are in fact inspired by the purpose of rejecting them altogether. They tell us that everything has a phenomenal level and an essential structural level. We cannot directly reach to the structural level through sense-perception. For this one has to go through the process of abstraction. Further, they inform us that mode of production is an essential social structure and owing to its relation on structural level class is a structural concept, not merely an economic concept. The greater the complexity of a social system, deeper is its structural level and by the time it reaches on the phenomenal level its impact gives rise to as much complex and diverse properties. The ultimate conclusion is that in the complex formation of today's capitalist mode of production the class struggle at the structural level would not manifest itself directly or separately. It will often come as entwined and diversified form of social struggles only." In other words, the class struggle will now take place in the form of social movements focused on caste, gender and environment etc. It is to reach to this conclusion that we are first taught the ABC of Marxist epistemology. Every Marxist knows that everything has a phenomenal level, a level of appearance and through sense-perception we reach to the level of perception. The second level is the structural level, the level of essence to which we reach through the process of abstraction, it is the stage of conception or that of conceptual knowledge. Till here it is fine. It is after this that the bungle lies. Everything in nature and in society has a structural plane

and a phenomenal plane. It is not as if class struggle is a structural concept whose phenomenal level is the social movements. Class has a phenomenal level (level of perception) and a structural level (level of conception). Mode of production has a phenomenal level and a structural level. Caste has a phenomenal level and a structural level. When a common man says that we are workers and are fighting for our right, or when he says that capitalism is plunderer, or when he says we belong to this caste, or we do not believe in caste, he is at the phenomenal level, at the level of perception. When a person reaches to the level of definition and role of the working class by carrying out social analysis, when he tells about the qualities and contradictions of a particular mode of production through intense study and analysis, when he speaks after understanding the historical socio-economic basis of caste, he is speaking at the structural level or at conceptual level. It is here that a muddle has been created. If the class struggle will now manifest itself only in form of social movements, it needs to be asked whether the myriad spontaneous and organized workers' movements which are taking place with their economic-political class demands or the owner farmers are waging movements with their class demands of costs and minimum support price, not the movements of classes?

It is in relation to this very logic that the thinker-duo passionately say, "some people think that the economic base is a kind of foundation on which the superstructural edifice is built. All this is verbal jugglery based on wrong understanding. If we dig the society, it is not as if the mode of production will begin to be seen or the concrete base cannot be made visible by penetrating the superstructure." If the first sentence in this is a verbal jugglery, then this has been played by everybody from Marx to Mao. It is the truth. Whatever Marx wanted to convey through this metaphor is clear in the preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Every metaphor, comparison or resemblance is incomplete and lame. Even Lenin said the same. To take an analogy literally is to extend a logic to the level of nonsense. If we take it literally a counter-argument can be made that with which spade will we dig the society? With which arrow will

we penetrate the superstructure? A Marxist does not study a mode of production by penetrating the superstructure but through the mechanism of reaching from the phenomenal level to the structural level by studying and analyzing the economic facts. The study of the mode of production means the study of development of production-relations (form of ownership+division of labour+forms of distribution) and the forces of production and the study of the development of internal contradictions going on in between the two. Similarly, he/she studies the superstructure and certify their conclusions related to the base. Further they try to understand the contradiction between the base and superstructure. Here there is another bungle. The mode of production has been referred to as base and not the total sum of the production-relations. To replace the mode of production with production-relations is to conceal the contradiction between the total sum of production-relations and the forces of production which is manifested in form of social class struggle. The same mistake was committed by Vinod Mishra as well. Anyways, the main purpose of the thinker-duo is to describe the so-called social movements themselves as the only form of class struggle.

The thinker-duo in-fact create an imaginary character of a narrow-minded communist, put some stupid things in his mouth and then while refuting them they say some right things and then take them to their desired conclusion through their “new” epistemology. Their own conclusion is clear that the class struggle will now be manifested at the phenomenal level in the form of social movements only. They level a charge on communists that while they consider the strikes and land-struggle as class struggle, when it comes to the struggles as as the anti-Dalit oppression struggle or the struggle for woman emancipation, they consider them to be isolated from the class struggle, still they take part in these social movements because the revolutionaries have to take part in the social movements. Even a communist having an average level of understanding does not think like this. It is a general understanding of Marxism that every social movement has a class substance. It is an indirect or distorted form of class struggle which arises out of the social contradictions of the

society in question. The communist leadership through participating in the struggle tries to bring the above contradiction in the role of the subordinate aid to the main contradiction because ultimately that contradiction can be resolved along with the resolution of the main contradiction. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat strive to establish their hegemony over every social movement. Let us take examples: The movement of nations and nationalities is the movement of the people of a nation or nationality under the leadership of national bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie against the ruling big bourgeoisie of a multi-nation country. Communists support it because it is against the bourgeois state. At the same, along with supporting the right of self-determination they also tell through continuous propaganda that the solution to the root problem lies in socialism, a step ahead of national independence. There is a clear-cut class character of student movement, from the viewpoint of substance it is a united front of middle class and other classes of people. Bourgeois politics tries to establish its hegemony through bourgeois student organizations and the proletarian politics tries to align the struggle of common students with the proletarian struggle by establishing its hegemony over it. Women's movement too is a movement of the women of all the classes. Various forms of the bourgeois women's movement fight for some concessions-reforms within the system while a women's movement guided by the proletarian politics even while participating in these struggles takes it in the direction of struggle for socialism, it constantly tells that ultimately the slavery of women belonging to all classes can only end during the period of socialist transition. It gives greater stress on organizing the women belonging to working class and lower-middle class because the women belonging to the upper class owing to their class interest do not accept the slogan of socialism and the radical path of struggle and they are immersed in the legal reforms and celebration of the identity itself. Even the mutual clashes among the castes are essentially the distorted and skewed forms of class struggle only. If bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leadership is dominant in the Dalit organizations, even while they have different remedies, they essentially confine the wider Dalit population to some reforms within

the system only. The task of proletarian politics is to struggle within the sphere of the democratic rights against the oppression of the toiling majority Dalit population and at the same time align it to the common demands of the wider toiling population belonging to other castes, to present a comprehensive programme of caste-annihilation and to carry out continuous propaganda and organize movement for breaking the segregation and prejudices at the superstructural plane. Thesis of the thinker-duo can be seen in a more refined form and with more open intentions in the draft manifesto of the 'New Socialist Initiative' (January, 2011). The one visible change in the manifesto is that the stand that the class struggles will now be manifested in the social movements only, has been given up. The manifesto recognizes even the movements of workers and that of toiling masses as forms of class struggle, but at the same time it cleverly reaches to the stage of writing a new edition of identity politics with the ladder of Marxist logic. The manifesto tells us that a person does not have a single identity but multiple identities. "As a social unit every individual stands on many axes" and "takes multiple identities along." So among the many axes, class is one. Further, "gender, caste, race, ethnicity, nationality and religious identity are examples of the social relations which cut through the axis of class relations in different ways and thereby create the social reality." So these lines have their independent existence and cut through the axis of class relation. Earlier, it has been mentioned that they themselves are axes. This alternative language of discourse which stands apart from the Marxist analysis is quite confusing. But its intention is obvious and that is to make all the contradictions as equivalent and to disintegrate the social struggles into the struggles of identities instead of organizing the class struggle of masses around the main social contradiction. Marxism tells us that amongst these myriad so-called identities many are burden of past which have been kept intact consciously in order to stop class-polarization. Some remnants are at the superstructural plane and some have their roots in the base of new production-relations as well. Some are imagined identities which are either the remnants of past or constructed. Some are the contradictions which have been intact during the entire

duration of class society, e.g. the question of gender. Earlier, the subservience of women had feudal character, now it is capitalistic. Some contradictions essentially come under the multi-level and multi-form contradictions of the capitalist society. Capitalism has adopted several pre-capitalist structures by reinvigorating them, it apparently gives the impression of an ostensible continuity of some contradictions from the past, but their class structural essence has changed. Since productive activity is the basic human activity, therefore, the production relations alone could be the base of society and the classes formed out of them could alone be the basic categories and in the root of other social categories lie this class essence in one way or the other. Hence, it is obvious that amongst all identities of human beings, class identity alone is the overriding identity. It is only on this basis that a broad mass mobilization can be carried out. To strengthen the class identity is not to leave other identities but it is to align the masses struggling on the judicious questions of nationality, gender, caste etc. with the main struggle. Class identity alone is the universal identity which overlaps all other identities. Capitalism uses the struggles of all identities as safety valve, smoke-screen and an instrument of diminishing the class polarization by articulating it as per its convenience. The vanguard of proletariat understands their class essence and subordinates them to the wider revolutionary struggle; it makes them as its constituting element. Today there is a whole stream of neo-Marxist thinking which is using the phraseology of post-modernist discourse (it also includes identity politics) in order to escape from or go away from the basic propositions on the questions of class analysis, class struggle, party, state and revolution. Subhash Gatade-brand thinkers of this stream celebrate the new rise of self-identity in the several small organizations and movements of Dalits, but they do not see as to how these myriad organizations become the abhorrent opportunist players of the parliamentary politics in a short course of time. They do not see that one of the culminations of the rising of the identities is coming to fore in the form of mutual clashes between the Dalit castes-subcastes (e.g. Mala-Madiga struggle in Andhra Pradesh) and segregation. They do not tell us as how any project of Dalit

emancipation and caste-annihilation will be developed through these risings of Dalit identity. They remain devoted towards Ambedkar for bringing out realization of Dalit identity and for bringing awareness against the social oppression of Dalits and they are never tired of blaming and accusing the communists for ignoring the caste-question and keeping a distance from Ambedkar, but they have never analyzed the political outlook, political role, his project of Dalit emancipation and his outlook of economics and history. They do not tell us how factual and logical were Ambedkar's thoughts on Marxism, the "pig's philosophy", on the dictatorship of proletariat, on religion and on the superiority of Buddhist religion over Marxism. Such people believe that it is important to worship Ambedkar for taking the Dalits along and condemning the communists has become a sort of ritual to them. An oppressed community does not come along if one carry the constructed idol of their old hero, one has to give it a concrete programme and a clear project of emancipation. It might take long time in this task if the subjective forces of revolution are weak due to other objective and subjective reasons. But there is no other alternative. This thinking is thoroughly incorrect that the main reason for the failure of the communist movement has been its lack of understanding and avoidance of the caste-system. The main reason for the failure of the communist movement is its inability to intensively study-analyze the base and superstructure of Indian society owing to its ideological weakness and its inability to develop a thorough programme—strategy and general tactics. Its inability in not determining the concrete task by correctly analyzing the caste question is a part of this main weakness or a by-product.

Among the communist groups in India, many have tried to give an interpretation of the caste-question but they are often superficial, incomplete or wrong. Somebody says that the production-relations in the past were based on caste-system (then the caste-system was based on what?). Somebody says that the caste-system was based on the division of labour (was it based on or the caste was itself a rigid structure of the division of labour, or whether it was only division of labour or the caste used to determine

the form of ownership and the modus-operandi of distribution as well?). Somebody says that the caste was linked with the production-relations (was it only linked or was it part of it and to which category it belonged—base or superstructure or both?). Also, there are those who consider caste as a superstructure only in all the era whose base was production-relations (and it is even now). Even while giving the history of the origin and development of the caste-system several wrong propositions (not accepted by the established Marxist historians) have been given, but it is not possible to discuss them here. In the colonial era, despite the presence of feudalism, the entry of industrial capital both maintained and attacked on its root, the overlapping between the spectrum of the caste-groups and that of class-groups was breached to some extent and in the post-colonial period it was shrunk to a great extent. There is a lack of clarity on this process in the writings of the communist revolutionary groups.

Some M-L groups owing to their inability to correctly formulate the caste-question believe it to be a pre-capitalist superstructure (social formation) based upon the semi-feudal land-relations while others view its presence even in the fabric of base of land-relations. The problem is that all such groups ignore the statistics about the nature of land-rent, the dominant tendency of the farmers to produce for markets after getting the ownership, presence of a national market linked to the international market, polarization of the peasant population, the tendency of differentiation and proletarianization, increasing encroachment of capital in agriculture and the expansion of industrial-finance capital and simply count the land-tenancy system, usury and the feudal remnants and give up the basic parameters of Marxist political economy and for the last 42 years they are adamant on accomplishing revolution in India on the model of New Democratic Revolution of China and even after a time span of 50 years they are still sticking to the 1963 document on the general orientation of the world proletarian revolution. The prometheus of Indian revolution is still tied to the rock of new democratic revolution with the chains of dogma. Among such groups some believe that the Dalit question/caste question in essence is a

land question. So a radical democratic land programme can solve this. Now what needs to be understood is that even if the stage of revolution is that of democratic revolution, (as clarified by Lenin) it cannot be the aim of communists to make the landless rural workers as the small-scale commodity producers by distributing land at the family level as a general land policy. The programme of democratic revolution first of all gives the ownership rights to the peasants, ends the strata of rent dependent landlords, motivates the peasants for co-operative and then collective farming, makes the state farms (which set an example) on the excess land the big estates, it makes a collective farm for the landless rural workers on the self-cultivated land of feudal landlords which have been taken over (in some special circumstances if the land is to be distributed in more backwards countries, co-operative are organized) and the sale-purchase of labour power is prohibited in agriculture. Even those middle owner farmers who are not ready to leave private farming immediately cannot hire labourers for cultivating their farms. Let us see the situation in India. The farmers have turned into owners and the big farmers have made a large section of small farmers as proletariat. The feudal rent and the rent dependent landlord have become thing of the past. The practical reality of today is that even if through a miraculous way all the landless people are handed over all the uncultivated land and the land obtained after strictly implementing ceiling (which the bourgeois land owner class, a junior partner of the state, will never allow to happen), every landless family would get 1.5 to 2 bigha land and very soon the magnet of capital will take it to the big land owners.

(if all the land is equally distributed among all the families, then every family would get 3.68 hectare of land, but how will this castle in the air be built and if it has to be done by the proletariat state, why would it do it the first place?) Secondly, in today's agriculture more than area it is the invested capital which matters. After becoming small owning peasant, the condition of landless workers would be worse than that of the factory workers, due to lack of capital. This we can see even today. Therefore, even today when the immediate

demands are raised for distributing the land to the rural labourers on lease, they are as much reactionary as are the demands related to the costs and support price raised by the owner farmers. The communist revolutionary groups which think in the framework of democratic revolution see the caste-system either in form of land question or of feudal superstructure. They fail to see the changed capitalist form of the caste-system.

There is yet another very strange stream which earlier used to believe in the stage of socialist revolution but has now gone back on it. It believes that the big feudalism of the kings and princes has got over (its remnants are left now) but small feudalism survives today in every village in the form of landowners and sharecroppers (this stream does not tell us that how is it that we can consider these landowners and sharecroppers as feudal?). The problem of caste is related to this small feudalism inextricably. The bigger plot of land lies with the 'upper' caste landowners (this is wrong, the bigger plot of land and capital-intensive agriculture rests with middle castes today). The small feudalism, the existence of temples-mosques-waqfs-churches-gurudwaras, remnants of the big feudalism and caste-problem, all these combine together to make feudalism as the main contradiction. So, the political economy went for a toss, the contradiction is determined by simple arithmetic aggregation only. This stream suggests the solution to the caste-problem that the socialist state would nationalize the whole land (for this even the lower middle class peasant population would not come along) and would distribute the land to people at the lowest pedestal and go towards the upper echelons of poor population (why will it not distribute equally?), then it would complete democratic revolution by completing the journey from co-operative farming to commune (so the state will be socialist but it will do democratic revolution!), in the same process there would be perpetual struggle at the superstructural plane and thus the caste-system would be destroyed from its roots. What to comment on such superficial, utopian, farcical Marxist dreams? But when a movement disintegrates, one has to be ready to read and listen to the extremely foolish original propositions.

There is yet another group which believes in the stage of socialist revolution in India. Even though, to a large extent it correctly discusses the cracks in the old caste-system along with the capitalist development and the increasing caste-division in the castes and it underlines the effective presence of caste-system even today, yet it does not clarify as to whether there is any dynamics of renewal and reinvigoration behind this effective presence or is it merely because capitalism has developed in our country through a slow, distorted, non-revolutionary path. If the caste-system has not been renewed as a bourgeois system, it would follow logically that if capitalism stays for quite a long period, caste-system would gradually vanish. Secondly, this group does not concretely situate the caste-system in the base and superstructure. The truth is that one of the independent motions of capital is loosening the caste-system while its opposing motion is renewing, refining and adapting it at both base and superstructural levels and thereby it is articulating it within the capitalist socio-economic structure. We have clarified our stand on this question above. This stream broadly takes correct stand by criticizing Ambedkar, Periyar, the phenomenon of Dalit upsurge, the tendency of harmonization of Ambedkarism with Marxism, and the neo-Marxist identity politics, but while suggesting the path of elimination of caste it gives more stress on opposing the making of caste-based organizations, exposing the Dalit leaders of bourgeois parties, exposing the NGO-brand identity politics and the neo-Marxist outlooks. Positively it finds it proper to oppose the caste-based oppression and atrocities as a part of the struggle for socialism and the formation of special forum (not on the basis of caste) for cultural propaganda against the caste-system and stresses on encouraging the inter-caste marriage. So the main stress is that if there is proper class mobilization, the problem of caste will not remain a major hurdle. This organization is silent on the question as to whether the slogans of propaganda and agitation in the process of the preparation of socialist revolution will directly target the caste? How will we tell the Dalit masses about the material basis and conscious activities of caste elimination in a socialist system in order to isolate the opportunist Dalit leadership and are

there any immediate demands (within the sphere of democratic demands) which could be helpful in reducing the miseries of Dalits and which would strengthen the class unity of all the workers belonging to all castes?

Nowadays one can see a very strong urge among many, in fact most, of the M-L organizations for harmonizing Marxism and Ambedkarism or at least borrowing something from Ambedkar in varying degrees. This was done a long ago by Sharad Patil's Satyashodhak Communist Party by adopting the ideology of Phule-Periyar-Ambedkar-Marx. Firstly, this party perhaps was not clear about the meaning of ideology itself. There is a difference among the philosophies of Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar themselves and on the philosophical essence there is no match with Marxism. Let us take the question of Ambedkar only. We have already discussed in detail his world-outlook, historical-outlook, politics, economics, solution for Dalit emancipation. None of the communist revolutionary groups clarifies as to what is to be taken from Ambedkar? One common thread is that often all these groups support reservation which was a contribution of Ambedkar. They do not pay attention to the fact that today more than being a bourgeois democratic right it has become an instrument of creating an illusion for bourgeois democracy. Secondly, some groups say the Ambedkarite thinking of carrying out movements on social (caste-based) issues should be merged with the stream of communists. Firstly, be it the question of caste, of gender or of environment, theoretical framework of Marxism consider all these social movements as integral part of class struggle and stresses on carrying it forward. It is a different thing that the Indian communists in the past did not give enough emphasis (not that they did not do anything) on this. But on theoretical plane Marxism's own understanding is quite rich. Secondly, Ambedkar carried out very few social movements, more than this he talked of legal remedies within the constitutional framework by bargaining with the colonial power by organizing the Dalits. Besides this he stressed on industrialization (that capitalist class is doing any way) and suggested the path religious conversion (which proved to be a flop).

Most such M-L groups, Gail Omvedt, Anand Teltumbde, Subhash Gatade etc. are overawed by the innovative theoretical contribution of Ambedkar that caste-system is not just a division of labour but it is the division of labourers as well and this is the speciality of India. Ignorance compels us to get surprised by treating even the common things as something original. The logical culmination of the division of labour anywhere in the world comes to the fore as the hierarchical division of labourers only. Let us first take normal examples. Those doing mental labour stand above those doing manual labour, skilled labourers stand above the unskilled labourers, permanent workers stand above the casual workers, those doing light work stand above those doing heavy work. In England, British workers used to stand above the Irish workers. In America the white workers stand above the black workers, Mulatto and Chicano workers and the immigrant workers. It is bound to happen in a capitalist society. In India the only thing which gets added to the division of labourers is that 'impure' work, heavy work and low paying lowly works are mostly done by the Dalit castes and even at the workplace they have to face greater social segregation as compared to any black or Mexican worker. Hence it is not an innovative discovery of Ambedkar, rather it is a general characteristic of capitalist division of labour.

Gail Omvedt of Shramik Mukti Dal has her original logic. She considers Indian communists as incorrigible mechanical materialists. She says that they consider caste as being absorbed in caste and while giving pure interpretation of exploitation they do not see it in the context of caste. While giving a new interpretation to the famous preface of Marx's book *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* she says that the forming of relations of social production which Marx talks about are non-class production-relations as well besides class production-relations (that is the caste production-relations). Marx's dictum that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle' does not apply on India.

This formulation is faulty all through. Firstly, in the ancient and medieval India the division of labour was on the caste basis only, in other words it was the division of labour which gave rise to caste and

caste was equivalent to class. This situation was changed in the colonial era. In the capitalist era it was changed even more rapidly. The class structure which arose by the capitalist division of labour had strong elements of old caste structure, but both were no longer synonymous to each other. Caste has not been absorbed in class but there is a caste-division among the classes and there is a class division among the castes, but the majority among the Dalit castes are at the lowest pedestal in both the divisions. Even though the people belonging to other castes stand beside them as workers, but they are segregated from them and even with regard to the nature of work they have to do the 'inferior' work. Insofar as exploitation is concerned, exploitation is an act of extracting surplus in the process of social production, it happens at the class plane only. Here it is not a question of less or more. It might be possible that a worker producing more on an advance machine gets more salary, but surplus might be extracted to greater extent. "Exploitation" is a well-defined economic category, it should not be mixed with any form of oppression or repression. A Dalit labourer gets oppressed in the factory, but his exploitation takes place as a class only.

Shramik Mukti Dal has another formulation that today a hierarchy of bourgeois caste-system has developed in which Dalits and tribals are engaged in unskilled, burdensome and 'impure' works, middle castes are engaged in 'blue collar' industrial jobs and unprofitable burdensome agricultural works and the 'upper' caste people are engaged in white collar upper jobs and managerial professions. Reservation and capitalist development has not brought about any significant impact over this caste-based division of labour. In this structure the surplus gets extracted from the bottom and reaches to the top with the bourgeois class. In this entire scheme the objective reality is not accurately reflected. If we leave aside the 'impure' works, then among the unorganized sector workers who do unskilled and burdensome works the population of non-Dalits and non-tribals is much more than the Dalit and tribal population. Secondly, the population engaged in agriculture has not been seen as differentiated. The section belonging to middle caste and upper

caste kulaks-landowners-farmers is barbaric exploiter, it gets the work done by hiring the labour power, if at all it is facing any crisis it is that of the capitalist agriculture. Then there is a population of small and medium farmers which is moving towards destruction and which consists of middle castes, some upper castes, and a few Dalit castes and tribals. It is true that in the higher jobs even now the upper castes are dominant. Insofar as extraction of surplus is concerned, as we have already told, it is not determined by the difficulty of social life but from the productivity of the particular sector.

The party's programme based on this scheme is thoroughly social democratic in nature. It has no trace of the programme of revolution and socialism. This party talks about ending the material basis of the bourgeois caste-system by adding the redistribution of land and water to the landless labourers in the land programme of the redistribution of land-ownership and means of production and moving towards co-operative socialist farming. It demands for providing seeds, agricultural instruments at cheaper cost to particularly the lower caste people, giving special training to the artisan castes for improving their traditional skills, giving loans and stimulus package to them for developing them in the co-operative agro-industry sector and giving training of organic farming to the Dalits and tribals. Besides, it demands to continue the reservation and to promote the inter-caste marriages. It can be part of any revisionist party, "social movement", NGO or bourgeois party. Gail Omvedt's entire new dialectical historical materialism for Indian condition gets exposed in its bourgeois reformist form when it reaches the stage of implementation.

Another main proponent of harmonization between Marxism and Ambedkarism, Anand Teltumbde, while on the one hand believes that all the projects of Ambedkar for caste-annihilation ended in failure, yet it is not sure why he considers Ambedkar's book 'Annihilation of Caste' (which we have discussed above) to be as important in India as is 'The Communist Manifesto'. Teltumbde believes reservation to be a whirlwind in this age of increasingly reduced job opportunities and considers it to be worthless. He is also

a staunch opponent of the identity politics. But instead of understanding caste in the framework of base and superstructure, he considers this framework itself to be a hurdle in understanding the relationships between caste and class and believes the inability of the Indian communists to align the caste with the class struggle to be their unpardonable mistake. We have given above our stand on the question of base-superstructure. We do not get any direction of annihilation of caste even from Telumbde, nor do we get to know as to what will Marxism get from Ambedkar after aligning the caste with the class struggle.

Insofar as the so-called Dalit theoreticians are concerned, their arguments are so crude and weak that it is not at all possible to have debate and discussion on them. In all it is only those doing identity politics who remain engaged in the NGO-funded fragmented social movements of various identities including caste and in the research in research institutions and they celebrate the resurgence of Dalit identity. A brief discussion of this breed has been done above. Their ideological source can be found in the post-modernist ideological streams.

Yet another thinker is Kancha Illaiya who without going into the analysis of policies count three categories of caste—Brahmanic communist nationalism, Hindu nationalism (Tilak, Gokhale, Golwarkar, SP Mukherji etc. all together) and Dalit bahujan nationalism (Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar etc.). One of the forms of implementation of this thesis of Dalit bahujan nationalism was the politics of Kanshiram and Mayawati. The alliance with the party of shudra caste (SP) was corroborating this thesis. But this alliance had to break. Then Mayawati started taking about Sarvajan in order to take Brahmins along. Now Kancha Illaiya's thesis has changed and according to the new thesis the Dalits should expand their hold in all the parties so that their claim to power is strengthened.

Chandrabhan Prasad is yet another theoretician who describes promoting Dalit capitalism as the path of Dalit emancipation, he still believes colonialism to be the emancipator of Dalits and installs the

idol of Angrezi devi. He does not tell us whether the few Dalit capitalists who will emerge will squeeze the Dalit workers in their factories or not and whether they will distribute the plundered profit among the Dalits and improve their condition? He and some other Dalit thinkers propose to promote the Dalits in the private firms through the steps such as Kennedy's 'Affirmative Action'. Firstly, it is like building castle in the air. Secondly, these people do not know that despite the elapse of one century from Lincoln's abolition of slavery to Kennedy's 'Affirmative Action' and even after several anti-racist movement, despite having a black president, black military chief, black secretary of state and several black players and artists, even now the majority black workers do the most burdensome and low-paid jobs, they live in hellish ghettos, their percentage among the unemployed is highest in proportion of their population, 70 percent people in the American prisons are blacks and other immigrants and several other fine manifestations of racial discrimination are still present.

Most of other Dalit thinkers do blind worship of Ambedkar and avoid any radical activity outside the sphere of parliament and reform. They do not have any project for Dalit-emancipation. If you talk of logic and science with them and in case you are not Dalit (even if you have abandoned your caste) they will put the stamp of caste-chauvinist on you.

In reality these vocal people of the Dalit intellectual community mostly represent the class interests of petty-bourgeois class. They are not bothered about the condition of the majority Dalit population and any struggle for their emancipation. They have gone far beyond them. There is a tendency in them of becoming a leader of the majority of Dalit population on account of their social status and caste base. Yet, even while they live in a well-to-do environment they have to face subtle humiliation, avoidance and segregation from the upper caste colleagues and because of this a passion gets generated among them which is reflected in their personality and their writings. Their real role today is that of social prop of the capitalist system. This dictum of Marx is to a large extent applicable

to them, "The more a ruling class is able to assimilate the foremost minds of a ruled class, the more stable and dangerous becomes its rule." (Capital, vol. 3, page 601)

Communist movement in independent India: A Retrospection

We have discussed above till the going astray of the Communist Party of India towards revisionism after the defeat of Telengana struggle. Later on, another revisionist party CPM got separated from it in 1964 after split. Then in the decade of 1980s the CPI (ML) (Liberation) also joined this fold.

Due to their presence in the parliamentary politics and owing to being dominant in the trade union politics, since last sixty year it is the face and conduct of these parties which has been there before the people in the name of communists. In the organs and documents of these parties the discussions on the caste question have been taking place, but in practice they have not done anything except for releasing some statements against few incidents of the Dalit oppression and some ritualistic protest demonstration. When a party makes the parliamentary politics and the trade union activities as its only task, it loses the courage to militantly carry out propaganda and agitation even on social issues.

They fear in building a social movement by firmly raising the caste question or even carrying out communist propaganda that the non-Dalit castes might be displeased with them whose demands they raise in the villages with prominence. At the same time in order to appease the agricultural labourers (mostly Dalits) they also continue to verbally raise their demands and the issues of caste oppression, although their mass base amongst them has slipped away and the parties such as BSP has taken over it.

Their main base in the cities is amongst the white collar (Bank, insurance etc.) workers and organized blue collar workers on whose economic demands their ritualistic activities carry on. Amongst these workers there are very few belonging to Dalit castes. Despite the

grievances, the poor masses still go along with them either in the hope of some economic concessions or security or it is because they have been finding the red flag as theirs for generations. The most abominable thing about the caste question is the lifestyle of the leaders and activists of these parties. Mostly all of them do intra-caste marriage with religious rites and rituals (by giving the logic of being isolated from society), perform religious rites of life-death, even do nepotism behind the scene and while finalizing the candidates for election they also consider the caste-equation of the areas. Their leaders are the people belonging to elite strata of society who do tricks to settle their sons and daughters in the best possible manner. All the principles and customs of the party life which were alive till 1950 have been gradually washed away. These revisionists are the second line of defense of this system itself. Their lifestyle corresponds to their politics, but since it is the face of these people which is there before the common people in the form of communist, it is correct that the reputation of communism has fallen among the Dalit castes, the base among them has been destroyed and a fertile ground has been prepared for adopting the anti-communist propaganda carried out by the new breed of the Dalit leaders and thinkers.

The communist revolutionary movement which arose from the Naxalbari peasant uprising of 1967 heralded new hopes. This wave was expanded to every part of the country. It had tremendous impact on the rural poor (in which Dalits were in majority). The exploiters were publically sentenced. The land of the landowners was taken away. However, by the time of formation of CPI(ML) in 1970 the “left-wing” adventurism had come to dominate the movement. It throttled the situation akin to a mass uprising of the rural poor. The movement got scattered and kept on disintegrating. Its root cause was the ideological weakness and the wrong understanding of the nature of Indian society and the programme (stage) of revolution. Instead of looking and understanding the new realities the attempts to fit them in the framework of the democratic revolution were continued and the main trend remained that of split and disintegration. The

stagnation of a long time also encouraged deviations. The trends and tendencies of right-wing also arose in response to the ultra-left. Even the few organizations which adopted revolutionary mass line by opposing the “left-wing” adventurism right since 1970 suffered from stagnation and fragmentation owing to wrong understanding of the nature of Indian society and programme. A stream of the M-L camp opened the new avenue by developing the correct understanding of the capitalist development of Indian society and the stage of socialist revolution, but even this stream suffered from fragmentation due to its incomplete understanding, petty-bourgeois departures and lack of Leninist organizational principles and modus-operandi and the struggle to overcome these shortcomings goes on till this day. Even today some communist revolutionary groups are applying mass line with right-wing trend, a powerful stream is that of “left-wing” adventurism and some are taking on the challenge of building a party on the line of socialist revolution and to move forward the social experiments.

Despite this difficult and awful condition, when the question of the impact of the communist revolutionary movement on Indian society in the context of caste question will arise, its positive aspects must be highlighted. In Andhra, Bihar, Bengal, Chhattisgarh and in some other states (we will discuss about Punjab separately), the organizations which applied mass line and those which applied “left-wing” line, both had their base in the rural areas amongst the landless poor and even within them mainly amongst Dalits. The land of land lords was captured and distributed among the poor, it might be wrong from the perspective of line, but it had a positive impact in bringing about a new consciousness among the Dalits and in forging their unity with other poor. Not only were the oppressor landlords punished, the organized barbaric genocides by their goonda armies were avenged.

Despite having a line of “left-wing” terrorism, a stream of communist revolutionaries for the first time taught the tribals of the forested regions of Chattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Andhra and one region of Bengal to stage an organized resistance. All this

resulted into a situation that despite the stagnation and disintegration of the movement wherever the movement had influence or where it has an influence even now, the condition of Dalits is better than other parts of the country. There the reign of terror and dominance of the upper caste and middle caste on Dalits has been reduced to a significant extent. Dalits move with greater self-respect in these areas. Despite its myriad theoretical weaknesses, overall the role played by the communist movement (do not include the revisionist parties in this) in lessening the social oppression of Dalits is not matched by any Dalit movement or the reform movement. The elite Dalit intellectuals who are tired of cursing all the communists are far removed from the Dakkhin tolas (Dalit settlements) and the shanty towns where despite having been scattered and disintegrated communist revolutionary activists are working whatever be their numbers. Punjab's situation has been somewhat different. In the era of semi-feudal land relations here the communists had their main base among the Jat farmers and less in the rural landless people and workers. The land relations got changed and a large section of the Jat farmers turned rich and became upper-middle farmers. The communist revolutionaries had got this mass base as a legacy, even the activists mainly used to come from such families only. The new base among the workers and rural landless people was made only to a limited extent.

Dalit population mostly (not wholly) kept a distance from this stream. Now those believing in democratic revolution taking away of land and redistribution was not possible any way. The mass base and the composition of cadre-leader could create problem in this. Consequently, instead of mustering courage to develop mass base among the Dalit workers of villages and cities and the lakhs of immigrant workers, a large section of the communist revolutionaries here took the banner of anti-proletariat demands of agricultural cost-minimum support price setting aside the Marxist political economy and they essentially remained militant peasant organizations. Their work among the workers of cities and villages always remained shrunk. Consequently, the Dalit population which is mostly worker

and lower middle class remained away from it. But if we talk in the context of whole India the main base of the communist revolutionary movement was among the poor and within it among the Dalits, it fought militant battles on the question of Dalit oppression and wherever it had influenced the social condition of the Dalits could be seeing even today. We are saying this just to respond to the accusations of the arm-chair intellectuals and anti-communism slandering by the leaders of bourgeois Dalit politics.

The problem has not been on this plane. The main problem has been to solve the puzzle as to how should we understand the caste question from the perspective of Marxist class-analysis, what are forms of social movement on caste question besides organizing the class-based economic and political struggles, how much importance they should be given, what will be our slogans of propaganda and agitation, how to build the workers' unity by breaking the caste-based segregation, how should we inform people about today's task on this question, what is our project for elimination of caste and how should we convince the Dalits, tribals, poor Muslim community ("kamin" castes) through propaganda, agitation and through examples that socialism will end the caste-system from each thread of the social fabric after going through a process and through these many changes. Therefore, the process of today's immediate activities should directed be towards that goal.

In this context we have presented a general and brief critique of the stand point of the different communist revolutionary groups. Therefore, we have now reached a situation wherein we present before you our understanding about the project of elimination of caste and the immediate tasks thereof.

We believe Indian society to be mainly and essentially a backwards capitalist country. This capitalism is different from the Europe of 19th-20th century and Russia of 1917. Hence, due to this reason and due to changes, which have occurred in the structure and modus-operandi of global capitalism, in the light of sum-up of the proletarian revolutions of the last century, the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist

revolution in this post-colonial society will be different from the October revolution in terms of form and path. At the same time, even the process of socialist transition, based on the sum-up of the past experiences, will be slightly different. It is because of this reason that we are terming it as New Socialist Revolution. Here we will discuss only those aspects of the programme of the revolution which are linked with the question of elimination of caste. For convenience, we will first discuss as to which path the socialism take and move forwards for the elimination of caste. After this, we will discuss the immediate tasks of the party of proletarian class in this context.

The socialist project of elimination of caste

The proletarian state will nationalize (without paying any compensation) all kinds of bourgeois government farms, huge agricultural land of old jagirs, the landed properties of the urban industrialists-traders-bureaucrats, farms of big farmers and plantation-farms, people will work in them like state industries and the responsibility of management will be borne by the committees elected by all those who work, in the leadership of the party. The landed property of kulaks-landlords-farmers will be taken over without paying any compensation and they will be converted into collective farms. In the state and collective farms, all the landless people will work and take part in the task of collective management with equal status. The small owner farmers who would not be ready to combine their farms into the collective farms will be motivated and encouraged for co-operativization. At some places those who would not be ready even for co-operative farming will not be allowed to hire labour power for their private farming. The sell-purchase of labour-power will be prohibited. Those carrying out private farming will not be eligible for the concessions and facilities received by collective farms like seeds, water, electricity, fertilizer etc. Gradually, owing to the assurance for economic security, the prosperity of the workers of state and collective farms and increasing faith towards socialism, even those involved in private and co-operative farming would be inspired for collectivization. The last stage of this process would be

nationalization of the entire agriculture. Thus by ending the private ownership of land and millennia-old landlessness of Dalits, socialism will destroy an important rural prop of the caste-system.

Immediately after destroying the bourgeois state the proletarian state will seize all the small and big, national and foreign industries and will nationalize them whose management will be carried out by the elected committees of workers and technicians in the leadership of the party. In the factories with the help of multi-skill training the division of labour would be flexible and mobile in which everyone will have to do all type of work (except for the works requiring technical expertise) and thus the difference between “higher” and “lower” work and between “clean” and “unclean” work would be gradually erased. Mechanization and the planned government arrangement for the drainage-sewage treatment plants will transform the categories of “impure” works. Then the increasing socialist consciousness will also end this culture of discrimination among people which would lessen the need for force while dividing the work in the flexible division of labour. If force is still needed on some people, it is justified.

The share market will immediately be closed. Owing to the nationalization of the trading sector the people’s control will be established on exchange. It will lead to the end of hoarding-profiteering-brokering and also the breakdown of the rigid system of family profession will have an impact on the caste-system. Private usury will be banned and punishable with stringent sentence. In case of any tragedy the needy will get aid from the management committee of state, collective enterprises.

The educational institutions are important centers of caste-based discrimination apart from economic discrimination. One of the tasks to be carried out immediately by the socialist state is that all private educational institutions will be nationalized, coaching institutes prohibited and free and uniform education is declared as one of the most important responsibilities of socialist state. In the scientific education system, students are assigned the different branches of education based on aptitude and natural skills, many skills are

engendered among them, the flexible division of labour enables them to do multiple works by changing profession and due to the gradual uniformity of salary, uniformity of life-style and the reducing the difference between the mental labour and manual labour, the custom of linking profession with the social prestige is ended. The socialist education apart from giving the highest importance to the culture of labour lays great stress on the cultural upgradation of all the youth. When along with reducing the inequality at the economic level the differences at the educational and cultural level be erased, it would become even more easier to demolish the wall of caste-discrimination.

Then comes the issue of health-care. Private practice, private hospitals, private medical colleges would be strictly banned. The entire health-care service will be under the state control. Socialism does not believe in the imperialist patent acts. It will produce all the medicines within the country. The health-care will be free for all the citizens. Anyone can read the brilliant work done in this field in the Soviet Union, socialist China and even in Cuba to easily know about the socialist health policy. There will be improvement in the social status of Dalits by free medical education and free and uniform health-care system as well.

The socialist housing policy will play an important role in ending the caste-discrimination. The socialist state will take the whole work of housing construction in its hand. The builder-contractors will become normal working citizens. The first task of the proletarian state will be to provide comfortable housing facility to all the homeless people and those living in the slums. It will be done by seizing old palaces, spare houses of those house-owner which have multiple houses, converting the five-star hotels, marriage halls and other places of opulence into residential complexes and by taking over a part of the big houses. At the same time residential colonies will be made on large-scale.

Initially, till the time one generation of scientists, engineers, experts having received socialist education gets ready, these professionals

will have to be given some concessions not only in salary but in the housing as well in order to smoothly carry out the production system. It will not be required in later phase. After the passing of initial phase the socialist state brings all the houses under the state ownership and guarantees every citizen to provide housing with all convenience. Along with the development of the forces of production, large scale construction work will have to be carried out continuously for making the houses uniformly convenient, for redesigning the old settlements and for settling new colonies by mobilizing the labour-power. The villages which are settled in haphazard manner will be converted into modern colonies equipped with all basic facilities and the spare land will be taken out for other works. With the distribution of state-owned uniformly convenient housing (based on nuclear family) the problem of apartheid of Dalits (and other workers), which is an important cause of social segregation, will be solved.

Due to the nationalization of agriculture and industry, the uniformly convenient housing (and communication-transport-entertainment facility) in the villages and cities, the differences between industry and agriculture and between cities and villages will begin to vanish. In the same process, the gap between mental labour and manual labour will also get reduced. These three inter-personal disparities act as the material basis for bourgeois privileges in a socialist society. Along with the fading away of these even the bourgeois privileges will vanish and consequently the bourgeois caste-system will also head towards extinction.

In the bourgeois society even, religion has become a pillar of bourgeois caste-system adapting itself to the bourgeois society. In the socialist society while the communist party will continuously carry out anti-religion and pro-scientific rationalist propaganda, the socialist state as a matter of civil right will respect the right of every citizen to have their own faith and to worship. But there will be total prohibition of the interference of religion into the socio-political life. There will be complete ban on performing religious rituals in the opening ceremonies, prayers in schools, doing *keertans* on loudspeakers, hampering the public life by marriage and religious

processions, religious schools, wasting social wealth by conducting samagam etc. on the rented public places. Considering the religious feelings of people, the old established religious places will be kept intact but the state will take over their management from the trusts and abbots, all the land and money of abbeys-temple-waqfs-gurudwaras-churches etc. will be seized by the state (A part of socialist primitive accumulation of capital will be collected from this immeasurable wealth, from acquisition of native and foreign companies and banks, the gold and black money seized from the houses of rich found after search). Forming religious organizations or doing any kind of socio-political mobilization on the basis of religion will be a punishable offence. A person will have freedom to marry by observing religious rituals but the state will recognize the marriages only after registration. A marriage will not be recognized without the consent of women. The legal process of divorce will also be simple. Dowry will be an offence with stringent punishment. Thus, due to reduction in the interference of religion in the social life the process of elimination of caste will be expedited.

The subservience of women happens to be the basis of the bourgeois structure of family and intra-caste marriage. Besides the mandatory nature of universal and uniform free education and the guarantee of employment to everyone, the women will be freed from the hideous slavery of domestic work by constructing crèche, kindergartens and collective messes on large scale. As a result, their participation in the social life will enhance. Their dependence on father (and husband) will be over and they could take the decisions of their life without any pressure. This will lead to a situation in which the trend of love-marriages and inter-caste marriages will become predominant and the wall of caste will begin to collapse.

The socialist state will declare all caste panchayats, Khap Panchayats, caste meetings and caste-organizations as illegal and any such attempt will be an offence with stringent punishment.

Besides the education system, the socialist state will use all the cultural mediums and the media to emphatically carry out anti-caste

system propaganda along with the socialist values so that the new citizens of the new society does not have any place in their mind for these hideous customs.

Thus, socialism will eliminate the caste-system from the base and superstructure by bringing about continuous change in the production relations along with the development of the productive forces and at the same time by carrying out with full force perpetual cultural revolution in the sphere of superstructure as well. The journey from the socialist transition to communism will be quite long, but the elimination of caste-system will be a matter of few decades only.

Our immediate tasks

Till now we have discussed as to how the caste will be eliminated in the socialist era but it does not mean that we need to first fight for socialism and then the caste-system will automatically vanish. If the caste question will not be there on our agenda right in the process of struggle for socialism and if we will not have any immediate tasks, the leading class of the revolution itself will continue to be victim of caste-based discrimination and the propaganda carried out by the bourgeois casteist electoral and reformist leaders and proponents. The huge population of the Dalit masses will continue to be in their slumber and will continue to follow aimlessly this or that casteist leader. The same condition will be that of the ally classes of the proletariat. Therefore, even if the ultimate elimination of the caste-system take place in the era of socialism, we will have to make conscious attempt to reduce its influence even during the preparation of class struggle and its development (then the upsurge of class struggle will have its own objective pressure as well and the class mobilization will help to push the caste mobilization behind).

The first task is to carry out continuous, intensive and widespread propaganda in various ways about the solution of caste-system through socialism and about the socialist programme of the elimination of caste. Owing to the weaknesses of the communist movement and due to the misdeeds of the revisionists (and to some

extent due to our own lack of clarity) the toiling masses, particularly the Dalit masses do not know at all as to what is the path which the communists suggest for the elimination of caste. For this task the party of the proletariat will require hundreds or rather thousands of sharp and effective communist propagandists, it will require pamphlets-booklets-cultural programmes, small education groups. But, as of now even the stage of building an all-India party itself looks distant. It will have to be brought closer through perpetual attempts. But even if the communists are organized even in a group or an organization, they must take up this task now itself.

There are some tasks which could be taken up even today. There are some demands which could be raised even today at the level of propaganda, agitation and movement.

The revolutionary unions under the influence of a revolutionary organizations, student-youth organizations, woman organizations, rural labour organizations and all mass-organizations should include the caste question in their programme, but not merely as a ritual, rather they must continuously carry out propaganda on this question, they must organize Jaat-Paant todak Bhoj-Bhat (food festival for breaking the caste), the demands of Dalit workers should be given prominence in the charter of the workers' movement and there must be enthusiastic participation in the Dalit workers' movement (such as sanitary workers' movement) and diligent attempt must be made to bring other workers in their support. While organizing the rural labourers every attempt must be made to break their mutual caste-based segregation. The cultural organizations must give special importance to the opposition to caste in their propaganda activities. The democratic rights movement need to come out of the ritualistic intellectual sphere of investigative team, signature campaign, protest letter and organize itself at wider social base which is capable of interfering through movement also apart from legal battle in the incidents of caste-oppression and Khap Panchayats etc.

The demand of universal, uniform and free education and employment for all is a long-term demand, but the students and

youth belonging to all the castes must be organized at once around this slogan and special emphasis needs to be made to take along the Dalit youth. In the educational institutions, caste-based discrimination needs to be made an issue. On the issue of reservation, we will have to put forwards our stand amongst the students and youth with the statistics of jobs and facts and figures of the results of last sixty years. We will have to tell them that we do not support the demand of taking away this democratic right which has been achieved in the past, we also oppose the scam going on in its implementation, but this demand today creates illusion towards bourgeois democracy, it has no special meaning today for the broad poor Dalit masses; on the contrary it is dividing and causing fight not only among the common masses but even the Dalit castes as well.

We must carry out continuous propaganda by logically and patiently responding to all the arguments made by the bourgeois Dalit politics of all hues and the bourgeois Dalit thinkers.

We should demand the ban on the publication of caste-based matrimonial in the newspapers. We must extend open support to inter-caste marriages and love-marriages; we must raise the legal demand of giving half of the family's property to women.

We must organize movements for legal bans on caste-organizations, caste meetings, khap and caste panchayats and their effective implementation.

We should demand a ban on public samagams (religious gatherings), imposing special tax on abbeys and temples for organizing traditional fairs, festivals and to ban the religious ceremonies in the government offices and school functions.

While we find it improper to form separate organizations of Dalit castes, but if the communist revolutionaries have enough strength, they must form caste-elimination forums in which apart from Dalits the citizens belonging to other castes having democratic consciousness must be included. This forum will continuously hold anti-caste propaganda meetings, publish books and booklets,

organize events and inter-caste marriage and actively oppose the incidents of Dalit atrocities.

In the end there is another important point. There are many communists who while giving the logic of being isolated from society take part in the religious ceremonies in their private-family lives (marriage, birth, death, yagyopaveet, upnayan etc.). These ceremonies are confined within the sphere of caste and are different for different castes. It is on the ground of above logic only that many communists wear religious symbols and relate themselves with the past religious heroes in their speeches. This is a social cowardice and unprincipled populism as well. On the contrary, it gives the impression among the people that communists are hypocrites. We can tell from our long experience that by humbly keeping away from religious ceremonies, doing marriage without any rituals and the communist conduct of leaving behind will of not performing any rituals even on death there is no isolation from society, rather the reputation of communists is enhanced by this. We do not impose our ideology on anybody, but we can certainly apply it on ourselves. Even bourgeois democracy says so and also the constitution of this country. We are saying all this because the question of religious conduct is linked with the question of caste. If the conduct of the communists even in their personal life will be non-religious, the Dalits will have faith that this person does not believe in caste from heart.

The question of caste is millennia old. There is no quick panacea for this. It demands a long and tedious process. This question is linked with the destruction of capitalism. In today's time making a step in the direction of any project of the elimination of caste would be a courageous act. But every difficult task does require courage. Today the elimination of caste can appear as a dream, but if a dream has a scientific basis, it could be turned into reality. Such a dream should be sought by every true revolutionary.

(Translated from Hindi: Anand Singh)

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CASTE: SOME CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS

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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 R̥gvedic 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 notion 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. Bougle 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 an 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 Heirarchicus* 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 these 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 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 **R̥gveda**, 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 'Bṛhatsamhita' of **Varnamihira** also *jati* and *varna* were used synonymously. But in 'Yajnyavalkyasmṛiti' 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 practiced 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 reveals it clearly that caste system spread in the southern and eastern India afterwards, and it acquired a 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 theory of Dravidian origin, is 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, 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 Śúdra *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 *Vaiś́yas* to a certain extent, and to oppress and exploit the śúdras 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 Śúdras, who were none other than the subordinated *dasyus/dā́sas*. 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 Śúdras 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 śúdra 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 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 *śúdras* and the untouchable castes fulfilled this need. Many times, the *śúdras* 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 Suvira 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 kṣhatriya 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 '**Gṛhapati**' 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 śudras* in southern and eastern India and with the transformation of the *śudras* 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 be known as Dalits. We have already mentioned that the religious codes had made a distinction between the *hīna* and *ahīna śudras* long ago. For example, chandal caste was counted as *śudra* in the varna system, but it was placed in the category of *hīna śudras*. On the one hand untouchability came into existence among those who were at the lowest rung among the *śudras*, 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 (*chamakara*) 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 *chamakaras* 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 R̥igvedic period. Even in the later Vedic period the Chandalas are mentioned as h̥ina śudras 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 legitimation 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, Ahamedabad 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 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 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 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 an 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 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.

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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.

(Translated from Hindi: Debashish Barat)

AMBEDKARISM AND EMANCIPATION OF DALITS

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The division of Indian people among castes makes Indian society unique in the entire world. This division has been changing its form for ages and is still intact. Crores of people have to face caste-based oppression, atrocities and humiliation in India even today. Along with the class division, the division of Indian society in tribals-non tribals, different nationalities and castes makes it an extremely complex society. As per a survey conducted in the beginning of the 1990s, the people of India are divided in 3539 castes (Suvira Jaiswal, Caste, p.15, Delhi, 2005). These divisions, particularly the caste-based division, make the path of the emancipation of Indian masses very challenging. The ruling classes have always used these divisions as a weapon to break the class unity of toiling masses, blunting their class consciousness and making them fight against each other and this process goes on till this day.

Apart from the class division, the division of Indian society in castes (also in nationalities, tribals-non tribals etc.) is an objective reality of today's India by denying which no project of the emancipation of working classes can be prepared. The first step in changing this objective reality is to accept it.

Due to the capitalist development after independence, huge changes have taken place in the caste-structure of Indian society. Amongst the characteristics of the caste, the caste-based hierarchy and caste-based division of labour has been broken to a large extent. But the characteristic of endogamy remains intact even today on a large extent. But despite all these changes a large section of the Dalit

population in India consists of rural and urban proletariat even today, which is facing caste-based oppression and humiliation apart from the worst category of economic-political exploitation and oppression. The end of this caste-based discrimination, oppression-humiliation is one of the most important questions of Indian's future revolution.

The communist movement in India has been struggling with the question of the caste right from the beginning and it is struggling with it even today. Even while fighting against the caste-based repression-oppression on practical plane, the Communist Party suffered from class reductionism right from the time of national movement. It could not give full attention to the task of ending untouchability in India. But it was the mistake of Indian communists, not that of Marxist ideology. Marxism is fully capable of understanding caste and all other related phenomena. Today when the caste question is included as a burning question in the list of tasks of Indian revolution, along with understanding the shortcomings of communist movement in India, we will have to also understand the achievements and limitations of the social reform stream of Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar (particularly Ambedkar) during the freedom movement.

Any discussion on the Dalit question will be incomplete without Ambedkar. Ambedkar himself was born in a Dalit family. He himself faced the brunt of the caste-system. Throughout his life he was striving for material-cultural-political-social upliftment of the Dalit castes. Ambedkar's role in raising awareness among the Dalit castes about human dignity and their rights remains undisputable. It was due to the struggles of the Dalit population against the hideous and inhuman institutions such as untouchability under Ambedkar's leadership that the Dalit question was included in the list of tasks of freedom movement. The parties like Congress had to include the elimination of untouchability in its programme even though this party never took any sincere step in this direction. Owing to the social-reform movement under the leadership of Ambedkar, indeed there has been an improvement in the condition of a small section of Dalit population.

In retrospect even while accepting the historically progressive role of Ambedkar and the social-reform movement in his leadership in the context of caste, one cannot ignore his limitations.

Today almost all kinds of Ambedkarites present Ambedkar as a messiah of Dalits. They say that Ambedkarism remains the only theory for the emancipation of Dalits. Some say that Ambedkarism is necessary for ending caste and Marxism is necessary for ending class. But does Ambedkar suggest any practical and realistic path for the emancipation of Dalits from socio-political-economic exploitation-oppression of Dalits? Does Ambedkar present a scientific and historical analysis and solution to the Dalit question? Does Ambedkar's thinking contain any comprehensive project for Dalit emancipation? Can the religious conversion (which Ambedkar did in the last days of his life and asked his follower to do the same for freeing themselves from caste-based repression-oppression) be a solution to the caste problem? Was the criticism of Marxism with regard to the caste problem which was put forward by Ambedkar based on deep and serious study of Marxism? Several 'Dalitist' and "Marxists" intellectuals loudly advocate the amalgamation of Ambedkarism and Marxism. Is it possible to harmonize Marxism and Ambedkarism in any way? To know the answer of these questions we will have to examine Ambedkar's world outlook, his politics, economics, sociology, his historical outlook and his criticisms of Marxism. The subject of this paper is the same. Surely this task involves a risk because it is difficult to tell Ambedkar's stand on many questions. At one place he says one thing and at another he says exactly opposite thing. In a way Ambedkarism is a kind of ideological confusion only. Today in the left-wing movement there is a tendency of uncritical admiration of Ambedkar. Maybe they think that Dalits will be displeased with Ambedkar's criticism. But this is nothing but political opportunism in the name of winning Dalit's hearts. Dalit masses can be brought to the communist movement only by struggling against their ideological prejudices and not through appeasement.

A theory is relevant insofar as it acts as a guide to social action. If a

theory does not act as a guide for our action, it is akin to a dead burden. When our point of departure is the emancipation of the crores of people who have to face social humiliation because of belonging to the so-called lower caste apart from economic-political exploitation and oppression, we must examine all such theories thread-bare which claim to be the guide to the emancipation of these exploited and oppressed people. We cannot take a single step towards Dalit-emancipation with an attitude of religiosity and veneration to a historic figure. The point here is not to raise a finger about the intentions of any historic figure, rather it is about the objective analysis of his ideas. Bhagat Singh had said, "A man who claims to be a realist has to challenge the whole of the ancient faith. If it does not stand the onslaught of reason it crumbles down. Then the first thing for him is to shatter the whole down and clear a space for the erection of a new philosophy."

Every historic figure and movement has both positive and negative aspects. No one should be considered above criticism. We must adopt the same attitude towards Ambedkar as well. If we have to prepare a new project of Dalit-emancipation today, we will have to criticize whatever was wrong in Ambedkar's thoughts and his practice.

1) Ambedkar's World View

World view or philosophy is a guide to all the activities of a person. If we properly understand the world view of a leader or thinker, his economic, political, social etc. thoughts and activities could be easily understood.

Ambedkar had announced to give up Hindu religion in his article 'Annihilation of Caste' written in 1936. But he did not give it up for next 20 years and in 1956 at the age of 66 he gave up Hindu religion and adopted Buddhist religion. Throughout his life he had faith in religion, so for almost his entire life his world view remained idealist. In the last year of his life, he reached Buddhism, so he traversed from idealism to primitive, crude and mechanical materialism which in no way helps us today to understand any natural or social

phenomenon.

Religion happens to be a part of the ideology of the exploiting class because the ruling ideology is the ideology of ruling class. Therefore, in a class society even the toiling masses are the carrier of the ideology of ruling class. The religious prejudices and superstitions of the toiling masses (including the labourers belonging to Dalit castes) strengthen the rule of the exploiter ruling class. Hence the emancipation of the toiling masses includes the emancipation from religion (end of religion), but Ambedkar used to think exactly the opposite. He says:

“Some People think that religion is not essential to Society. I do not hold these views, I consider the foundations of religion to be essential to life and practice of Society.” (See, Dhananjay Keer, ‘Ambedkar Life and Mission’, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, II Edition, 1961)

Ambedkar in his writings and speeches always used to stress upon the need for religion. In the Depressed Classes Youth Conference he said, “It pains me to see youth growing indifferent to religion. Religion is not an opium as it is held by some. What good things I have in me or whatever have been the benefits of my education to Society. I owe them to the religion’s feelings in me. I want religion, but I do not want hypocrisy in the name of religion.” (Ibid, p. 304.)

He further says, “Religion in the sense of morality must, therefore, remain the governing principle in every society.” (Ambedkar, Buddha and Future of His Religion.)

Throughout his life Ambedkar was under the illusion that root of untouchability or casteism lies in the Hindu religion and that untouchability and casteism could be ended just by giving up religion. As we will see later, nothing of that sort happened. But despite having such thinking towards Hindu religion he was always wavering when it came to give it up. His talks about giving up Hindu religion began way back in 1929 when on 29 May, 1929 in the Jalgaon conference held in his leadership a proposal was passed asking the Dalit castes to adopt any religion other than Hinduism. In

the Yeola Conference of October 1935 he announced, "I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu (Keer, *ibid*, p. 252)." On 18 June 1936 Ambedkar met Dr. Munje, the leader of Hindu Mahasabha and on his advice he was ready to adopt Sikh religion. Toeing the line of fascist Munje he announced, "Sikhism is the best, If the depressed classes join Islam or Christianity, they not only go out of the Hindu religion, but they also go out of the Hindu Culture." (Keer, *ibid*, p. 278.)

On 13–14 April 1936, Ambedkar addressed the Sikh Mission Conference in Amritsar in which he lauded the egalitarianism among Sikhs. But it was yet another illusion of Ambedkar. While Sikh religion rejects casteism and untouchability in principle, at the practical level the condition of Sikhs was not much better than Hindus.

After wandering for years in search of a "good religion", ultimately his search ended up with Buddhism. On 14 October 1956, he announced his decision to adopt Buddhism. He chose Buddhist religion because according to him, Hindu religion suffered from four varnas whereas there is no place of four varnas in the Buddhist religion. Ambedkar says, "Buddhism teaches social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom, political freedom... equality not between man and man only but between man and woman," (Ambedkar, *Buddha and Future of His Religion*).

Ambedkar's above conception about the Buddhist religion is far from the historical reality. We will discuss more on it when we will return to the analysis of Ambedkar's world outlook. Any ways, this was Ambedkar's philosophical journey. Despite myriad criticisms and reservations, he continued to have a belief in Hindu religion throughout his life and he remained a Buddhist only for last two months of his life (he died in December 1956). After his long religious "research", his destination happened to be primitive Buddhism. Buddhism was a product of a time when the classless tribal society was fast coming into the grip of varna system (class division). Before the varna system the main characteristics of the tribal society were—

common property, equal status, mutual co-operation, unity and a sense of security. These characteristics of the tribal society were being destroyed under the pressure of the socio-economic processes of the varna system. The varna system, being patronized by the kingdoms, was destroying the primitive morality and in its place a fertile ground was prepared for the hunger for private property, greed, hatred and self-centered lifestyle. The gap between rich and poor was continuously getting widened due to class division of society and a large section of population was forced to face sorrows and miseries. Buddha said that the reason for these sorrows was desire, possession, greed, craving and ego. But Buddha could not understand the material base of these evils. He could not understand that these evils have grown due to the class division of society and will end with the end of the class division. Buddha believed that the fire of desire, greed and hatred could be extinguished through individual good conduct and individual self-purification. Hence he proposed his Ashtang Marg (eight-fold path).

Buddha organized sangha (monastery) on the tribal model. Among the masses the attraction for the tribal society still existed. There was complete equality in these sanghas which were administered in collective and democratic manner. The Bhikshus (Buddhist monks) could be recruited from all the classes. Brahmins and Chandals all were equal in the Sanghas. The members of the Sanghas could not possess any private property. The Bhikshus used to get their food from people.

It was at this time that the ruling classes found in Buddhism an ideology through which the human conduct could be controlled and regulated through social and religious rules instead of violence and force. In order to rectify the kind of anarchy which was spread due to the destruction of the traditional tribal culture owing to the increasing class division of society as an inevitable consequence of agriculture and trade, new social rules and a new kind of belief system was required. Buddhism fulfilled this necessity. Buddhism now rapidly started becoming the religion of the upper classes. The sanghas and Bhikshus started getting prosperous. It was during the lifetime of

Buddha himself that Buddhism had lost its radical character and had drowned into the pit of degeneration. When the kings started granting money for building big Bauddh Vihar, when the kings and emperors began to subsidize them, when Buddhism became a public sector enterprise, Buddha chose the path of compromise. The Buddhist religion got degenerated when the dependence on people for feeding the Bhikshus gave way to dependence on kings. Buddha was co-opted by the system. The same happened with Ambedkar in the last years of his life. First time a tragedy and second time as a farce!

This is Ambedkar's Buddhism. Ambedkar's Buddhism is the Buddhism of Buddha, not of the post-Buddha Buddhist philosophers such as Dignag, Vasubandhu and Nagarjuna who tried to develop Buddhism and to eradicate the evils engendered in it. In fact it was during the life-time of Buddha himself that the beginning of the compromise of Buddhism with the ruling establishment was made. For example, an indebted farmer could not choose the path of asceticism, nor could women do it without the consent of their husband, soldiers too could not choose the path of asceticism without permission. If this Buddhism of Ambedkar is applied in today's society, it would have dangerous consequences. In that event, the Dalits who are debtor of rich farmers will continue to face the slavery of the rich from generation to generation. All women would be left to the mercy of their husbands.

Ideas arise from the material conditions of their time and propose solution to the problems of their time. If the situation is changed then either the ideas develop themselves or else they become stale and become thing of the past. The socio-economic situation changes, new contradictions arise and in the new situation new philosophy is born for their resolution which surely learns from its heritage as well but does not expect from them the solutions of today's problem.

Nowhere does Ambedkar clarify as to how can a philosophy born in the era of slavery solve the problems of a capitalist society (in Ambedkar's time semi-feudal and colonial India and after independence an India moving towards capitalism). Nor do the

current advocates of Ambedkar give any response to this question. Actually, Ambedkar always remained an idealist in understanding social phenomena. Even after adopting Buddhism, Ambedkar continued to believe religion to be necessary for society. The root of Ambedkar's mistakes in the sphere of politics, economics, sociology and history-writing needs to be probed in his idealist world outlook.

2) Ambedkar's Politics

There were three big names in the anti-caste and anti-untouchability movement in the country during the freedom movement—Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar (undoubtedly it was not the only such movement, during the same period a much more powerful communist movement also existed which, despite its ideological weaknesses, was fighting against caste and untouchability on much larger scale than the above movements and with greater success). Jyotiba Phule was Ambedkar's predecessor while Periyar was his contemporary. All the three have different opinions on the question of origin of caste and its elimination but their approach towards the British imperialism which had enslaved India was similar.

The cracks had started surfacing in the caste-based rigid division of labour due to the beginning of the capitalist development in India which was a by-product of the reckless exploitation of natural resources and cheap labour by the British colonialism. Due to the growth of newer professions a section of Dalits also got the opportunity to adopt new professions by leaving their caste-based professions. In the education system started by the British, a small section of Dalit castes also got the opportunity of studying. It was because of such "reforms" by the British imperialism that the social reformers such as Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar used to have admiration for the British rule. Ambedkar says, "It was the destiny pre-ordained by the Hindu God. Until the advent of the British, the untouchables were content to remain untouchables. It was a destiny pre-ordained by the Hindu God and enforced by the Hindu state. As such there was no escape from it. Fortunately or unfortunately, the East India Company needed soldiers for their army in India and it

could find none but the untouchables... It is with the help of an army composed of untouchables that the British conquered India..." Ambedkar says that the untouchables also benefitted by the education provided by the Britishers. (Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, vol. IX, p. 189)" Even when Phule and Ambedkar at times used to criticise the British rule, these criticisms were sweet nothings. In practice they never took part in the freedom movement against the colonial rule. Phule while criticising the British raj remained confined to appeal to the goodwill of the Britishers. (Gail Omvedt, 'Dalits and the Democratic Revolution,' First Edition, 1994, p. 98). Ambedkar and his contemporary Periyar in fact took the side of Britishers in the freedom movement against the British imperialism. Periyar was an atheist. Apart from being anti-casteism and anti-Brahmanism he was also anti-north and anti-Hindi. Like Ambedkar and Phule he too failed to understand the contradictions of his time. He was a staunch opponent of the independence of India from the British. He used to believe that the freedom from the British will result into the return of Brahmanism.

Ambedkar glorifies the British at some place and at others he criticises it. While glorifying the British he says, "The depressed classes and the British are bound in a unique bond. The depressed classes welcomed the British as liberators from the centuries-old oppressions and atrocities by the orthodox Hindus. They fought against the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and won this vast empire of India for the British, in which they adopted the role of guardians of the depressed classes." (Ambedkar, Collected Works (Hindi), Vol. 5, p. 16, our translation.)

He takes a 180 degree turn from his above stand and while strongly criticising the British Raj he says, "In the first 25 years of the Nineteenth century when the British rule became a reality, there were five famines here which claimed about 10 lakh lives. In the next 25 years there were two famines, and about four lakh people died. In the third 25 years there were six famines, and the death toll went up to 50 lakhs. And what do we see in the last 25 years of the century? Eighteen famines! And the number of people dying in these is approximately 1.5 to 2 crores. ...Gentlemen, what is the reason for

this! To say in clear words, this is the policy adopted by the British government which is aimed at obstructing the development of trade and industry in India.... This policy has turned India into a poor country. Who are the main victims of this poverty? The Dalit peasants who are unable to feed themselves for months even now, they are the majority of victims...

“Before the Britishers came, your condition was very terrible due to untouchability. Has the British government done anything to end this untouchability? Before the Britishers came, you could not take water from the village wells? Has the British government tried to give you this right? Before the Britishers came, you could not enter the temples. Can you do so today? Before the Britishers came, you were not given jobs in the police. Is the British government giving you the jobs now? Before the Britishers came, you did not have the permission to join the army. Do you now have this opportunity?... Gentlemen, you cannot answer yes for even one question. Those who have ruled this country for such a long time, there may be some good things. But one thing is sure that there has not been any fundamental change in your condition by this... (Ambedkar quoted in above book by Gail Omvedt, pp. 80-81).

In Ambedkar's own words, in one century of the British rule several famines took place in India due to its policies which resulted into the loss of more than 20 million (poor) Indians, majority of whom were Dalits. Ambedkar also says that no fundamental change was brought about in the condition of untouchables in India after the coming of British. Despite all this he did not take part in the anti-British imperialism national movement, instead he continued to oppose it.

While describing the reason behind non-participation of the untouchables (Here he is speaking on behalf of all the untouchables, although he was not the only leader of the untouchables. At many places in the country the Dalits were fighting for the independence of the country along with the caste-oppression in the leadership of the communists) in the movement for independence of the country from British imperialism, Ambedkar says, “it is not because they are the tools of British Imperialism, but because they fear that Freedom of

India will establish Hindu domination which is sure to close to them and forever all prospect of Life, Liberty and Pursuit of happiness...” (Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, vol. IX, p. 189). Ambedkar terms the struggle for independence of the country as “dishonest agitation” (ibid. p.178). While presenting a casteist analysis of the movement for independence of the country he says the struggle for independence is “mainly waged by Hindus” (Ambedkar, What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables) and that is why the Dalits must keep away from it.

At another place he says, “The depressed classes (read Ambedkar and the movement under his leadership — author) are not anxious, they are not clamorous, they have not started any movement for claiming that there shall be immediately transfer of power from British to the Indian People... their position to put it plainly, is that we are not anxious for transfer of political power...” (ibid, pp 63-67).

Ambedkar suffered from this illusion that after gaining independence from the British imperialism there will not be any improvement in the condition of Dalit, rather their condition would deteriorate. The condition of Dalits was slightly improved after the capture of India by the British, but the British had kept the caste-system as it is. Ambedkar mainly used to criticize the British rule again and again on this very point. And repeatedly appealed to the British to end the caste system here.

It was not in the interest of the British imperialism to end the divisions of Indian people along castes (similarly divisions along religion, region and nationalities). Such divisions among the Indian people were helpful to the British imperialism in maintaining their rule by dividing them. In the new land settlement introduced by Lord Cornwallis, the condition of the Dalits remained similar to the one during the system of rural brotherhoods. The British did not recruit Dalits in police and military as well. Only a separate Mahar regiment was created. Nowhere did they make any common regiment of the Dalit and other caste Indian soldiers.

In fact the British imperialism had made an alliance with feudalism in India to rule it. It kept the feudal production-relations here

unchanged. In this system, a huge majority of Dalit population was agricultural labourer and landless poor farmer. A small population was the lowest-grade wage-slave in the cities which was engaged in their caste-based professions. So in the colonial India, to talk of Dalit-emancipation without breaking the dominant production relations prevalent at the time was like building a castle in the air and this was precisely what Ambedkar, Phule and Periyar did. They failed to trace the root of the caste-system. Owing to their idealist world outlook they continued to search for the root of the caste-system in the Brahmanic ideology. In fact, it was Ambedkar wasted significant amount of time of his life in studying ancient religious texts in this futile search. He failed to identify the contradictions of his time and among them the principal one. It was this outlook which took him towards conciliation with the British imperialism. Ambedkar presented a caste analysis of his contemporary movements such as the national movement in the leadership of Congress and the Communist movement. He termed the movement in the leadership of Congress as upper-caste movement and kept himself away from it. Thus he left the battleground of the national movement open for the upper-castes and confined himself to the “movements” such as for the rights of Dalits to take water from the wells of village, entry of Dalits into the village temples and in begging piecemeal concessions from the British government for the Dalits.

The social reform movements which took place in Ambedkar’s leadership were so feeble and vigourless that they were utterly incapable of making a powerful dent to the caste-system. Most of the “movements” of temple entry for Dalits which took place in his leadership were unsuccessful. He succeeded only in a few cases (e.g. the Dalit “movement” for the right of the worship of Ganesha idol at a public place in Bombay in 1929).

The biggest movement which took place in Ambedkar’s leadership was the movement for taking the water by Dalits from the Chavdar pond situated in the Mahad town of Kolaba district of then Bombay presidency in March 1927. About 10 thousand Dalits took part in this movement. Thousands of Dalits got assembled in the Mahad town under the leadership of Ambedkar, they marched till the Chavdar

pond and drank water from there. After that when they were returning to their homes in small groups, the Hindu fundamentalists attacked them and beat them up severely. After that the Hindu fundamentalists purified the pond through religious rituals and recaptured it and prohibited the Dalits from taking water from there. In December 1927 once again the movement for taking the water by the Dalits from the Chavdar pond was started in the leadership of Ambedkar. But the Hindu fundamentalists took a stay order from the court even before the movement had begun. Ambedkar's agitation began on 25 December 1927 in Dasgaon which was five miles away from Mahad. As soon as Ambedkar arrived there, he was summoned by the District Magistrate (DM) and Ambedkar went to meet the DM. The DM "advised" Ambedkar not to take law in his hand and Ambedkar accepted his "advice". Subsequently the DM himself reached the meeting spot and he threatened the Dalits of stringent punishment if they violated the law. After this, Ambedkar announced the withdrawal of the movement on 27 December so that the government does not get angry with the Dalits (for more details about this incident, see Dhananjay Keer's 'Ambedkar: Life and Mission', Chapter VI, Declaration of Independence). So this was the fate of the biggest movement under the leadership of Ambedkar which is discussed widely.

Ambedkar used to justify his non-participation in the freedom struggle of the country by saying that "we cannot fight two enemies at once" (Gail Omvedt, *ibid.* p.15). Instead of targeting the root of the exploitation-oppression of Dalits in the colonial India he remained engaged in some minor anti-Brahmanic "movements". Even for these reforms he was never ready to violate the law.

During the national movement there was yet another big force, the Communist Party of that time. It was the Communist Party alone which was leading the movement against the alliance of imperialism and feudalism. The solution to the caste question in India was inextricably linked with the emancipation of the toiling masses of India from the alliance between imperialism and feudalism. It is true that the Communist Party at that time suffered from the deviation of class-reductionism. But it does not mean that the Communist Party

did not do anything for the resolution of the caste question as is been alleged by today's Dalit intellectuals in the similar manner as Ambedkar used to condemn the Communist Party by terming it as 'a bunch of Brahmin boys' (Gail Omvedt, *ibid.* p. 183). Everywhere the communists fought against all kinds of socio-economic inequality, exploitation-oppression and injustice. The great Telengana peasant struggle which was fought in the leadership of the Communist Party also gave a powerful blow to the exploitation-oppression of women and Dalits by the feudal system. (for details, see P. Sundaraiyya's 'Telengana People's struggle and its Lessons').

But owing to its ideological weaknesses the Communist Party failed to take the leadership of the national movement in its hand. It was because of this reason the project of the emancipation of the toiling masses (including the resolution of the caste question) could not move forward.

Ambedkar condemned the communists not only by terming them as 'a bunch of Brahmin Boys', but also by condemning the violent means adopted by the communists. (See *Bahishkrit Bharat*, 31 May, 1929). Even on the issue of violence, Ambedkar's stand was contradictory. At some places he is against the use of violence (above) by the exploited people for their emancipation and at other places he is seen as favouring it. He says, "Non-violence is the most proper law.... The man who comes to kill you, or to outrage the modesty of a woman, or sets fire to another's house, or commit theft and is killed while struggling to escape, dies by his own sins as all aggressors and wicked men do... Truly speaking the law should be non-violence wherever possible, violence whenever necessary" (Dhananjay Keer, *ibid.*)"

Even while Ambedkar's thoughts on the question of violence were contradictory, in practice he always followed non-violence. None of "movements" in his leadership moved towards the path of clash with the state.

Violence has never been the first choice of the communists, rather it is the last resort. Communists prepare the toiling masses for revolutionary violence to counter the counter-revolutionary violence

spread by the ruling classes because without it the movement of the exploited masses cannot move an inch ahead. It was because of this negative attitude towards violence or his attitude of being confined to the legal sphere only that none of the social reform "movements" in the leadership of Ambedkar could ever achieve the status which was achieved by the Telengana peasant struggle in the leadership of the communists which apart from making a deadly blow to the feudal production-relations also provided relief to the Dalits and women on large scale from all kinds of exploitation-oppression.

The Dalit movement in the leadership of Ambedkar remained engaged in the issues such as taking water from the wells and temple-entry. These issues were undoubtedly important for providing equal status to the Dalits, but even more important (the most important) issue was that of land-reforms or the distribution of the land which was occupied by the feudal lords among the poor and landless farmers which was a common demand of the rural poor belonging to all the castes. If the masses had been mobilised on this issue or the similar common issues of poor, even the internal contradictions within the toiling masses (such as the caste-based prejudices among the poor belonging to the upper-castes) could be resolved. In this way the 'Brahmanic' forces (the elites belonging to the upper-castes) could be isolated from the poor belonging to their own castes. But Ambedkar, instead of raising the most important issue of the emancipation of the Dalits, remained engaged in secondary issues only. And raising the issues in the wrong order by Ambedkar used to keep the upper-caste poor (owing to their caste-based prejudices) in opposition to the poor Dalits. Thus Ambedkar inadvertently used to strengthen 'Brahmanism' instead of weakening it.

When the Britishers were forming separate electorates for Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as per their policy of 'divide and rule', Ambedkar falling into the trap of the Britishers raised the demand of separate electorate for Dalits. But later he took back this demand under pressure of Gandhi (the famous Poona Pact). Even this was a non-issue being raised by Ambedkar. It could have split the national movement and weakened it.

Ambedkar continued to act as a splitting force in the national freedom movement. He kept away the Dalits under his influence from the struggle for national independence. By terming the communists as 'a bunch of Brahmin boys', he kept the Dalits away from the real ideology for their emancipation.

Even in the workers' struggle Ambedkar played the role of splitter, e.g. in the 1929 Bombay textile workers' strike. The owners of the Bombay textile mills introduced a new machine on which a single worker could run three looms. As a result workers began to be retrenched. Against this retrenchment, one and half lakhs workers went on strike on the call of Girni Kamgar Mahamandal, a union under the communist leadership. On the appeal of Frederick Stonze, the manager of E.D. Sassoon Mill, Ambedkar asked the workers to go back to work. Due to Dalit workers going to work on the call of Ambedkar, the strike was broken. On April 26, 1929 when the textile workers of Bombay once again went on strike, Ambedkar again ran a strong campaign to break this strike.

One of the given reasons for Ambedkar's opposition to these strikes is that the Dalit workers were not permitted to work in the high paying departments of textile mills such as the weaving department. And none of the unions was fighting against this discrimination. Besides, Ambedkar used to believe that communism and strikes are the two inseparable twins. He was of the belief that the strikes could be used for the fulfilment of political motives more than for the economic struggle of the workers and it leads to worsening the economic condition of the workers. (for more on this, see Dhananjay Keer's 'Ambedkar: Life and Mission,' Chapter VII, VIII).

Here Ambedkar while showing his hatred for communism and his loyalty towards the owners, once again commits the mistake of making the secondary contradiction among the people as the principal one instead of taking the fight against the common enemy of the workers (both Dalits and non-Dalits) forward which is harmful for both the Dalit workers and non-Dalit workers and it is only the owners who benefit.

Ambedkar's overall political conduct was full of legalism, vacillation, compromises and split-making activities. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that in his last years Ambedkar was co-opted by the state. Though Ambedkar collaborated with the British rulers from the beginning. In 1926 Ambedkar was nominated in the Bombay assembly as a representative of Dalits. This nomination continued till 1934. Likewise, in 1942 (till 1946) Ambedkar occupied the post of Governor General's administrator in the labour department. When the British government decided to grant independence to India, it was announced in 1946 that India could make its own constitution and could prepare its draft.

The "election" to the 'constituent assembly' took place in July 1946. In all 246 members were "elected" from all the states. 96 of these members were not elected through any election process, rather they were nominated due to their feudal rights as representatives of feudal principalities. Other members too consisted of those having properties of various sorts, who belonged to upper castes and were highly educated.

Ambedkar too was one of its members. He succeeded in entering the constituent assembly with the support of the members of Muslim League in Bengal after his failure to get Congress support in his home state Bombay. Ambedkar had always been a critique of Congress. At one time he said, "Only a person with no self-respect can align with the Congress (Letters to Gaekwad', p. 239)." But now Ambedkar took a 180 degree turn and he was ready to move along with Congress. After independence, due to partition Ambedkar's membership to the constituent assembly was nullified because he was elected from Bengal. Congress immediately asked one of its members from Bombay to resign and got Ambedkar elected in his place.

In August 1947 he was made law minister in the newly formed cabinet. All his life Ambedkar had condemned the movement of Congress as an upper-caste movement, but now he became part of this upper caste movement. Ambedkar had called the collaboration

with Congress as an act of a person lacking self-respect, but now he kept his own self-respect at bay and went along with Congress.

Ambedkar got one more post as a favour from Congress. On August 29, a seven-member committee was formed to draft the constitution and Ambedkar was elected as the chairman of this committee. However, this committee did not play any role in drafting of the constitution because it was prepared by the bureaucracy beforehand. The committee had just to have a look at it and give suggestions for some necessary amendments.

This constitution which was prepared by the representatives of the bourgeois class which had occupied power in India is in fact a document safeguarding the private (bourgeois) property. There are numerous draconian laws which are derived from this constitution in order to deal with any potential challenge to the system of property posed by the toiling masses. This constitution also contains the provision of imposing emergency by putting the entire "democracy" on hold. The Dalit intellectuals take enormous pride in the fact that it was Ambedkar who made the Indian constitution (even though it is not true because Ambedkar merely gave the final shape to an almost complete draft). They present this constitution as a great contribution of Ambedkar to India. Throughout the country wherever one gets to see Ambedkar's statue, he is shown as holding the book of constitution. In fact the "Dalit" middle-class takes pride over something on which it needs to feel ashamed.

It will be relevant to refer to yet another incident here. When Ambedkar was enjoying the post of law minister, the army, which was sent by his government, was involved in bloodbath in Telengana killing the poor peasants, agricultural labourers (mostly belonging to Dalit castes) and women. It was raping the women. The Nehru-Patel (and Ambedkar) government sent army in September 1948 to Telengana to suppress the Telengana peasant uprising. The toiling masses (which included Dalits in large numbers) were creating new chapters of freedom from feudal exploitation-oppression while the Indian army was immersing it into rivers of blood. The horrific description of the barbaric atrocities which were committed by the

Indian army against the rebel toiling masses of Telangana can be read in P. Sundaraiyya's book. The atrocities being committed by the Indian army over the toiling masses of Telengana (which included Dalits as well) did not shake the conscience of Ambedkar. He did not raise any voice against this. This "messiah" of Dalits continued to enjoy the post of minister.

Ambedkar wanted labour department in Nehru's cabinet, but he was not given this post which led to his rift from Congress. On September 27, 1955, he resigned from the post of law minister. After this he gave a surprising statement that "I will be the first person to burn this (India's) constitution." (Reference of Vijaybharti's Telugu book, page 452, given in Ranganaykamma's book 'For the solution of the "Caste" question, Buddha is not enough, Ambedkar is not enough either, Marx is a must'. Despite the above statement of Ambedkar the Dalit middle class intellectuals continue to glorify him as an architect of India's constitution.

Yet another remedy which Ambedkar had suggested for the emancipation of Dalits was reservation in the government jobs and educational institutions. Undoubtedly a section of Dalits benefitted from this reservation after independence. A section of Dalits got the opportunity to read and write. A small middle-class and the upper middle-class has also emerged due to reservation. Now it is this class, which would be hardly 10 percent of the Dalit population, which is enjoying all the benefits of reservation.

At the time of independence when the Dalits were given reservation, it was a bourgeois democratic demand. But now its character has changed. Now the ruling class of the country is using the issue of reservation to divide and to cause fight amongst the poor and unemployed. The unemployed belonging to the non-Dalit castes consider reservation to be the main reason of their unemployment and they go against it. They fail to see that the opportunity of employment itself is very limited in the current capitalist system, that unemployment in a capitalist system is a structural problem, the capitalist class uses the unemployed vis-a-vis the employed as a reserve army from time to time. On the other hand, there are Dalit intellectuals who consider reservation to be the only way for the

emancipation of Dalits. We believe that both these stands—for reservation and against reservation—are wrong. There is a third stand which is to mobilize the toiling masses against this capitalist system on the slogan of 'education for all, employment for all'.

Indeed, there have been big changes in the caste-system in India after independence. The untouchability is almost over. The caste-based division of labour has been broken to a large extent. The Ambedkarites give the credit to Ambedkar for the improvement in the condition of Dalits. It is not fully correct, but only partially correct. The main reason for these changes is the capitalist development after independence which was possible due to the same freedom for which Ambedkar never fought but continued to oppose throughout his life.

3) Criticism of Marxism by Ambedkar

Ambedkar has made critical comments on Marxism and communism at many places in his writings and in his speeches. But it is in his essay 'Buddha or Karl Marx' (Collected works, vol. 7) that he has revealed his thoughts about Marxism in detail. In this essay the kind of understanding and the criticism of Marxism which he has presented is very cursory, superficial and weak. Reading this essay, one gets the impression that he had not read even a single original work of Marxism.

He begins his essay with these words, "A comparison between Karl Marx and Buddha may be regarded as a joke. There need be no surprise in this." (ibid. P. 343). To compare between Buddha and Karl Marx in itself is not a joke. If Ambedkar had taken up this task after correctly understanding both these theories, it would have been a learning for the reader as well as for Ambedkar himself. Further Ambedkar writes, "a comparison between the two is attractive and instructive." (ibid.). It is a pity that both these things are missing in the comparison done by Ambedkar. Instead of being attractive, it is very boring and instead of being instructive it is full of inaccurate information. Further Ambedkar writes, "If the Marxists keep back their prejudices and study the Buddha and understand what he stood

for I feel sure that they will change their attitude. It is of course too much to expect that having been determined to scoff at the Buddha they will remain to pray.” (ibid.). Here Ambedkar presumes that Marxists are prejudiced against Buddha and they scoff at him. Ambedkar does not inform us as to who were those Marxists nor does he give any reference of such writings. If for a moment we agree with Ambedkar that there are some Marxists who are prejudiced towards Buddha and scoff at him, what then is the fault of Marxism in this? It could be the fault of understanding of the Marxist. Marxism helps us to scientifically understand the rise, growth and decline of a philosophy (and the material basis for this). The Marxist philosophy is materialist and its method dialectical. This method teaches us to divide ‘everything into two’ and to separate the positive from negative. Marxists study Buddhism from this very method. They accept its positive elements and reject its negative elements. They do not at all scoff at Buddha and they certainly do not worship him either.

Further he explains theories of Buddha and Karl Marx; rather he explains his own understanding about these theories. About theories of Buddha, he says that “I studied Tripitak” but he does not give us any clue as to which work of Marxism he studied. Informing about Marxism he says, “Karl Marx is no doubt the father of modern socialism or Communism but he was not interested merely in propounding theory of Socialism. That had been done long before him by others. Marx was more interested in proving that his Socialism was scientific.” (‘Buddha and Marx’, ibid. P. 345). If before describing Marxism Ambedkar had bothered to study even little bit of Marxism, he would not have made such a ridiculous statement. He does not inform us who was the one who ‘propounded theory of socialism’ ‘long before’ Karl Marx. Perhaps he is alluding to the utopian socialism of Sismondi, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, which was born at a time when the proletarian class was in minority and was underdeveloped. Far from launching a crusade against the propounders of the utopian socialism or having dislike towards them, modern (scientific) socialism considers itself to be a successor of utopian socialism. In his book ‘Socialism, Utopian and Scientific’,

Engels lavishly admires the utopian socialists and at the same time discusses the limitations of their theories as well. The 'crusade' of Marxism was against the followers of utopian socialists who were playing an entirely different role by forming various factions. Despite the development of the workers' movement the supporters of utopian socialism and communism continued to have a negative attitude towards strikes, trade-unions and political struggles like earlier. They used to take the workers away from the class struggle and towards the arena of utopia and socialist schematicism (e.g. the idea of setting up communist colonies). Ambedkar did not understand the different material conditions behind the growth of utopian and scientific socialism, nor did he understand the basic difference between the two.

Further Ambedkar continues his explanation of "Marxism" and lists down the "principles of Marxism" and proceeds from one profanity to another. According to him, "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." (ibid).

Ambedkar says the same thing in different words, "The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world." But Marx does not say any such thing. What Ambedkar states is a distorted and wrong version of the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach written by Marx. Marx says, "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways, the point, however, is to change it." (Marx-Engels, 'The German Ideology', Progress Publishers, Moscow, page 617). It's not that Ambedkar understood Marx's dictum wrongly, he in fact did not understand it at all. Further Ambedkar says, "society is divided into two classes, owners and workers." Even here Ambedkar is misinforming us. Marxism does not consider the capitalist system (or any other pre-capitalist system) as being divided into only two classes. Marxism tells us that owner and workers form the two main classes of capitalist society, but it does not deny the existence of other (middle) classes. Ambedkar informs us that Marx says, "the workers are exploited by the owners who misappropriate the surplus value, which is the result of the workers' labour." Here Ambedkar is

partially correct that the owners exploit the workers, but Marxism does not talk of making good use or misuse of the surplus value. Marxism tells us that the only source of the capitalists' money (profit) is the exploitation of the labour of workers (surplus value). Marxism does not say any such thing that if the owner class uses this surplus value benevolently then the workers' exploitation is right and if it misuses it then it is wrong.

Further Ambedkar tells us that many of the things mentioned in the original corpus of Marxian creed have been disproved by history. He says that Marxism has been subjected to much criticism ever since it came into being. As a result of this criticism much of the ideological structure raised by Karl Marx has been demolished. There is hardly any doubt that Marx's claim that his socialism was inevitable has been completely disproved. The dictatorship of the Proletariat was first established in 1917 in one country after a period of about seventy years (Ambedkar was not even aware as to when was 'Capital' published) 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. Height of ignorance! Ambedkar's understanding of Marxism is highly immature. Even a normal student of Marxism could understand that this is totally absurd. Has Marx said anywhere that since socialism is inevitable, it would be established without any human effort? Marx repeatedly tells that socialism (dictatorship of proletariat) could be established only by overthrowing the capitalist system through the organized and conscious attempts (class struggle) of the proletarian class. Ambedkar says that 'communism is another name of the dictatorship of the proletariat.' It is utterly childish! According to Marxism communism is the advance stage of socialism where class, class struggle and the state which happens to be the product of these contradictions will cease to exist.

So communism is not the other name of the dictatorship of the proletariat, rather both are opposite of each other.

After claiming that a large part of Marxism has been demolished, Ambedkar informs us that only following four items remain as a residue of Marxism:

(i) The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world.

(ii) That there is a conflict of interest between one class and another class.

(iii) That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation.

(iv) That it is necessary for the good of society that sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property. (Dr. Ambedkar, 'Collected Works,' Hindi edition, Vol. 7, p. 347)

After this Ambedkar goes on to compare Buddha and Karl Marx and he says that Buddha and Karl Marx have agreement on these four points and on the first point there is complete agreement between Buddha and Karl Marx. We have already seen that the first point which is discussed in Ambedkar's explanation of Marxism (residual) is totally absurd. Marx did not say it at all. As regards the second point, Ambedkar says that as per Buddha "there is always strife going on between kings, 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 . . ." (ibid. p. 347) In response to this argument made by Ambedkar, Rangnaykamma writes, "In view of Ambedkar, the Buddha's observations amount to speaking of class struggle.

"Even those who not at all know anything about classes will not be in such a pathetic condition as this!

"When we speak of 'classes', we assume the existence of 'owner-labourers' relationship. We also assume existence of exploitation of labour. ...

"Classes are based on exploitation of labour! Class struggle and different interests are based on classes.

“Based on these principles, we understand classes in any kind of society. ...

“We will be able to understand classes, sections within the classes and the entire set of social relations only when we clearly know about the exploitation of labour.

Ambedkar’s claim that ‘the Buddha had already talked about the classes’ has nothing to do with classes. If we properly understand classes, we can understand the nature of conflicts which the Buddha observed.” (Ranganayakamma, *Ibid.*, p. 309-310)

While explaining the third and fourth-point Ambedkar tells as to how Buddha eliminated private property which happens to be the cause of all miseries, how the Buddhist monks could not keep any private property apart from eight personal items. This comparison of Ambedkar has nothing to do with the Marxist principles of elimination of property. As per the Marxist teaching first of all the proletarian class organizes itself into the leadership of its revolutionary (communist) party and captures the state from the bourgeois class. Subsequently it undertakes the gradual socialization of the means of production and other forms of property and its purpose is to continuously move towards a classless society. Marxism is concerned with the material and cultural prosperity of humanity.

Towards the end of his article, Ambedkar has compared the means adopted by Buddha and Marxism for achieving their aim (As per Ambedkar both have the same aim). Ambedkar says, “the means adopted by the Communists are equally clear, short and swift. They are (1) Violence and (2) Dictatorship of the Proletariat” (*ibid*). As regards violence, Ambedkar says, “violence cannot be totally abandoned. Buddha was against violence. But he was also in favour of justice and wherever force is required for justice he has permitted it” (*ibid*). But Ambedkar condemns the communists for violence because “The communists preach violence as an absolute principle” (*ibid*). But Ambedkar does not provide any reference to support his accusation. He presumes that when communists advocate violence, this violence is not for justice. If the working classes use violence in response to the violence imposed upon them by the exploiting

classes for getting rid of exploitation-oppression, is it not for justice? If even this is not for justice, then what is Ambedkar's definition of justice? On this Ambedkar has maintained a studied silence.

Even on the question of dictatorship and democracy, Ambedkar is badly confused. He does not even understand that what he calls democracy is actually the dictatorship of class, one or another. In capitalist democracy it is the dictatorship of the bourgeois class. For the bourgeois class it is democracy and for the proletariat class it is dictatorship. The only "crime" the Marxists commit is that they call a spade a spade. The dictatorship of proletariat is the dictatorship for the bourgeois class and democracy for the proletarian and other toiling classes.

Overall it can be said that the Ambedkar's interpretation and criticism of Marxism is extremely childish and ridiculous. It is a product of Ambedkar's ignorance and lack of reading.

4) Ambedkar's Economics

While writing and speaking on the economic questions Ambedkar comes to the fore as a bourgeois economist. On the question of the building the Indian economy after independence there is no difference between the Nehru-Mahalanabis-Tata-Birla plan and the thoughts of Ambedkar. Ambedkar advocates a public sector capitalism which is also known as mixed economy. (To know in detail the thoughts of Ambedkar on this question, see Dr. Ambedkar, Complete Works vol. 2). After independence the capitalist class adopted the same path for the capitalist transformation of Indian economy. In fact, this was the only alternative for the capitalist transformation of a semi-feudal economy which was available to the emaciated capitalist class which was born out of a colonial structure and which had come to power in the particular historical conditions prevailing at the time of independence. And the Indian capitalist class chose the same alternative. In this way the Indian capitalist class did not do a radical rupture from imperialism nor did it give a revolutionary blow to colonial-feudal socio-economic-political formations which it had inherited. The Indian capitalist class either

ended these formations in a long historical process or adopted them after modifying a bit. This path of capitalist development has been extremely painful for the toiling masses of India. The outcome of the capitalist development of last 65 years is in front of everyone. Today we are living in a society which is much polarised than ever. The toiling masses (Dalits constitute a significant part of it) of India suffer from barbaric exploitation-oppression even today. This is the fate of the path suggested by Ambedkar for the emancipation of India.

In his above-mentioned work, Ambedkar also gives a proposal before the capitalist class of nationalization of agriculture. This Ambedkarite utopia of the nationalization of agriculture was derived out of ignorance and the capitalist class of India never paid any attention to it. Actually, even the industrial capitalist class wants the nationalization of agriculture. It would end the absolute-rent received by the land-owners and the industrial capitalist class would get the cheap raw material from agriculture. But attacking one part of private property would raise the question mark over the whole system of private property. Therefore the bourgeois class will never take such a fatal step.

Ambedkar terms the totality of suggestions (nationalization of agriculture, industry, insurance etc.) which he gave to the Indian capitalist class in his above work on the eve of independence as state socialism. What Ambedkar terms as state socialism is referred by Nehru as mix of “socialism” and capitalism (mix economy). In essence both are the same.

5) Ambedkar's Sociology

Undoubtedly Ambedkar continued to struggle against untouchability and caste-system throughout his life. But does Ambedkar suggest any path for the elimination of the caste-system? On the question of elimination of the caste-system in India he has expressed his ideas in detail in his essay 'Annihilation of caste' (Ambedkar, Complete Works, vol 1). His essay is actually a draft of a speech which he prepared for the annual conference of the 'Jaat-Paat-Todak-Mandal' of Lahore to be held in 1936. But because of the disagreement of the

inaugural committee with the content of his speech, Ambedkar could not deliver this speech. Dalit intellectual Anand Teltumbde while comparing this essay with the Communist Manifesto says, "What Communist Manifesto is to the capitalist world, 'Annihilation of Caste' is to the caste-India. (Quoted by Asit Das in 'Marxism and the Caste Question: An extended Review of Com. Anuradha Ghandy's "Caste Question in India", sanhati.com)

The Communist Manifesto shows the path of the emancipation of workers all over the world from the capitalist exploitation-oppression. Can the same be said about Ambedkar's 'Annihilation of Caste' that it also shows the path of emancipation of crores of Dalits from caste-based repression-oppression and humiliation? Any person suffering from caste-based repression-oppression would feel happy when he will read the title of this essay (Annihilation of Caste). But alas, the reader of this essay gets disappointed because Ambedkar concludes that the annihilation of caste is impossible. Ambedkar mentions two reasons for the annihilation of caste to be impossible. The first is that the Brahmins would not be ready for it and secondly none of the castes would like it to be changed. Ambedkar says, "Speaking for myself, I see the task to be well nigh impossible. Perhaps you would like to know why I think so. Out of the many reasons, which have led me to take this view, I will mention some, which I regard much important. One of these reasons is the attitude of hostility, which the Brahmins have shown towards this question. The Brahmins form the vanguard of the movement for political reform and in some cases also of economic reform. But they are not to be found even as camp followers in the army raised to break down the barricades of Caste. Is there any hope of the Brahmins ever taking up a lead in the future in this matter? I say no. You may ask why? You may argue that there is no reason why Brahmins should continue to shun social reform. You may argue that the Brahmins know that the bane of Hindu Society is Caste and as an enlightened class could not be expected to be indifferent to its consequences. You may argue that there are secular Brahmins and priestly Brahmins and if the latter do not take up the cudgels on behalf of those who want to break Caste, the former will. All this of course sounds very plausible. But in all this it is

forgotten that the break up of the Caste system is bound to affect adversely the Brahmin Caste. Having regard to this, is it reasonable to expect that the Brahmins will ever consent to lead a movement the ultimate result of which is to destroy the power and prestige of the Brahmin Caste? Is it reasonable to expect the secular Brahmins to take part in a movement directed against the priestly Brahmins? In my judgment, it is useless to make a distinction between the secular Brahmins and priestly Brahmins. Both are kith and kin. They are two arms of the same body and one bound to fight for the existence of the other...

“Some of you will say that it is a matter of small concern whether the Brahmins come forward to lead the movement against Caste or whether they do not. To take this view is in my judgment to ignore the part played by the intellectual class in the community. Whether you accept theory of the great man as the maker of history or whether you do not, this much you will have to concede that in every country the intellectual class is the most influential class, if not the governing class. The intellectual class is the class which can foresee, it is the class which can advise and give lead. In no country does the mass of the people live the life of intelligent thought and action. It is largely imitative and follows the intellectual class. There is no exaggeration in saying that the entire destiny of a country depends upon its intellectual class. If the intellectual class is honest, independent and disinterested it can be trusted to take the initiative and give a proper lead when a crisis arises. It is true that intellect by itself is no virtue. It is only a means and the use of means depends upon the ends which an intellectual person pursues. An intellectual man can be a good man but he can easily be a rogue. Similarly, an intellectual class may be a band of high-souled persons, ready to help, ready to emancipate erring humanity or it may easily be a gang of crooks or a body of advocates of a narrow clique from which it draws its support. You may think it a pity that the intellectual class in India is simply another name for the Brahmin caste. You may regret that the two are one; that the existence of the intellectual class should be bound with one single caste, that this intellectual class should share the interest and the aspirations of that Brahmin caste,

which has regarded itself the custodian of the interest of that caste, rather than of the interests of the country. All this may be very regrettable. But the fact remains, that the Brahmins form the intellectual class of the Hindus. It is not only an intellectual class but it is a class which is held in great reverence by the rest of the Hindus...

“When such an intellectual class, which holds the rest of the community in its grip, is opposed to the reform of Caste, the chances of success in a movement for the break-up of the Caste system appear to me very, very remote.” (Ambedkar, Complete Works, vol. 1)

Ambedkar describes the second reason for the ‘annihilation of caste’ to be impossible in the following words: “The second reason, why I say the task is impossible, will be clear if you will bear in mind that the Caste system has two aspects. In one of its aspects, it divides men into separate communities. In its second aspect, it places these communities in a graded order one above the other in social status. Each caste takes its pride and its consolation in the fact that in the scale of castes it is above some other caste. As an outward mark of this gradation, there is also a gradation of social and religious rights technically spoken of as Ashta-dhikaras and Sanskaras. The higher the grade of a caste, the greater the number of these rights and the lower the grade, the lesser their number. Now this gradation, this scaling of castes, makes it impossible to organize a common front against the Caste System. If a caste claims the right to inter-dine and inter-marry with another caste placed above it, it is frozen, instantly it is told by mischief-mongers, and there are many Brahmins amongst such mischief-mongers, that it will have to concede inter-dining and inter-marriage with castes below it! All are slaves of the Caste System. But all the slaves are not equal in status. To excite the proletariat to bring about an economic revolution, Karl Marx told them: “You have nothing to lose except your chains.” But the artful way in which the social and religious rights are distributed among the different castes whereby some have more and some have less, makes the slogan of Karl Marx quite useless to excite the Hindus

against the Caste System. Castes form a graded system of sovereignties, high and low, which are jealous of their status and which know that if a general dissolution came, some of them stand to lose more of their prestige and power than others do. You cannot, therefore, have a general mobilization of the Hindus, to use a military expression, for an attack on the Caste System.”

Those suffering from the curse of the caste-system do not need to get disheartened because like all other questions, even on this question, Ambedkar while refuting his own notions says exactly the opposite of what he said above. He says that the annihilation of caste is possible. The panacea which he invented for this was inter-caste marriage. Ambedkar writes, “I am convinced that the real remedy is inter-marriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount the separatist feeling—the feeling of being aliens—created by Caste will not vanish. Among the Hindus inter-marriage must necessarily be a factor of greater force in social life...”

But according to Ambedkar, the biggest roadblock in the path of inter-caste marriages is Hindu religion. He says, “You are right in holding that Caste will cease to be an operative force only when inter-dining and inter-marriage have become matters of common course. You have located the source of the disease. But is your prescription the right prescription for the disease? Ask yourselves this question; Why is it that a large majority of Hindus do not inter-dine and do not inter-marry? Why is it that your cause is not popular? There can be only one answer to this question and it is that inter-dining and inter-marriage are repugnant to the beliefs and dogmas which the Hindus regard as sacred.” (ibid.).

Ambedkar says that in order to pave the path of inter-dinning and inter-caste marriages among people a struggle needs to be waged against the Hindu religion and the Shastras. “People are not wrong in observing Caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of Caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy, you must grapple with, is not the people who observe Caste, but the Shastras which teach them this religion of Caste.

Criticizing and ridiculing people for not inter-dining or inter-marrying or occasionally holding inter-caste dinners and celebrating inter-caste marriages, is a futile method of achieving the desired end. The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras. How do you expect to succeed, if you allow the Shastras to continue to mold the beliefs and opinions of the people?

“To agitate for and to organize inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages is like forced feeding brought about by artificial means. Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so.”

But where is the magical wand through which the people’s belief in the Shastras could be destroyed and every man and woman could be freed from the shackles of Shastras? He does not reveal it.

But Ambedkar does not stop here. He tells yet another remedy for the annihilation of caste, “you will get an idea why I think that breaking-up of Caste amongst the Hindus is well-nigh impossible. At any rate, it would take ages before a breach is made. But whether the doing of the deed takes time or whether it can be done quickly, you must not forget that if you wish to bring about & breach in the system then you have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the Shastras, which deny any part to reason, to Vedas and Shastras, which deny any part to morality. You must destroy the Religion of the Shrutis and the Smritis. Nothing else will avail. This is my considered view of the matter.” (ibid.)

Further Ambedkar says, “Some may not understand what I mean by destruction of Religion; some may find the idea revolting to them and some may find it revolutionary.” (ibid.)

Further Ambedkar takes yet another somersault, instead of destroying religion he now begins to talk of reform in religion. He says, “While I condemn a Religion of Rules, I must not be understood to hold the opinion that there is no necessity for a religion. On the contrary, I agree with Burke when he says that, “True

religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true Civil Government rests, and both their sanction.” Consequently, when I urge that these ancient rules of life be annulled, I am anxious that its place shall be taken by a Religion of Principles, which alone can lay claim to being a true Religion. (ibid.)

After this Ambedkar provides a long list of reforms needed in Hindu religion.

So, this is Ambedkar’s path of ‘Annihilation of Caste’ which is compared by Anand Teltumbde with the Communist Manifesto. And intellectuals like Asit Das owing to their defeatist mindset and due to the fear that the Dalit might be pissed off, avoid any kind of criticism of Ambedkar and nod in agreement with the “Dalit” intellectuals.

Talking in today’s context, the path of inter-caste marriages which was suggested by Ambedkar for the annihilation of Caste could be effective to a great extent in making a dent on the caste-system. But it would not be possible through any utopian reforms within the Hindu religion (as suggested by Ambedkar). There cannot be arranged inter-caste marriage. Only inter-caste love marriage is possible. For love, what one requires is time, education and culture. But even now about 90 percent of the Dalit population are wage-slaves which do not have time, nor do they have education and culture for love. A culture-less love cannot be a human love; it could only be animal love. For the spread of education and culture among the Dalits what is required is to improve their economic condition and for that the current capitalist production-relations will have to be changed. Ambedkar rightly said that for annihilating caste inter-dinning and inter-caste marriages should be promoted. But how will that be possible? In response to this question, he has only created a utopia of reforms in Hindu religion.

During the last days of his life Ambedkar told yet another path for the annihilation of caste. It was the path of religious conversion. But even on this Ambedkar does not have any clear-cut view. Like all questions even on this question he says contradictory things.

He says, "Can an untouchable after his conversion to Christianity take water from a public well? Are his children admitted to a public school? Can he enter a shop and buy things from inside? Will a barber shave him? Will a washerman wash his clothes? Can he travel in a bus? Will he be admitted in public offices without compunction? Will he be allowed to live in the touchable quarters of the village? Will the Hindus take water from him? Will they dine with him? Will not the Hindus take a bath if he touches him?" (Ambedkar quoted by Ranganayakamma, 'For the solution of the "Caste" question, Buddha is not enough, Ambedkar is not enough either, Marx is a must', p. 403.)

In response to these questions Ambedkar says: "I am sure the answer to every one of these questions must be in the negative. In other words conversion has not brought any change in the social status of the untouchable convert. To the general mass of Hindus the untouchable remains an untouchable even though he becomes a Christian (Ibid. p. 403)."

In 1956 when Ambedkar embraced Buddhist religion by giving up Hindu religion and asked other Dalits also to follow suit, he did not raise the same questions with regard to the Buddhist religion which he raised with regard to the Christian religion.

But, can the path of religious conversion being suggested by Ambedkar for the annihilation of caste help in annihilating the caste? Did the Dalits get emancipated from the caste-system after embracing the Buddhist religion? The answers to these questions are in the negative. The Dalits who embraced Buddhist religion by giving up Hinduism began to be called as neo-Buddhists. The term Neo-Buddhists became synonym of Dalit. Even among the Dalit Buddhists the caste-discrimination continued. Actually, religious conversion is no solution to the caste question. If all the Dalits embrace Buddhist religion, the name of Dalit will become Buddhist. If people belonging to all the castes embrace Buddhism its fate will be similar to Sikh, Christianity and Islam. These religions do not believe in casteism but casteism continues to be followed by its followers. Only the name of caste has been changed. Among Sikhs, the

Chamars became Ramdasiye Sikh, chuhde became mazhabi sikh and Jats became Jat Sikh. Even Islam has the similar situation. The followers of this religion are also divided in several castes such as Sheikhs, Ansari, Dhunia, Kadi, Kasim, Hazzam etc.

Ambedkar either believes annihilation of caste to be impossible or contrary to his own belief when he gives suggestions for the annihilation of caste, they are all impractical and utopian.

6) Ambedkar's History Writing

Whatever has been written by Ambedkar in the name of history is highly ludicrous. It is full of fairy tales. To know it the readers can see Ambedkar's works such as 'Castes in India: Their mechanism, genesis and development', 'The untouchables: who were they and how they became untouchables?', 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution', 'Buddha and his Dhamma' etc. Rangnayakamma in her book 'For the solution of 'Caste' question, Ambedkar is not enough, Buddha is also not enough, Marx is must' has also staunchly criticized this so-called history writing of Ambedkar. The readers can refer to this as well.

A thorough criticism of Ambedkar's highly ludicrous "history writing" would require a huge book. But it would be a worthless task. Therefore, we will limit ourselves to only two questions. One of the questions is, the origin of caste-system and the second is the origin of Buddhism, its role in relation to caste and its fall. Ambedkar's writings on both these questions are fanciful. Today we have loads of scientific research on both these questions. After so much research on the caste question and Buddhism, no one apart from the blind followers of Ambedkar would agree with the fanciful writings of Ambedkar.

First let us take the question of the origin of the caste. On this Ambedkar writes, "It is my turn now, this evening, to entertain you, as best I can, with a paper on Castes in India: Their mechanism, genesis and development."

"I need hardly remind you of the complexity of the subject I intend to handle. Subtler minds and abler pens than mine have been brought

to the task of unravelling the mysteries of Caste; but unfortunately it still, remains in the domain of the “ unexplained “, not to say of the “ un-understood “ I am quite alive to the complex intricacies of a hoary institution like Caste, but I am not so pessimistic as to relegate it to the region of the unknowable, for I believe it can be known.” (‘Complete Works’, vol. 1)

Ambedkar quickly “solves” this complex subject. He says, “Having explained the mechanism of the creation and preservation of Caste in India, the further question as to its genesis naturally arises... As for myself I do not feel puzzled by the Origin of Caste in India for, as I have established before, endogamy is the only characteristic of Caste.” (ibid.)

But how did endogamy come into existence? In response to this question Ambedkar says that it was started by Brahmins. It means The Brahmins were present even before the beginning of endogamy. So the caste-system was not born due to endogamy. But Ambedkar does not bother to address these questions. For Ambedkar, caste-system is not an incomprehensible-unknowable mystery, but for the reader even after reading his entire article the origin of caste-system continues to be an incomprehensible and unknowable mystery. Ambedkar does not help even a bit towards solving the mystery.

The question of the origin of the caste-system remained an incomprehensible and unknowable mystery for Ambedkar (even if he claims contrary to it), but the Marxist historians such as D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma, Suvira Jaiswal, Irfan Habib etc. have taken up the task of solving this mystery. These historians believe that the caste-system was a kind of division of labour. R.S. Sharma writes, “The caste-system began on the basis of division of labour.” Irfan Habib writes on this, “I believe that it will be useful to follow the perspective which was clearly and cogently practiced by Kosambi. This perspective is the one developed by Karl Marx. Caste should be viewed primarily in its role in different social formations that have arisen in a chain of sequence. A social formation, in so far as it is based on the form of the ‘labour process’, arises after the producers in society are able to provide a ‘surplus’. It is vain to expect a social

institution like caste to exist before this stage has arrived. Indeed, Dumont himself recognizes this, for he admits that the emergence of castes presupposes division of labour which cannot be found in primitive societies. ('Caste and Money in Indian History') Further he writes, "this primitive division of labour in the form of caste-system has been adopted by all the subsequent social systems moulding it as per their requirement. And today it exists as a capitalist caste-system. Being a relatively rigid form of division of labour, the caste system formed part of the relations of production." ('Caste and Money in Indian History'). Further he writes, "Being a relatively rigid form of division of labour, the caste system formed part of the relations of production." (ibid.). D. D. Kosambi says, "Caste-system is a class-system of a primitive stage of production." ('Culture and Civilization of Ancient India: an historical outline').

Much like the origin of the caste-system Ambedkar could not understand at all the origin of Buddhist religion, its relation with the caste-system and the reasons for its fall. Ambedkar says that the Buddhist religion originated as a reaction of the degeneration of the Aryan civilization. He does not discuss the material conditions behind the origin of the Buddhist religion at all. He says, "Buddhism was a revolution. It was as great a Revolution as the French Revolution. Though it began as a religious revolution, it became more than religious revolution. It became a Social and Political Revolution. To be able to realize how profound was the character of this Revolution, it is necessary to know the state of the society before the revolution began its course. To use the language of the French Revolution, it is necessary to have a picture of the ancient regime in India.

"To understand the great reform, which he brought about by his teaching, it is necessary to have some idea of the degraded condition of the Aryan civilization at the time when Buddha started on the mission of his life."

Ambedkar provides a long list of the evils which were introduced in the life of Aryans. While discussing the Buddhist religion with

reference to caste, he says, "Thirdly Buddha denounced the caste system. The Caste System in its present form was not then existing. The bar against inter-dining and inter-marriage had not then become operative. Things were flexible and not rigid as they are now. But the principle of inequality which is the basis of the caste system had become well established and it was against this principle that Buddha carried on a determined and a bitter fight.

"In the matter of his opposition to Caste, Buddha practiced what he preached. He did what the Aryan Society refused to do. In the Aryan Society the Shudra or low caste man could never become a Brahman. But Buddha not only preached against caste but admitted the Shudra and the low caste to the rank of a Bhikku who held the same rank in Buddhism as the Brahman did in Brahmanism."

Ambedkar holds the Muslim invasions to be responsible for the fall of Buddhist religion, "The furious massacre perpetrated in many places by Musalman invaders were more efficacious than Orthodox Hindu persecutions, and had a great deal to do with the disappearance of Buddhism in several provinces (of India)."

But Marxist historians have different opinion on all these questions. D.N. Jha writes about the origin of the Buddhist religion, "The newly developed features of the social and economic life of the people did not fit in with the Vedic ritualism and animal sacrifices, which had become a source of the senseless decimation of cattle wealth, the main basis of the new plough agriculture. The conflict between the Vedic religious practices and the aspirations of the rising social groups led to the search for new religious and philosophical ideas which would fit with the basic changes in the material life of the people..."

"Certain features are common to Jainism and Buddhism. First, the proponents of both sects had to put in considerable mental and physical efforts. This is proved by the extremely austere life of Mahavira and Gautama. Secondly, both religions denied the authority of the Vedas and opposed animal sacrifice, which brought them into conflict with the brahmanical orthodoxy. The technological change owing to the introduction of iron led to the increasing

development of plough cultivation which was mainly dependent on animal husbandry. Viewed in this background the doctrine of non-injury to animals appears significant. The concept of ahimsa popularised for the first time helped agriculture which can support at least ten times as many people per square mile as a pastoral economy in the same region. But undue emphasis on nonviolence in Jainism stood in the way of its propagation among the agriculturists whose profession necessarily involved killing insects and pests...

“Compared to Jainism, Buddhism was moderate in its stress on the doctrine of ahimsa...

“Since Buddhism, unlike Jainism, showed a greater awareness of the contemporary needs of agriculture it was acceptable to the village folk.” (‘Ancient India’, D.N. Jha).

About the approach of Buddhist religion towards caste-system, Irfan Habib writes, “almost everyone seems agreed that in universalising the caste system within India, Brahmanas have played a key role, and that by integrating the caste doctrine into the dharma, Brahmanas made the caste system and Brahmanism inseparable. One result of these assumptions has been that the role of Buddhism in the process of caste formations has often escaped notice.

“To anyone who reads Kautilya’s Arthashastra with its heavy stress on the varna system and then turns to Asoka’s edicts, the contrast is a striking one. The word varna (or jati) never appears in Asoka’s texts; obedience to the varna rules does not form even implicitly a part of the dharma that Asoka propagated and whose principles he inscribed on rocks and pillars. In so far as Buddhism rejected the religious supremacy of the Brahmans, it necessarily questioned the legitimacy of the varna division inherited from the Vedas.

“And yet it may be asked whether Buddhism did not have its own contributions to make to the development of the caste system. The karma doctrine or the belief in the transmigration of souls which formed the bedrock of Buddhist philosophy, was an ideal rationalization of the caste system, creating a belief in its equity even among those who were its greatest victims. In the Manusmriti (XI, 24-26) it already appears as a firm part of the caste doctrine.

“Second, there was the stress on ahimsa. Kosambi attributed the stress on avoidance of animal-killing in Buddhism to the irrationality of large-scale slaughter of livestock for sacrifice by Brahmanas, once settled agriculture had replaced pastoralism. Kosambi did not, of course, intend to disparage the sincerity of the Buddha’s disapproval of violence or cruelty (and, after all, Asoka condemned the massacres by his army in Kalinga). What he implied was that any criticism of the large-scale animal sacrifices would be popular among the ‘cattle-raising vaisya’. But I would like respectfully to suggest what seems to me to be a more plausible reason why ahimsa should have become a popular doctrine. It provided reason for the subjugation and humiliation of the food-gathering communities. The Asokan edicts contain injunctions against hunting and fishing, and the Buddhist texts look down on ‘animal-killing jatis’ as much as the brahmanical texts do.

“Indeed, here Buddhism also contributed to the ultimate denigration of the peasantry in the varna structure. R.S. Sharma of exposition of how the shudra and the vaisya varna came to be regarded as the category to which peasants must belong is practically definitive. In this denigration the ahimsa doctrine too was made to play a part. Manu (X, 84) condemns the use of the plough for the injury that its iron point causes to living creatures. This is echoed in later Buddhism; Itsing says that the Buddha forbade monks from engaging in cultivation because this involved ‘destroying lives by ploughing and watering field.’

“It would, therefore, be wrong to suppose that the caste ideology has been exclusively Brahmanical in its development.” (“Caste and Money in Indian History”).

The Buddhist religion could never become a challenge to the social system. In the Buddhist monasteries, there was no entry to the debtors and slaves. (DN Jha, *ibid.*). So, comparing it with the French Revolution (which ended Feudalism in Europe and heralded a new era in the history of mankind) is not at all apt. As regards the fall of the Buddhist religion, this fall had begun in the lifetime of

Buddha itself when it became the state-religion. We have already discussed this in this paper.

The reason for Ambedkar's ignorance about history lies in his idealist world view which prevents him from going to the root of the historical events and the phenomena. It is because of this idealist world view that Ambedkar considers caste to be a superstructural question and does not see its root in the division of labour or the production relations (base). Hence, he sees even the solution to this problem in the reform in the Hindu religion and freedom from Shastra.

7) On Advocating Unity Between Marxism and Ambedkarism

There are numerous shades of Dalit intellectuals. Some say that Marxist philosophy is economic deterministic. Some say that Marxism is not relevant in Indian context because Indian society is divided across caste lines. But at the same time there is yet another stream of "Dalit" intellectuals which considers Marxism as necessary for India but along with Ambedkarism. They say that in order to end the caste-based and class-based exploitation-oppression Marxism needs to be amalgamated with Ambedkarism.

The attempts of amalgamating Marxism and Ambedkarism are not new, such attempts have been made in the past as well. Sometime back Sharad Patil formed Satyashodhak Communist Party in Maharashtra which used to believe in Marxism-Phule-Ambedkarism as its guiding principle. Hindi writer Manager Pandey who is known as a Marxist critic also stresses on the unity between Marxism and Ambedkarism. Dalit writer Thomas Mathew also gives the same line. Another Dalit writer Anand Teltumbde says the same thing using different words. He says that prerequisite for bringing about any social change in India is a strong Dalit movement which while fighting the remnants of Brahmanism is capable of taking a class orientation and assimilating the toiling masses from all the other castes, and there should also be a strong communist movement which incorporates into its class struggle the agenda of the struggle

against social and cultural discrimination. (See his article, Theorizing the Dalit Movement: A Viewpoint)

But, is any such unity between Marxism and Ambedkarism at all possible? Those advocating unity between Marxism and Ambedkarism do not tell us concretely as what Marxism can take from Ambedkarism to enrich itself. A unity between Marxism and Ambedkarism would mean unity on philosophical plane; unity on political, economic and sociological plane. But in all these matters Marxism and Ambedkarism stand opposite to each other.

The philosophical base of Marxism is dialectical materialism, whereas Ambedkar remained a metaphysical idealist throughout his life. In the last days of his life, he reached to the primitive mechanical materialist Buddhism. This materialism was materialistic with regard to understanding the relation between man and nature while in relation to understanding the social relations it too was idealist only. And Ambedkar does not even take the primitive materialism of Buddha; he only takes individual conduct. As regards understanding the social relations, Ambedkar remained a metaphysical idealist throughout his life. Dialectical materialism serves the progressive classes; it is their intellectual and spiritual weapon. On the contrary metaphysical idealism serves the moribund exploiting classes.

Talking about politics, Marxism paves the way for the establishment of dictatorship of proletariat through class struggle. The dictatorship of proletariat would be merely a means for eradicating class differentiation from society, ending exploitation of a man by a man and for taking socialism to a classless society—communism. In the process of developing socialism to classless communism even the dictatorship of proletariat would become redundant and in a natural process it would end.

On the other hand, Ambedkar's politics advocates for reconciliation with the exploiting classes. It gives the line of appeasing the wretched exploited toiling masses through the lollypop of some minor reforms within the capitalist system based upon the foundation of exploitation and oppression by making the toiling masses a part of the system.

Marxist political economy exposes the capitalist exploitation. It tells us that the exploitation of labour is the only source for the profit of capitalist. For ending this exploitation, it is necessary that the working class unites itself in the leadership of the Communist Party and overthrows the rule of the capitalists and establish its dictatorship. Only then it could socialize all the forms of property.

On the other hand Ambedkar's economics is utopian. It favours public sector capitalism. It advocates for continuing the exploitation of the toiling masses by the capitalists. Marxism teaches us that the social-cultural discrimination could be ended only when its material basis—production relations—is smashed. To preclude any confusion, we must clarify that Marxism does not teach that with the change in the production relations the socio-cultural discrimination would end on its own. For this perpetual cultural revolution would be required in the process of changing the production-relations (revolution) and even afterwards. As regards Ambedkar, he does not have any programme of ending socio-cultural discrimination. On the question of annihilation of caste, he believes that it is impossible. Later on, without giving any clarification he calls for religious conversion for the annihilation of caste which could not affect the caste-system even a bit. It is not clear as to why the supporters of Ambedkar are insisting on the unity between Marxism and Ambedkarism when Ambedkar himself was dead against Marxism. Perhaps he did not show as much hatred towards Brahmanism as he showed against Marxism. After all it was Ambedkar who termed Marxism as 'pig's philosophy' ('Buddha or Karl Marx').

Marxism is an ideology of the revolutionary working class while Ambedkarism happens to be a shade of bourgeois liberalism. Both these ideologies represent the interests of the classes which are antagonistic to each other. Any unity between both of them is impossible.

In Conclusion

Ambedkar waged a relentless struggle against untouchability and caste-system which happens to be a curse of Indian society. Due to

these struggles a new awareness for their rights was indeed generated among the masses suffering from caste-based repression-oppression for generations. But despite its noble purpose this stream of social-reform in the leadership of Ambedkar was bereft with any comprehensive project for the emancipation of Dalits. We do not see any path of Dalit emancipation in the overall philosophic, political, economic and social thoughts of Ambedkar.

We would like to end this paper with these words of Bhagat Singh, "Arise! So called untouchables, the real sustainers of life, awake...

"waste no time and unite to stand on your own feet and challenge the existing order of society. Let it then be seen as to who dares to deny to you your due. Do not be at the mercy of others and have no illusions about them. Be on guard so as not to fall in the trap of officialdom, because far from being your ally it seeks to make you dance on its own tunes. The capitalist bureaucratic combine is, truly speaking responsible for your oppression and poverty. Hence always shun it. Be on guard about its tricks. This is then the way out. You are the real working class. Workers unite – you have nothing to lose but your chains. Arise and rebel against the existing order. Gradualism and reformism shall be of no avail to you. Start a revolution from a social agitation and gird up your loins for political economic revolution. You and you alone are the pillars of the nations and its core strength. Awake, O sleeping lions! Rebel, raise the banner of revolt." (Bhagat Singh, The untouchable, published in 'Kirti' (Punjab) June 1929).

(Translated from Hindi: Anand Singh)

CASTE, CLASS AND IDENTITY POLITICS

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The beginning, on a large scale, of what is termed as identity politics can be traced back to the decade of 1980. As is clear from its name, the concept of identity is central to it. In sociological and socio-anthropological terms, 'identity' is a set of behavioral and individual characteristics which gives recognition to an individual as member of a group. This identity is determined by objective social categories such as caste, gender, religious community, race etc. and is generally considered as relatively stable, static and naturally given. It is this very definition of identity which is the point of departure for identity politics. However, as a collective phenomenon, it does not speak of any single identity; rather it emphasizes on several fragmented identities. This fragmentation of identities not only takes place at the level of personality of an individual, but also at the plane of society as a whole. In a class society, a man\woman has multiple identities. Every individual has the identities of caste, language, region and nationality. The identity politics highlights these identities and essentializes them. One of the identities (which cannot be even termed as an identity in the true sense) which this politics does not even mention is the class identity. The class identity is not given naturally, racially, regionally or linguistically. The class identity is formed during society's basic activity viz. the productive activity; the people who are engaged in these activities come to establish certain definite social relations which are independent of their will. However, the politics of identity never lays any emphasis on this identity. You will get to see innumerable NGOs which are founded on gender, caste, region or linguistic identity. However, you can hardly come across any workers' NGO!

What is the motive behind overstressing the primitive communal identity and ignoring the class identity? In order to understand this, it is imperative to first understand the global material background of the emergence of the identity politics. Besides, the phenomenon of emergence of fora such as, 'New Social Movements', World Social Forum as well as that of non-government organizations (NGOs) must be contextualized within the perspective of identity politics.

The Material Background of the Rise of Identity Politics

In the 1980s and 1990s, following the beginning of the process of globalization, the neo-liberal economic policies were implemented in those countries of the world where people were uprooted on a large scale, the unemployment increased rapidly and popular unrest grew tremendously. In such a scenario, in order to douse the extreme public anger over the effects of the processes of globalization and in order to blur the ever-intensifying class contradictions, a need for the ideological weapon of the identity politics arose which could, at least, look radical in its appearance. The identity politics while talking about the "peripheral" and "marginalized" identities, overlooks the class identity. For instance, there is an NGO called World Mountain People's Association which is funded by the French government. This NGO appeals to unite all the people living in the Mountainous regions, not only in the country but throughout the world! According to it, the mountainous people, irrespective of the fact whether they are rich or poor, share the same issues because they live on mountains! This, too, is a kind of politics based on the invocation of regional and communal identity.

Thus, the identity politics was brought into play to prevent any class-based unity as a result of intensifying class division and polarization due to globalization. The identity politics is, in fact, a part of the internal mechanism of the global capitalism which is funded by the capitalism itself as a counter-balancing force for keeping in check the inevitable explosive social consequences of the process of globalization. If the independent logic of capital develops

uninterruptedly, the explosion of social class polarization and deepening social contradictions would soon take the capitalist system towards its culmination. In order to prevent this to happen, the bourgeois theoreticians, state powers and international agencies keep on creating different kinds of 'speed breakers' and 'safety-valves', erecting the second and third line of defense for the system and infiltrating different kinds of 'Trojan horses' within the mass movements. The forums such as World Social Forum, which claims to be a common platform for the 'new social movements', are performing the role of such Trojan horses only. This name itself is amusing. They stress on being social precisely because they are not political. Being political would mean to raise the question of state, the question of system. However, these movements do not wish to raise precisely these questions. Today the same is being done by the so-called 'New Social Movements' as well as myriad NGOs and organizations and movements sponsored by them which raise the slogan of identity politics. They take away the problem of state and system from the realm of questions. The capitalist class is never put into the dock. What is not spelt out is that who the enemy is and whom to fight. Raising finger against the government is deemed incorrect and by employing radical slogans and talking about people's initiative, initiative from below etc. responsibility of all sorrows, distress and problems is put on people's shoulders.

There is yet another important point which needs to be drawn attention to. The capitalist system is a homogenizer and it requires certain extent of uniformity on the plane of identity. On the economic plane, capitalism carries out a process of universalization. The economic universalization gets expressed in the universalization in the superstructure as well. Capitalism undertakes a kind of universalization of the identity of man/woman, too, as well as, in form of a human being, as an independent individual, too, at least temporarily, it does this. It is capitalism itself which creates a sense of class within the working class and in this sense if we term the class as identity in a particular historical sense, it creates a class identity. But this universal identity could prove dangerous for capitalism, especially in its most moribund and parasitic phase

because it, on its own, moves towards class polarization. It is for the first time that capitalism creates class divisions in the society in such an intense manner. The class consciousness which gets generated in this process is fatal to capitalism.

Therefore, while on the economic plane the moribund capitalism, which is devoid of all progressive potentialities, requires universalization, it needs fragments on the plane of superstructure. It needs to revive all those dead identities against which it had declared a war during the anti-feudal struggle. It is in this broad perspective that the political agenda behind the identity politics can be situated.

Identity Politics and Postmodernism

This is nothing but a postmodernist agenda. The postmodernist philosophy informs us that the era of meta-narratives is over. Every kind of universalization, generalization, homogenization and standardization is repressive. The Western Imperialism subordinates the Eastern world in the name of modernity, rationality etc. According to the postmodernist philosophy, all these ideologies, in fact, are part of a Western conspiracy, namely, enlightenment! As against the Western colonial discourse, it glorifies 'traditional knowledge', 'oriental innocence', indigenous community, identity, language, culture etc. Although Postmodernism is against all kinds of essentialization, it does positive absolutization of myriad pre-modern/oriental identities in its fight against modernity. Whatever is native and pre-modern is good; modernity is undesirable.

It was Lyotard who pioneered the agenda of Postmodernism on the philosophical plane in the latter half of 1970s and early half of 1980s. Subsequently various 'post' ideological streams began to be piled up, e.g. post-colonial thought, Post-Structuralism, Post-Marxism, Post-Feminism, Post-Orientalism etc. All of these are, essentially, various parts, dimensions or extensions of the postmodernist thought itself. The focal point of all these thought-streams is the concept of power. According to Michel Foucault, a major stalwart of post-modernist thought, power permeates every nook and corner of the

society; and it is diffused and decentralized. It is prevalent in every part of day-to-day life and it gets internalized by people. It is irresistible because any effective collective resistance, which has the potential of social transformation, gives rise to the 'new forms of power'. Hence any collective fight for any social transformation is undesirable. Every collective resistance will give rise to new forms of power and therefore, all collective resistance against repression is futile. If collective resistance will ultimately give rise to power and repression only, why take pain to resist against it, at all? Under such a situation how could then one resist power? As per Foucault, you could resist against power and repression by rejecting all kinds of norms and universals in your personal life. The concept of standardization, universalization and generalization remain at the heart of power and repression. The only way out is to rebel against all norms and universals pertaining to gender identity, caste identity etc. in the personal life. The same was termed as Queer Theory by Foucault. It is not a coincidence that in the NGO world, numerous NGOs are working on the alternative sexual identity for the rights of LGBT (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Trans gender) community. It is evident that by rejecting the concept of all kinds of collective resistance (read class resistance!) Postmodernism takes away all kinds of agency from change.

Where then lies the solution? Some other postmodernist philosophers suggest slightly different solution. According to them, the solution lies in those structures which are yet to be polluted with the influence of power. Colonialism and Imperialism happen to be a form of power itself. They were resisted from the ground of Nationalism in the anti-colonial struggle. However, Nationalism too, is a modern philosophy which happens to be a product of West. Hence the power structure is inherent in it too. That is why, the post-colonial state, which came into being after the successful fight of nationalism, is, in fact, a modern state. Today Imperialism cannot be opposed from the ground of Modernism because modernity happens to be a cultural-philosophical project for the global domination of Imperialism itself and from its ground the hegemony and power cannot be resisted. Therefore, as per these thinkers we will have to

find out those structures which are pre-modern, which are untouched by power and untouched by western influence! And what all could such structures entail? All pre-modern identities, all “primitive” identities (here the term primitive is not used in the sense of being backward, rather to refer to those identities which do not arise during socio-economic interaction or exchange, rather they are naturally given) such as tribal, Dalit, woman (particularly within the home!) etc. Thus, according to the postmodernist thought, Enlightenment, scientific revolutions, rationality, humanism etc. are all part of a project of global domination by West. According to them, all these need to be rejected because they are reductionist, universalistic, monolithic and homogenizing etc.

Marxism, in particular, is always targeted by these streams of thought. Marxism, too, is rejected by terming it as part of a ‘modernist meta-narrative project’ as well as of western conspiracy for establishing global domination of Enlightenment. Although someone who has studied even the basic works of Marxism, knows that Marxism has never adopted a non-dialectical or uncritical approach towards Enlightenment. For instance, in the pamphlet ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’ written for workers, Engels had drawn attention to both the positive and negative aspects of enlightenment philosophy and rationality. However, the motive of the likes of Foucault and Lyotard behind throwing the entire project of enlightenment into the garbage bin is not so much to cast aside the heritage of their bourgeois forefathers than it is to attack Marxism. It is akin to waging a proxy war against Marxism. Marxism as well as all those ideologies which talks of social transformation, are declared as western conspiracy and we are told not to think about class, socialism etc. Instead, we have to preserve the smaller fragments i.e. community, caste, domestic world of women, etc. All these are autonomous spaces which are free from the influence of power structures of western Enlightenment. Since the era of meta-narratives is over, hence the era of class struggle, revolution, social change, which happen to be meta-narratives, is also over. This is the postmodern era and in the postmodern era, in the words of Lyotard

itself, 'meta-narratives are incredulous'. (The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, 1979).

Therefore, now it is the era of smaller, fragmented, peripheral struggles—the caste-based struggles, women's struggles, tribals' struggle, the struggles of indigenous communities for preserving the environment etc. We have to build an autonomous space for these peripheral identities while remaining within the ambit of the system.

Few years ago, "post-Marxist" thinkers, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in their book 'Hegemony and Socialist strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics' have taken this postmodernist philosophy to greater heights! As per Laclau and Mouffe, all kinds of repression are subjective. It has nothing to do with the objective reality and the concrete inhumanities of repression. This, in fact, amounts to deny the possibility of a broad united movement against an exploitative and repressive system. In other words, here, too, the irresistibility of the power structures is being highlighted.

Postmodern Agenda and Sub-altern Studies in India

In the intellectual world of India, the postmodernist agenda has been most effectively implemented by the historians of Subaltern Studies. After initially confining itself largely to the Marxist terminology and analysis, a linguistic turn occurred in the Subaltern Studies under the influence of Edward Said and Michel Foucault. Within the Subaltern Studies, the postmodern agenda was effectively implemented especially by Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyanendra Pandey and Gyan Prakash. In the early articles of the Subaltern Studies series of books, Ranajit Guha described the purpose of this entire endeavour as to "correct the elitist bias" in the history writing. However, the subsequent Subaltern Studies remained vacillating between derivative discourse, indigenous community and 'fragment', all the three of which are the categories of postmodernist discourse. Partha Chatterjee, in his book 'Nationalist Thought in a Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse', says that the intellectual class in India had come under the hegemony of colonial power-

knowledge and hence it was capable of only undertaking derivative discourse. Thus, the middle-class intellectual realm in the National Movement had entirely come under the grips of the modern thought. It enjoyed no agency. Beyond this intellectual world, in which the structures of power have made inroads and thus polluted it, there lies a world of community consciousness which is pure, primitive and holy. In Indian context, Partha Chatterjee sees it in relation to 'peasant consciousness' which happens to be free from the western hegemonic influence. Gandhi is claimed to be its symbol.

Such an analogy is, however, amusing. Gandhi was a modern thinker. His humanism, despite its spiritual cover, language and style, was essentially a bourgeois humanism. Partha Chatterjee does not deem it necessary to see as to how colonialism had co-opted the indigenous structures and used them in colonial exploitation. And these indigenous structures were used not due to their 'oriental innocence' (as stated by Ashish Nandy) but owing to their vested interests.

After Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak joined the project of Subaltern Studies, the emphasis on fragments and communities was enhanced. The postcolonial state was declared as being part of the project of western cultural domination of Enlightenment. This state had come into existence via nationalism, which was nothing but the derivative discourse of the colonial discourse. Severed from socio-economic perspective and context, the community and fragments were glorified.

In 1993, with Partha Chatterjee's book 'The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Studies', the Subaltern Studies attained its logical nirvana. Chatterjee discusses Dalits, women, etc. separately as the fragments of nation. There cannot share a common agenda and all these fragments are reified in such a manner that they could not be joined together. According to Chatterjee, during the Nationalist phase, the expression of the initiative and autonomy of women could only be found in home, or at the most, in autobiographies. Chatterjee is completely silent on all

the myriad activities and political associations in which women had enthusiastically participated in the 1920s. This book is silent even on the caste-based movements of Phule, Periyar or Ambedkar. In this book, Chatterjee puts forward a new binary—material/spiritual. ‘Material’ is that which is outside, non-domestic, masculine and ‘spiritual’ is that which is inside, domestic and feminine. In the spiritual world, the colonial subject used to establish its autonomy while being co-opted by the British in the material world; for instance, on the issue of equality before law, Chatterjee considers it to be co-opted by the western hegemonic project. Every resistance against Imperialism which was carried out in a modern manner, in a secular way, and with economic critique, in fact, amounted to surrendering before the hegemonic enlightenment project of Imperialism. That is to say, all the battles which Nationalism fought were co-opted by Imperialism

In this opposition to modernity, Dipesh Chakrabarty has left even Partha Chatterjee behind. In his article titled ‘The Difference Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal’, Chakrabarty has found irreducible categories of “beauty” in the domestic glorification of Kul and Grih Lakshmi. Chatterjee sees them as an ideal form of autonomous, non-bourgeois and non-secular individuality. Here no one needs to ask the question ‘why’. So what if these are patriarchal, after all they are pre-modern! Chakrabarty believes that a woman’s strength lies in the arena of oriental domesticity only. Thus, the women must feel complacent by looking for the source of their strength in precisely those tasks which the Hindu religion and civilization deems fit for women! What it is, if not a vulgar perversion of the resistance of women?

The Subaltern historians take the concept of the autonomy of the communities to the extent of putting an end to the interference of modern state in the community affairs. Did anyone hear the resonance of allowing Khap Panchayats to carry out freely their barbaric Talibanistic diktats in this? It is not surprising at all. This entire discourse is at times found standing on the side of communal fascism and at others, on that of neo-liberal capitalism. In the domain of oriental innocence, all that comes which takes place in Indian

society, without the interference of state. For instance, practice of Sati, the protection of culture by the Khap Panchayats, the repression of women etc. The modern state does not have any interference in all these, and often, it is some section of people themselves who execute such acts on the basis of their much eulogized pre-modern and oriental consciousness. And yet these all are proper and desirable for the afore-mentioned Subaltern historians because they are feats of the oriental innocence divided or organized, as they are, in fragments.

Two Forms of Identity Politics and the Intersection between Caste Politics and Identity Politics

The identity politics derives its ideological fuel from this very postmodernist stream of thought. The fragments which the Postmodernism talks about is being implemented on the plane of identities by identity politics. The entire NGO sector is also linked with this very idea. By dividing the different sections of masses into fragmented identities, the NGO sector is carrying out the dangerous task of misdirecting and disintegrating the people's struggle through reformism. In fact, it is a conspiracy of blunting the class consciousness of people by celebrating the fragments. The NGO sector acts as a mechanism of 'safety-valve' within the capitalist system and every now and then, it plays the role of restraining people's anger and discontent. We must understand the gravity of their conspiracy.

There is yet another perspective where the influence of identity politics can be discerned. The surge of the fascist majoritarian Hindutva politics in recent years is, in fact, an expression of politics of identity itself. Any such right-wing fundamentalist politics is established on a static ideal of identity and acquires legitimation for the same by posing the myths as reality and common sense through an imagined past. All such right-wing appropriations are inherent in identity politics. In present times, not only the peripheral identities, but more so the mainstream identities are using the tool of identity politics for their vested interests. This, too, is a dangerous trend.

Both these forms of the identity politics present themselves as contrary and alternative to each other; however, in reality they are not two separate antagonistic forces at all. They only present themselves as such. That is to say, the NGO politics and the right-wing religious fundamentalist and communal fascist politics are the two sides of the same coin. Although they present themselves as mutually antagonistic, they share a fundamental unity in terms of

ideology and philosophy. We can say that they present themselves as the binary of false alternatives. The same was termed as 'disjunctive synthesis' by Gilles Deleuze—a set of opposites in which the elements presented as opposites are, in fact, not opposite to each other.

After examining the key theoretico-ideological formulations of the identity politics and revealing its philosophical essence, now we are largely in a position to arrive at the conclusion that in the present times, the caste-based politics is actually a form of identity politics only. The caste-based politics in both its avatars—the casteist politics of upper castes and the Dalit politics—is an expression of identity politics only. In this form, they can be termed as 'inverted mirror image' of each other. Here too, we can see a kind of 'disjunctive synthesis', a binary of false alternatives, which in reality are not at all alternatives of each other; because in their own ways, both are based on the 'over-identification' of politics with the caste identity. Here it is not necessary to discuss the casteist identity politics being put to practice by the different organizations of the upper castes. Nothing remains to be deciphered regarding its reactionary, barbaric and inhuman character. There is tremendous unity between form and content.

However, the politics practiced around the Dalit identity by the Dalit organizations, too, is fulfilling the agenda of the identity politics itself, even if in some cases there is a genuine desire for and intention of Dalit emancipation. No politics and organization based upon identity can have a project for social emancipation. No real fundamental issue can be meaningfully raised on the basis of caste-based, gender-based, linguistic or national identity. Therefore, through identity politics, the Dalit organizations are, in fact, serving, even if unconsciously, the capitalist system itself. This is the class character of the identity politics which is status-quoist as well as reactionary. All their good intentions notwithstanding, such Dalit organizations are not being able to implement a really effective project of Dalit emancipation; moreover, they could never be able to prepare any such project, standing as they are on the ground of identity politics. Undoubtedly, there are many such people in these organizations

who, honestly and militantly think about the project of Dalit emancipation and are active. However, in absence of a correct politics, such thinking and activism often do not head in any direction, or usually begin to serve the forces representing the status-quo. Because as long as it is not clear as to who is really responsible for the caste-based oppression as well as other forms of exploitation-oppression and whom should one fight, the resistance against it, is bound to be misplaced. Here it is necessary to clarify that when we are referring to Dalit organizations here, we do not at all mean the bourgeois electoral parties deeply enmeshed in the bourgeois politics like BSP which claim to represent the interests of Dalits but use them merely as vote-bank (although till a few years ago, several intellectuals claiming to be leftist were gloating over Mayawati's ascent to power, over the fact that now the steps of Dalits are being heard in the corridors of power. Thankfully, such foolish cacophony has been silenced with all the records of atrocities committed on Dalits being broken during Mayawati's reign!). In this respect, the less one talks about Bahujan Samaj Party, the better. The BSP, under the leadership of Mayawati, has set several new records of bourgeois electoral opportunism. To savour the fruits of power, it did not even refrain from making an electoral alliance with the upper-casteist fascist Hindu right-wing forces. In Uttar Pradesh, the brunt of Mayawati's 'social engineering' had been borne by none other than the poor Dalits themselves. Among those who practice electoral Dalit identity politics, the case of Mayawati is not unique or peculiar. The position of Ramdas Athawale, Dalit Panthers' leader in Tamil Nadu, Thor Thirumavalvan, Ramvilas Paswan etc. is no different. At times, they are seen sitting in the lap of BJP and at others in Congress's.

The hollowness of politics, of not only these electoral Dalit political parties (which are intentionally dishonest, too and which are wholeheartedly engrossed in serving capitalism) but even that of the non-electoral Dalit organizations practicing identity politics (many of which honestly raise the agenda of Dalit liberation) could be revealed through just one incident which goes on to show that there is nothing left in their politics, except for empty symbolism. Recently, two

incidents occurred on the national plane, which were of real and symbolic importance for the common poor Dalit population. One was the exoneration of the rich upper-caste people accused of genocide of Dalits in Bathani Tola by the court and the another was putting a cartoon of Nehru and Ambedkar in the NCERT book prepared by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palsikar. Both these incidents took place within a gap of only few days. But many Dalit organizations forgot even to issue a statement on the release of the accused in the Bathani Tola genocide, while much mayhem was caused on the cartoon controversy. Some people even attacked the office of Suhas Palsikar. It is a matter of a separate discussion as to what was right and what was wrong in the cartoons of Nehru and Ambedkar; this, too, could be a matter detailed discussion as to whether Ambedkar can be criticized or he should be declared beyond criticism, so that the “nation” could get rid of “upper-caste guilt conscience”; one could even discuss as to whether there is any qualitative difference between what was done in Suhas Palshikar’s office and what the Hindutva forces used to do with Hussain’s paintings or what they did in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute; and finally there could be a discussion even on the issue as to whether there is any need for new idols in a country full of idols of various kinds. However, for now we will not go into these discussions and would only allude to the fact that the Dalit organizations did not make as much noise on the acquittal of the murderers of Bathani Tola as they did on the cartoons of Ambedkar and Nehru. Does it not reveal the hollow symbolism of the whole of Dalit identity politics?

Like all bourgeois political forces, the parties practicing Dalit identity politics safeguard those very class relations which prepare the conditions for caste-based oppression. And all caste-based parties prevent the forging of class unity and end up strengthening the caste-based dividing line. And even the non-electoral Dalit identity politics objectively does the same thing. The political character of an organization is not determined by the socio-economic roots of its members. For instance, a Dalit organization cannot be accepted as being representing the correct politics of the Dalit liberation simply because the majority of its members happen to be Dalits. It is from

this ground that several Dalit thinkers often ask as to how many Dalits are there in the leadership of a particular party. For instance, often this question is posed by the Dalit thinkers to the people belonging to communist party that how many Dalits are there in their Central Committee. However, from the same logic can't someone ask a question from the numerous existing Dalit organizations that how many workers are there in their leading bodies? We believe that both these questions are incorrect and are raised from the ground of identitarian thinking. This then follows that we can decide about the political ideology of an organization through the family and birth of those present in its leadership. Is not this too a kind of Brahmanical logic? The character of a political ideology is determined by the fact as to which particular class is this ideology serving, not by the fact as in which family its carriers were born. The logic of identity politics is a circular logic which in no time brings you to the same place where you started from. In a way, it contains the logic of its own defeat within itself. The correct way of attacking the savarnavad should be to eradicate it forever. How does emphasizing upon the Dalit identity from the logic of identity politics assist in the objective of striking a blow on savarnavad? It is obvious that the casteism of the upper-castes cannot be countered, under any circumstance, from the ground of identitarian Dalit politics.

So what should be done in such a scenario? We would like to reiterate that we will have to mobilize broad cross-section of poor population around an identity which could result into maximum possible mass-mobilization; and class identity happens to be one such identity which is not an identity in the true sense of the term. The concept of class expresses a social relation. According to Lenin, "Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in the historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they

occupy in a definite system of social economy.” As is clear from this definition, class is a relative concept. Class is not only an economic phenomenon but it gets expressed in the multiple forms in culture, literature and society. The charges of class reductionism and economic determinism levelled against Marxism, in fact, amounts to maltreatment of facts. Engels had clarified at one place, “According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.”

Class “identity” is a modern “identity” which internally cuts across all other identities. This is the identity which could give rise to a progressive revolutionary mass mobilization. In this sense, class identity is an overriding identity which exists by cutting across all other identities. Whatever be the nation, whatever be the caste, the language, the region, its people are divided in classes and an acute polarization has taken place among them. Here it is important to clarify that to highlight the class identity is not to suppress or destroy the particularities of other identities. To consolidate the class identity is to raise the class consciousness and its aim is to do extensive mass mobilization around the class identity, whatever be the caste, religion, region, language, nationality etc. The path of the project for emancipation of broad cross-section of masses could be only this. As soon as we recognize the forces responsible for the caste-based, national, gender-based oppression, we realize that our common

enemy in the project for Dalit liberation, putting an end to national repression, annihilation of women oppression and inequality is capitalism and the capitalist class itself. The caste could be eliminated only when the project for the radical transformation of the entire socio-economic structure, abolition of every kind of inequality and establishment of an egalitarian society reaches its destination. It surely does not mean that we are putting forth a proposal to keep on hold the struggle against casteism and casteist mentality till such a revolution and the creation of such a society takes place. We know it very well that without a perpetual propaganda against the casteist mentality and casteism, the proletariat, too, cannot be united as a class. In fact, the task of creating class consciousness is inevitably and imminently linked to the struggles against caste and casteism with full force from today itself. Without this the proletariat cannot be aroused, mobilized and organized against capitalism as a class. But all attempts of reifying this important question of caste as a separate fragment will lead towards the identity politics only and will play no less a role in dividing the toiling masses in pieces than the capitalist upper-caste ideology. Therefore, the solution to the caste question calls for a revolutionary class perspective, not the identity politics which celebrates the fragments.

(Translated from Hindi: Anand Singh)

CASTE QUESTION IN INDIA AND THE PATHS OF ITS RESOLUTION

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The question of fundamental change in the socio-economic system of our country is ridden with many kinds of complexities. In order to solve it, it is extremely important to understand the concrete socio-economic condition of the country and to internalise the economic division of the social system as well as the social division. Much like our society is divided on the basis of class, it is also divided among the Dalits, tribals, minorities and various nationalities etc. Particularly the existence of caste system is a characteristic feature of Indian society without understanding which we cannot take the fight for changing the system and society forward.

The Indian rulers (from the ancient era to the modern era) have used the caste system to plunder the earning of the working classes. Even today the caste system continues to act as an important ideological and political weapon of their exploitation.

Several foreign groups of invaders entered into India and many of them established their rule as well. But they too had to reconcile themselves with the caste system. Even the rulers belonging to Islam and Christianity which preach equality and brotherhood had to make compromise with the caste-based India social system and had to see its religious followers as being divided into the categories of caste.

Even today the notion of caste happens to be an important component of the reactionary ideology and the ruling-exploiting classes use it to divide the toiling classes and to blunt their consciousness and to cause harm to the unity of democratic-revolutionary movement. The caste-based inequality, discrimination,

untouchability and the thoughts of Brahmanic of Indian society. The superiority continues to be the reality of Indian Society. The upper and dominant castes continue to commit various kinds of atrocities on the Dalits and other oppressed groups quite frequently. Even after the 65 years of independence, the Dalits and backwards castes have not been given due representation in the economic educational, social and political arena. Our country is called as 'world's biggest democracy', but even today caste system plays an extremely important role in the electoral politics.

Therefore, it has become an immediate task of the progressive democratic and revolutionary groups to gain correct understanding about the origin and evolution of the caste system which is deeply entrenched in the Indian society and its reactionary role as also to develop proper strategy/action plan for the elimination of the caste system.

The Origin and Evolution of the Caste System

Unlike the European society, the history of the Indian society has been the history of caste and class struggle. The history of the caste system in our society is around 3500 years old. This duration is generally divided into three parts:

(a) Vedic period (between 1500 BC and 500 BC)

At Around 1500 BC the Aryans nomadic groups and non-agricultural tribal clans began agriculture. By 1000 BC the agriculture became the main component of the production system and by 500 BC the state was originated.

(b) Between 500 BC and 400 AD

In this duration agriculture and trade developed. Subsequently smaller kings and later on feudalism was evolved.

(c) From 4th Century AD Onwards

In this duration feudalism was consolidated and it developed; the Brahmanic Hinduism came into existence and the caste system

became more rigid. By the sixth century AD the feudalism was consolidated at the level of entire country, similarly the process of consolidation of the caste system also gathered pace.

By and large the process of the consolidation of the caste system was completed by the 10 century AD.

Looking at this prolonged history of the caste system one gets to know that when agriculture was developed with the use of iron, the system of four varna (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra) came into existence in the post Vedic and Upanishad period. Although some Marxists believe that the roots of caste system lie in the Indus valley civilization itself and between 3000 BC and 1500 BC, sharp division had come to exist among the different varnas.

Ambedkar while clarifying the process of varna division has written that like other societies even the Hindu society got divided in 4 varnas such as Brahmin or priestly class, Kshatriya or warrior class, Vaishya or trading class, and Shudras or artisan and slave class. In this varna system people could change their varn based on merit. These were formed on the basis of occupation which turned into an integrated society in due course. It was this which Ambedkar termed as ^amalgamation of groups* and 'mutual interaction'. According to him it was the varna system which was transformed into the caste system.

He has found 4 characteristics of caste which are as follows:

1. People are engaged in their caste-based occupation in hereditary manner.
2. There is no inter-dining between one group and another.
3. One is determined to remain in the same group in which one was born.
4. The marriages take place within the group only. (intra- caste marriage)

Ambedkar has considered the fourth characteristic, i.e. the constraint of the matrimonial relation as the main characteristics of the caste system. While explaining ^amalgamation of groups* and 'mutual

interaction' he said that the Indian population is formed with the amalgamation of Dravidians, Mangols, Aryans and Shakas. Centuries ago, the people belonging to these original dynasties came from different directions with different cultures in the tribal stage and settled down as neighbours. Due to continuous contact and mutual interaction, they developed a common culture which replaced their own cultures. Thus, a homogenous social unit came into existence which was divided into different varnas/caste.

He explains the process of this division in the following manner:

1. **Manu and Satparshi's system:** First of all, the right of the determination/ renewal of varnas rested with the officials having the designation as 'Manu' and 'Saptarshi'. They used to determine the terminate the varna of a person after every 4 years based on merit.
2. **Gurukul System:** Under this system a Guru used to educate for 12 years. After that 'upnayan sanskar' used to be held. In this upnayan ceremony the acharya (teacher) used to determine the varna of student. Through this system the varna was made as unchangeable throughout one's life while in the Manu or Saptarshi system a person's varna could be changed after 4 years, so Shudra could achieve the status of Brahmana on the basis of me merit.
3. **The system of upnayan:** Under this system the Brahmin took away the right of upnayan from guru/acharya and gave it to father. After this the intra-gotra marriages were banned and the custom of intra-caste marriage began. Now the caste system became completely hereditary and all the four varnas got converted into castes. First of all, the Brahmins started practicing endogamy and the other varnas followed.

Later on, all the four varnas got divided in hundreds-thousands of castes/sub-castes. The least division took place in the Brahmin caste and highest number of divisions took place in the Vaishya and

Shudra caste. Today there are around 6000 castes/subcastes which exist in our country.

According to Ambedkar, neither Manu nor the Brahmins started caste system. Rather the society itself adopted it. Manusmriti (written in the second century AD) only provided a thorough ideological basis and justification of the caste system. In Ambedkar's words, 'All the non Brahmanic subdivisions and classes followed it with heart which later on turned into the castes practicing endogamy.'

Often all enlightened anthropologists, sociologists and Marxist thinkers believe that in the process of the development of the feudal mode of production the tribal groups were continuously forcibly assimilated. Then an agrarian society based on exploitation emerged in which the caste acquitted a concrete shape and the labour Shudra caste's acquired primary role. Thus, a simple primitive economy was transformed into a relatively complex, agrarian feudal economy based on the plunder of labour surplus. In order to increase their exploitation and plunder, the feudal lords not only attacked on the culture/customs and prohibitions of the tribals, they also carried out campaign for subordinating them and making them as slaves through war.

We can conclude that the genesis of caste system is closely linked to the development of feudalism and exploitative agricultural system. In this system a handful of people control the land and state while the wider masses are condemned to live the life of slavery. The feudal forces not only use the caste system for plundering the labour of masses, they also take the help of religious philosophies and rituals. At the same time, by establishing and using the patriarchy the women are tied with the chains of slavery and many kinds of atrocities are committed over them. The caste system not only provides the labour groups of various kinds for doing farming works, it is also helpful for maintaining the rule of and state power of the feudal lords in the villages.

This is the reason why in our country the caste system is not part of superstructure but it is part of base as well. Although the caste system does not entail all the aspects of feudal production relations and caste and class are not synonymous to each other, under feudalism the caste system and Brahmanic ideology play an important role in the enslaving the broad masses and increasing their plunder.

The Impact of Capitalist Development on the Caste System

Several Marxist-Leninist-Maoist groups carry this notion that when the capital enters decisively into a feudal/semi-feudal system, the caste system collapses on its own. But in our country this notion is completely rejected. The reality is that during the British rule the capitalist relations were expanded in many sectors of our economy including in trade and commerce, but it could not completely break the feudal system and production relations. The British imperialism took important lesson from the French revolution entered into a compromise with the Indian feudalism. It broke our economy only to the extent which was extremely necessary for its economic- political interest. Particularly after the latter half of the 19th century (after the beginning of the Victoria rule) it made multiple powerful blows to the feudal production relations which led to the transformation of the colonial-feudal economy into a colonial-semi feudal economy. Between the period of the last two decades of the 19th century and the preparation of the second world war there was large scale capital investment in the industrial and other sector which led to qualitative change in the century old feudal structure. Consequently working class and middle class originated and grew on a large scale and the caste system was shaken as well. But the pace of the capital investment and industrial development was not so intense that the people engaged in the farming could be proletarianised.

The realities is that even the working class to a large extent remained attached to land in the villages and could not achieve the status of modern class. None of the class struggles in this period

were free from casteist prejudices. Even the Communist Party of India (CPI) which was leading the class struggle could not free itself from the feudal ideology and casteist prejudices. Although in one of its proposals in 1930, it did appeal to all the untouchables that they become part of the anti-British anti-landlordism revolutionary front. Insofar as the Gandhi and other Congress leadership are concerned, they not only believed the four varna system as 'natural and necessary' but they mentioned it as 'in accordance with conservation of human labour. Gandhi went on to say that 'varna system is merely a cultural system... 'one cannot imagine a better harmonious system than this.'

After 1947 when transfer of power took place and the Congress party came to power, many progressive, democratic and revolutionary forces hoped that now capitalism would expand and the caste system would be eradicated. But the hope from the party like Congress of comprador and landlords which had justified the caste system proved to be building a castle in the air. The Central government of Congress enacted several land reform acts including the Zamindari abolition act, but it did not implement them with honesty. Even the president Rajendra Prasad left no stone unturned in saving his hundreds of acres of land from land ceiling. Later tall claims of agriculture development, green revolution, white revolution, yellow revolution, blue revolution were made but in totality there was no qualitative change in the agricultural production. At the same time even the process of democratic transformation of society could not be accomplished.

After 1947 in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal India due to the alliance between the imperialist finance capital and the capital of the country's comprador capitalist class, capitalist development has undoubtedly taken place. But this development has not brought about a revolutionary change (as happened in the European countries). This distorted and incomplete capitalist development has embraced a large section of the pre-capitalist relations. Therefore, whatever capitalist development has taken place in our country is with the pre-capitalist and semi-feudal fabric. This is the reason why

various forms of caste-based and gender-based exploitation and oppression are present in our country in one form or the other.

It is true that in recent years there has been rapid fragmentation of the caste system in our country owing to the expansion of the finance capital in various sector of economy and newer class-caste structures have come into existence. These changes in the socio-economic relations could be seen properly in particularly the states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and in some states of south India. In many states there has been emergence of new classes such as capitalist farmers, and artisans equipped with modern agricultural instruments. At the same time, in some states even the economic-social-political hegemony of upper castes such as Brahmins and Kshatriyas has been broken in some states.

The inclusion of the representatives of castes such as Jat, Yadav, Kurmi, Patidar, Patel, Maratha, Kunbi, Reddy, Vokalinga, Lingayat, Kamma etc. is a burning example of this. Today a big section of middle peasant consists of people belonging to Shudra caste. Similarly, most of the population of small poor and landless farmers and landless agriculture labourer are consists of extremely Shudra castes, nomadic tribes and religious minorities (Muslims).

Overall, it can be said that today there has been tremendous change in the form of caste and class. Today there is class division in the caste and also there is caste division with class. The working class in India is not a homogenous class like the European working class and even within it there exists the caste division. This is the naked reality of Indian society. Not internalising this fact is to promote the reformist and opportunist tendencies in the democratic-revolutionary movement.

Movements Against the Caste system

There have been several movements against the varna system and caste system, we are reviewing these streams:

(a) The struggle of Buddhists and Jains

In the era of Gautam Buddha and Mahaveer the people belonging to toiling Vaishya and Shudra varna were fed up with the feudal kings. They had to heavily pay taxes and also, they had to suffer from atrocities of the ruling classes. For getting rid of all these they took the support of Buddhists and Jains. Since Buddhists and Jains opposed the varna system and since they opened the gates of their monasteries for those suffering from the system including for the untouchable chandals, people from these varna embraced Buddhism and Jainism in large numbers. But the proponents of both these communities did not make a blow to the feudal production relations, hence they could not carry the anti-caste/varna struggle forward.

(b) Bhakti movement (between 12th Century AD to 17th Century AD)

Most of the saints leading this movement belonged to Charmar (one who does leather work), Lohar (ironsmith), Badai (carpenter), Julaha (weaver) and other artisan castes. Some among them also belong to the Brahmin caste. There was a radical stream of this movement as well which were being represented by the saints such as Basavanna, Tukaram, Namdev, Kabir and Gurunanak. They openly opposed the Brahmanic hypocrisy and casteist discrimination and Kabir went on to make a terrible blow to Hinduism.

This stream of the Bhakti movement posed an enormous challenge to the ideological and material base of feudalism. But in the final phase of this movement the conservative saints such as Ramdas and Tulsidas also emerged who tried to reestablish the varna system and Brahmanism.

Even this movement could not succeed because it did not make a dent on the base of the caste system-the feudal mode of production

and its relations.

(c) Movement against the Brahmanic hegemony

This movement began in the early years of the 20th century in which the middle caste Shudras and untouchables were mobilised against the feudal hegemony of the Brahmins. One of its sections waged struggle against the monopoly of the Brahmins in the government jobs while the other radical section challenged the entire caste system and Brahmanism. At the same time, they also raised the problems of peasants and middle classes. Therefore, this section received the broader support from the exploited and oppressed masses. Their struggle also encouraged the mobilisation of the broader masses in the battle against imperialism.

Later the leading section of the non-Brahmin castes which were part of this movement took part in the electoral politics and even captured political power in many states. Thus, they became the new exploiting community of the Dalits and poor. It example include the Marathas in Maharashtra, Reddy and Kamma in Andhra Pradesh, Vokalinga and Lingayat in Karnataka, Patel in Gujarat, Yadav and Kurmi in Bihar and Jat in Haryana

(d) Jyotiba Phule's and Periyar's Movement

In the anti-Brahmanic hegemony movement the name of Jyotiba Phule and Periyar is taken with immense pride. Jyotiba Phule formed Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1853 and commenced the struggle mainly against Brahmanic Hindu revivalism. But this movement adopted the democratic means since its beginning and at the same time it also raised issues such as casteist exploitation, widow remarriage, alcoholism, repression by bureaucracy, plunder by the usurers, dispossession of the farmers from their land, the plunder of Indian wealth by the imperialists etc. Thus, Phule attacked both the feudal reactionary base as well as its superstructure as also the British rule. But before his struggle could challenge the fundamental land relations, he passed away. After his death the leadership of the movement came into the hands of the feudal king of Kolhapur and it

could not maintain its all-round democratic character. Later on, the entire character of this movement underwent change and got confined to providing better status to the Kshatriyas/Marathas in place of Brahmins.

E.V. Ramaswami (who is known as Periyar) was part of Congress party in the beginning. But he felt extreme hatred due to the casteist prejudices of the Congress leadership and after leaving congress he started Self Respect movement in 1925. Earlier Justice Party was formed in Tamil Nadu and it had even managed to get majority in the Madras presidency elections of 1920. Periyar usually used the platform of the Justice Party, but his attitude was changed after the formation of the state government of this party. He vehemently criticised the anti-people and anti-Dalit activities. Consequently, he had to suffer from the repression of the Bri government. In 1942 Dravid Kadhgam party which n was subsequently split into D.K. and D.M.K. He made an appeal to observe the 'day of mourning' on 15 August 1947 and to and termed Congress rule in the independent India as the 'Brahmin raj'.

Later on, he supported D.M.K. It was during the rule of this DMK that the goondas of the barbaric landlords of Tanjavur burns more than 70 women and children alive by burning the Dalit huts. The killers against whom the charge of genocide was made were released by the court. Thus, the anti-caste movement led by Periyar had a sad ending. Although this movement did play an important role in creating anti-caste feeling at the country level.

(e) Ambedkar's struggle for caste annihilation

The Ambedkarite and other democratic-revolutionary groups consider the role of Ambedkar in the battle for the annihilation of caste as quite significant. In the early period of his political career, He opposed the hypocrisy of the upper castes and subsequently he carried out strong movement for entering Dalits into the temples. In this process he also opposed the upper caste mentality of Congress and the Gandhi's notion of the welfare of the untouchables. He demanded land and separate colonies for the Dalits. He said in

unambiguous words that before independence there must be social reforms such as caste annihilation. He believed that if India would gain independence before the annihilation of caste, it would be the freedom of Hindus and not that of lower castes.

Ambedkar became a member of the constituent assembly with the support of Muslim League and a qualitative change was witnessed in his attitude in the very first speech in this assembly. This was his amazing speech in which on the one hand an attempt was made to satisfy congress politically and on the other hand to satisfy Hindus communally. After this the Congress not only got him elected from Bombay but also made him law minister in the Nehru's newly formed cabinet. When the Constituent assembly passed the constitution of India, Ambedkar termed it as huge structure of political democracy. But within two-three years of the passage of the constitution, he realised its true character. In 1953 while speaking on 'Andhra state bill' he said, "my friends tell me that I made the Constitution. In reality I had to write many things against my wishes. Now I am not satisfied with this Constitution which I myself wrote. I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody."

Finally, he was so dejected that he had to tender his resignation from the post of law minister in 1955. After this on October 14 1956, he embraced Buddhism. Immediately after religious conversion he gave a speech in which he vehemently criticised Marxism. He said in unambiguous terms that Marxism only preaches of achieving the material pleasures and it is not useful for pre humanity. According to him, Buddha's ashtang marg is the best path for the annihilation of caste and comprehensive development of humanity.

Thus, the idea of breaking the existing socio-economic system could not become part of his consciousness and his movement could not breach the limits of reformism. Although Ambedkar had very strong desire of directly attacking the caste system-an important pillar of the semi-feudal system.

(f) The struggle of communists against the caste system

In the Communist movement, there have been serious difference of opinion with regard to the caste question right from the beginning. Although The CPI understood the importance of the caste system in India in 1930 and in a proposal titled Forum For Action it made an appeal for aligning the struggle against the untouchability and the caste system with the agrarian revolution and anti-imperialist struggle, but subsequently it broke its relation with agrarian revolution and anti-imperialist struggle itself. With the special efforts of B.T. Randive (who wrote a booklet to clarify the interrelationship between caste and class), towards the end of the decade of 1980 the CPI(M) decided to restart the battle against feudal and semi-feudal ideologies on a large scale so that their mass base could expand in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (where the semi- feudal production relations are quite strong). But like CPI even they did not make any programme for making a dent on the base of the caste system viz. the semi-feudal mode of production Consequently their mass base continued to shrunk and ultimately, they had to lose power even in West Bengal and Kerla.

Thus, the reformist parties such as CPI and CPI(M) made a mistake in understanding the semi-colonial and semi-feudal character of the Indian society and they did not see it by link by linking it with the base of caste system. They carried out sporadic struggles against the caste system on the level of ideology, i.g. superstructure. But like other bourgeois parties, their main goal continued to be that of winning election by setting caste equations

After the Naxalbari peasant revolt when CPI(M-L) was formed in 1969, even this committed the serious mistake of not understanding the caste properly. Although in the programme which was passed in the its party congress in 1970, it did recognise India as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country and tried to see the question of caste-based exploitation and oppression in its relation with the semi-feudal production relations, but it did not develop a concrete task of action

for carrying forward the fight of elimination of caste. Later on, this party got divided into multiple groups.

When The Mandal Commission's period arrived and when the militant battle on the demands of giving reservation to the socially and educationally backward sections was intensified, many CPI(ML) started thinking seriously about the caste question. Some of them supported the reservation while others opposed it. Similarly, some groups considered caste system as a question of superstructure while others linked it with the base. Some went on to say that in reality the caste is a question of the superstructure of Indian society, but it influences the base to a large extent.

Recently some groups of CPI(ML) and other groups who consider India as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country have built a unified party and it has decided to move towards the elimination of the caste by carrying out class struggle as main link. But even today they continue to suffer with the problem of gaining correct theoretical understanding and evolving a plan of action for the elimination of caste. If they succeed in solving both these problems it would not only be a qualitative development on the level of class struggle, the thorough battle for systemic change will get fillip. But if the revolutionary forces of the country continue to try to solve the caste question by developing the class struggle mechanically like CPI and CPI(M) or if they limit their actions to protesting the caste-based or gender-based exploitation-oppression, ensuring reservation in education, employment, politics etc., they would never be able to mobilise the majority of the people of our country in favour of revolutionary change. Notwithstanding the militancy of the class movements without taking the broad and active support of the exploited-Dalits-oppressed people, it would be difficult for them to stay in the it would be difficult to stay for a long time.

In our understanding today it becomes the responsibility of the revolutionary forces that they link the class struggle for uprooting the semi-feudal and semi-colonial system and for smashing the alliance

between imperialism, comprador bureaucratic capitalism and feudalism with the struggle against the caste system. They must internalise the fact that the caste system in our country is not just a matter of superstructure, but of base as well. As long as the root of the caste system—semi-feudal mode of production and also the feudal/semi-feudal authorities present in most of the village areas are not smashed, one cannot proceed towards the end of caste system.

At the same time, we will also have to remember that even after the change in the base, i.e. even after the change in the system a perpetual revolution will have to be carried out against the caste-based discrimination or favour. But then this fight would be focused in the arena of superstructure.

In order to eliminate the exploitation of a person by another and the exploitative machinery—state, a perpetual cultural revolution will have to be carried out.

(Translated from Hindi: Anand Singh)

MARXISM AND THE CASTE QUESTION – REVIEW OF COM. ANURADHA GHANDY’S ‘CASTE QUESTION IN INDIA’

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INTRODUCTION

In this putatively post-Marxist (postmodernist) epoch, where history has ended decisively in favour of capitalist liberal democracy, class has been given up as an analytical category and socialism as the historical destiny of the oppressed. Multiculturalism is the dominant political theme in the metropolitan academies where volumes are written on the hardening cultural boundaries and the carnivalesque play of identity. Therefore the ‘subaltern’ and ‘postcolonial’ political subject’s consciousness has nothing to do with the totalizing of the Soviet era mode of production narrative. Caste has become a very important subject, both for the metropolitan and Indian universities; book-shelves are packed with latest publications on caste.

In Indian politics, caste has emerged as one of the most important issues after the Mandal/Kamandal controversies. All the ruling class political parties carefully cultivate vote banks based on caste. In the post-Mandal Indian political reality where social justice has replaced social revolution, even the parliamentary left both the neo-revisionist and social democratic type have fallen into the trap of identity politics, whereas gruesome massacres and atrocities on Dalits are a daily affair. Not a single day passes without newspapers reporting various outrageous acts of atrocities on Dalits in India. On the other hand, continuous ‘deconstruction’ and ‘fragmentation’ of social reality, constant ‘decentering’ of the ‘self’ and creation of the ‘other’, micro-narratives replacing meta-narratives is the fashion, where any kind of talk about ‘liberation’ and ‘emancipation’ are quickly reduced

to linguistic mysticism. In the academic jargon, caste as a cultural identity has resurfaced with renewed vigour. However, for some of us who still believe in revolutionary left praxis and the grand narrative of emancipation and ultimate transcendence of capitalism, caste and caste oppression is a serious issue because as Ambedkar has said, caste system is not only a division of labour, but also a division of labourers. Hence, understanding caste and working out a strategy is extremely essential for the politics of social transformation. Marxists and revolutionary left forces have been derided for not understanding the caste question in India. On the contrary, Marxist authors like D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and Suvira Jaiswal have produced outstanding works on developing a theoretical understanding of caste system in India.

It is here that the writings on caste question in India by late Comrades Anuradha Ghandy and Y. Naveen Babu assume extreme importance because they developed a framework for revolutionaries for dealing with the caste system for achievement of democratic revolution in India. It is important to highlight that both Comrades Anuradha Ghandy and Naveen Babu were no armchair theoreticians, but active participants in revolutionary left politics in India. Com. Naveen Babu was martyred in the year 2000 at Visakhapatnam.

For anyone who is serious about radical social transformation, caste is an important issue because the caste system, apart from structuring exploitative relations of production, essentially forms a social hierarchy. Caste status is acquired by birth and castes are maintained as endogamous groups. There are more than 2000 such castes in contemporary Indian society. Modern 21st century India still embraces caste and it forms the basis or is part of the cultural, political and social events across India.

In fact, caste has reinvented itself and is very much part of the consciousness of all the Indian classes. It will not be an exaggeration to say that no conversation or discussion in everyday life of an average Indian goes beyond the second sentence without the

phrase 'which caste is she/he from?' In a sense, perpetuation of the caste system is promoted by the upper echelons of the Indian society to bring order and to directly or indirectly control it. [1] The abolition of the caste system has to be a fundamental goal of the Indian democratic revolution. Any mass movement to abolish classes, which does not engage in a direct fight against the caste system, will not achieve its objective. The reverse is also true. Only identity-based caste struggle without challenging the exploitative relations of production cannot create a social system without exploitation.

THE CASTE SYSTEM IN HISTORY

Com. Anuradha Ghandy's writing on caste question is an extremely valuable contribution in dealing with the caste question in India and its relation with the politics of radical social transformation. Com. Anuradha's "Caste Question In India" is a seminal text in understanding the origin of caste/class, relations of production in agriculture, state, social hierarchy and formulating a political programme for the abolition of caste system and its relation with the democratic revolution in India. She wades through history explaining the origin of the caste system, tribal class society rise of the state in India and scripting a specific set of demands for struggle to abolish caste system and its relation with the democratic revolution in India. Explaining theoretical framework, she writes,

The caste system has been one of the specific problems of the Indian democratic revolution. It is linked to the specific nature of the evolution of Indian society and has been one of the most important means for the exploitation of the labouring masses. Sanction by the Brahminical Hindu religion, Varnashra-Dharma legitimized the oppression of the working people, and the enslavement and degradation of one section of the masses, reducing them to near animal existence. For the ruling classes in India, from the ancient to the modern period, the caste system served both as an ideology as well as a social system that enabled them to repress and exploit the majority of toilers.

Invaders from other lands who came to rule over India, adjusted with this system, as it suited their class interest; religions like Islam and Christianity, which profess the equality of all men, adjusted with it, allowing its believers to be divided on the basis of caste, because they did not interfere with this system of exploitation. Today, caste ideology is still an important part of the reactionary ruling class ideological package, and it serves to divide the working masses, hampering the development of class consciousness and a unified revolutionary struggle. At the same time, caste based occupations and relations of production, caste based inequalities and discrimination, the practice of untouchability and the belief in Brahminical superiority, are still as much part of the socio-economic life of the country. Caste is being used in the corrupt electoral politics of the ruling classes. To root out the caste system we must first understand its origin and development and evaluate the successes and failures of the various struggles against the caste system and Brahminical ideology. [2]

As I have explained earlier, Com. Anuradha was no ivory tower intellectual detached from the vagaries of everyday struggles of the oppressed, so she wrote with lucidity and without any academic jargon for grassroots activists involved in the day-to-day struggles of the underdog. She explains the origin of the caste system for people who are not formally trained in history or any other branch of social science. Writing about the origin of the caste system, she traces its history back 3,000 years linking it up with the development of class society, emergence of the state, the development of the feudal mode of production and the continuous but often forcible assimilation of tribal groups, with their own customs and practices, into the exploitative agrarian economy.

From Tribal to Class Society

Com. Anuradha explains three distinct periods of the origin and development of the caste system:

1. Vedic period: The period from 1500 BC, when Aryan pastoral tribes and non-agricultural tribal communities took to agriculture, the

emergence of agriculture as the dominant production system, to the rise of the state around 500 BC.

2. The period from 500 BC to the 4th century AD – the period of the expansion of agriculture based on Shudra labour, the growth of trade and its decline; the rise of small kingdoms to the emergence of feudalism.

3. The period from the 4th century AD onwards – when the development of feudalism took place, and Brahminical Hinduism and the jati system acquired their complex and rigid form.

Explaining the emergence of class society from tribal society, she says class societies emerged from the clashes of the various pastoral Aryan tribes and the indigenous tribes and the development of agriculture with the widespread use of iron, which took the shape of the Varnas, hence the four Varnas were the form of class society which took place in the later Vedic and Upanishad period.

Giving the details of the process, she writes,

As the Vedic Aryans entered from the Punjab area and spread towards the Gangetic Plain from around 1500 BC, they were already divided into an aristocracy (Rajanya) and priests (Brahmins) and the ordinary clansmen (vis) In the incessant conflicts and wars that were associated with their spread eastwards, conflicts among the various pastoral Aryan tribes and with local tribes for cattle, water resources, land and then also for slaves, sections of tribes that were defeated began to be enslaved, known as dasas. The wars increased the importance of the chieftains. They relied on ritualism to enhance their prestige and consolidate it, and to appropriate the surplus through these rituals. Tributes of cattle and slaves were given by the ordinary vis to the rajanyas. Major and minor yagnas were increasingly performed by the rajanyas, in alliance with the Brahmins. The ruling elite and the priests live off the gifts (dand/bali) given to them by the vis at these yagna. At this stage, the tribal organizations based on clan and kin were still dominant. The emergence of the Brahmin and Kshatriya Varnas was a process of the breaking down of the kin-based relations among these ruling elites and the creation of a broader class – the Varna – which lived

off the tributes and gifts from the vis and subjugated the tribes. The pastoral tribes had adopted agriculture, and from the local tribes, the chieftain clans and the priestly clans were being incorporated into the Kshatriya and Brahmin Varnas, respectively.

The subjugated tribals, both Aryan and non-Aryan, gradually came to form the Shudra Varna. All of them were not slaves. While domestic slavery existed, it was basically the Vaishya peasants (from the vis the broader Vaishya Varna emerged) and the Shudras, who reared cattle, tilled the soil.

The widespread use of iron not only for weapons but also for agricultural purposes, from around 800 BC, marked a qualitative change in the production system of the ancient tribal societies. Plough-based agriculture could generate considerable surplus on a regular basis. Dense forests could be cut down and land cleared for cultivation. Thus, iron enabled the agrarian economy to become the prominent production system in this ancient period. The spread of agriculture was achieved at the cost of the non-agricultural tribes. They were either subjugated or displaced from the forests and their traditional means of livelihood. The conquest of new territories and the possibility of regular settlements further enhanced the importance of chieftains. Tribals' oligarchies emerged. Many of the chieftains turned into kings who needed grander yagnas to consolidate their rule not only over their own clans and tribes, but also over the territories they commanded the janapada.

The Varnashrama-Dharma was already being developed by the Brahmin priestly class. The rituals became more complex, elaborate and wealth consuming. These rituals were the means by which the surplus could be distributed. The surplus, appropriated in the form of gifts, was shared by the ruling Kshatriyas and the Brahmin priests. Gifts were no longer voluntary. They were forced. The Arya dharma and Varna ideology legitimized the increasing power of the kings and priests and the absorption of the subjugated tribals into the lower Varnas. It became the ideological expression of the classes that had emerged from the womb of the various tribes. Those groups that did

not accept the rituals and forced tributes were considered anarya or mlechha.

Development of agriculture, including paddy cultivation in the Gangetic Plains, was accompanied by the increasing division of labour and growth of trade. Private property in land emerged; towns developed; few classes came into existence – the Vaishya traders and the gahapatis, the landowners. The gahapatis did not themselves till the land, but got slaves or Shudras to till it. Tensions between upper two Varnas and the lower Varnas, and between those who owned and those who laboured, emerged. This led to the emergence of the ancient state. The first states emerged in the Gangetic Plains in Bihar.

Rise of the State

She explains the emergence of the state in India and its relations with the Varna order and how Brahminical rituals were used to legitimize the rule of the kings.

The emergence of the Kosala and Magadha monarchies around the 6th century BC was the form in which the state developed in ancient India. The ruling class in the proto states and these early states relied on yagnas and rituals to buttress and legitimize their rule. The early states had the explicit function of upholding the Varna order and private property. Gifts were replaced by taxes. A standing army came into existence. The Varnashrama ideology reflected and buttressed this class situation in the interests of the ruling Kshatriyas and Brahmins. The Brahmins and Kshatriyas enclose the Vaishyas and Shudras, the servants of another, to be removed at will, to be slain at will. In the context of the differences between the classes becoming sharp, the Varna divisions had become rigid. Social distance and endogamy came to be emphasized.

But the newly emerged classes, the lower two Varnas and the non-subjugated tribal communities did not accept this ideology and the Varna hierarchy with Brahminical superiority. The rise of “Lokayata”, “Mahavir”, Buddha and other opposing sects and philosophical

systems was a challenge to this Vedic yagna-based Brahminism and Varna-based hierarchy. These sects gained the support of traders, and artisans organized into guilds and semi-tribal kings and chieftains. Later, with the consolidation of the state formation with Mauryan rule (4th-3rd centuries BC), the reduction in the importance of yagnas and borrowing certain principles from Buddhism, Brahminism tried to reassert its ideological role. Yet, it had to contend with Buddhism and Jainism for commercial and royal patronage and for social domination. This reflects the struggles put up by the various classes and peoples to the consolidation of the caste system based on Brahmin-Kshatriya superiority. Yet Brahminism played a key role in the development and consolidation on the state in ancient India and the development and formalization of a class society in the form of Varnas.

The Mauryan Empire, which rose in the Magadha region in the 3rd century BC, was the first major fully formed state in India after the Indus Valley civilization. It was an ancient communal and state ownership type of state with Shudra-based production. The origins of the Mauryas themselves are obscure, but the state was guided by the famous Brahmin Kautilya, also known as Chanakya. Chanakya's Arthashastra was the first and hence a frank account of how to rule. It laid down the principles of state craft without any ideological and religious cover up. The Mauryan state was a centralized state which took the responsibility for the extension of agriculture and trade. This arthashastra state settled groups of Shudras where lands could be cleared and brought under the plough. The sita lands were farmed directly by the state with the help of Shudras (serf) labour, under the autocratic regime, while rashtra lands were farmed by the free peasantry (Vaishyas). These rashtra lands were taxed on various counts. The state took taxes from the Vaishyas and labour from the Shudras, providing them with the necessities of cultivation.

While slavery also existed, slaves were used primarily by landowners for domestic work and by the state for processing the grain collected in the form of taxes and for the production of some commodities. The state also monopolized the mining and minerals.

By this period, a class of dependent peasants and labourers (helots) – Shudras by Varna, had been consolidated. But the Vaishyas who carried out trade and settled in urban areas began to distinguish themselves from their peasant brethren. In latter centuries, peasant cultivation became the hallmark of the Shudras. The ordinary, free peasantry was pushed down into the Shudra Varna, while the Vaishya Varna became the monopoly of the traders and merchants. At the same time, the class of Kshetraswamis, those who got their lands cultivated by sharecroppers and dependent labourers, came to become the norm.

In the Mauryan period and up to the 3rd century AD, trade was an important aspect of the economy. While trade along with the dakshina pantha and to the north along the uttar pantha grew in the Mauryan period, in later centuries trade with the Roman Empire (1st and 2nd centuries AD) also became important. In the south, trade links with the South-East Asian societies, including China, also existed. Thus, the class of artisans and merchants who were linked to the market were socially and economically important. Artisans and merchant guilds were powerful. Also, during this period artisan guilds were strictly not hereditary.

The restrictions on the marriage part of the tribal endogamous practices were adopted by Brahmins, though their social purpose became different. In the early Vedic period, tribal endogamy was not strictly followed in the assimilation of groups. But as class differences started to emerge and the need for a large number of labourers grew, the two upper Varnas enforced strict rules regarding the form of marriage, a method of distancing themselves from the lower two Varnas, while at the same time sanctioning hypergamy. Hypergamy allowed converted Brahmins and Kshatriyas to seek partners from among their own tribe's folk, absorbed as Vaishyas or Shudras. It allowed political alliances with non-Kshatriya chieftains and kings. At the same time, marriage rules for the two Varnas were not restrictive allowing for the rapid increase in population of the labouring people.

In a primitive economy, human labour is the main productive asset. Hence, even marriage rules developed according to the interests of the ruling classes and gained ideological legitimacy through the rigid Varna divisions.

Brahminism in a New Form

Explaining the popularity of Buddhism and Jainism, Com. Ghandy says the toiling people like Shudras and traders like Vaishyas had to pay high taxes, but had to be content with lower social status. Expensive rituals based on sacrifice of animals created difficulties for agriculture. Explaining the process of creation of jatis, she says with the decline of yagnas, a transformation in the social role of the Brahmins took place and with that Brahminism also underwent a transformation. Brahmins, encouraged and protected by kings, brought the borders of the kingdom under agriculture, in the process 'aryanizing' the tribals in the region. From Ashoka's time, the free peasants and the Brahmins migrated in search of fresh lands to bring it under agriculture. The ashrams set up by the Brahmins in the forests were the pioneer settlements that developed contacts with the tribes in the area, and brought them under the command of the plough and the Vedas. The local tribals were incorporated almost wholly as jatis of the Shudra Varna, and retained their tribal customs and became the labourers on the land carrying out the various tasks necessary for agricultural operations.

The tribal elite were incorporated into the Brahmin Varna. The Brahmins changed the form of their religion. Sacrificial yagnas became symbolic. The principle of ahimsa was adopted from Buddhism. The older Vedic codes, which were glorifications of pastoral life and wars, gave way to newer Gods, like the cult of Krishna, and also Shiva and later Vishnu. Tribal rituals were adopted, for instance the agni rituals, performed only by the Brahmins in South Indian temples, were non-Vedic in origin. Tribal worship of Mother Goddesses was also incorporated into the Hindu religion. In fact, with the development of feudalism, the feminine names of certain tribes, etc., Matangi, Chandali, Kaivarti and their

tribal totems, were also incorporated into the Hindu fold. Gods and Goddesses were incorporated into the Hindu pantheon as avatars of the main God, Vishnu. This was the ideological manifestation of the social process of the absorption of tribes and semi-tribes into the spreading agrarian economy at the lower levels of social hierarchy. The significance of the Varnashrama-Dharma in this process, the importance and social base. In the king's court, they provided the genealogy that proved the Kshatriya/Brahmin status of the ruler's family; hence Brahminism was supported by the rulers. Yet, in the period upto the 6th century AD, at least, Brahminism and the caste system could not gain hegemony in invasion of foreign groups like Kushans and Shakas, which ruled over large territories, the strength of artisan and trade guilds, as also the influence of Buddhism and Jainism.

Extension to the South

She explains how this Aryan system of caste and social organizations spread with iron to the south. And the patronage extended by the Satvanas, which were one of the first state formations in the 2nd century AD, consolidated the Brahminical caste system in South India.

The basic difference of Marxism and left politics with identity politics and ruling class politics vis-à-vis caste is that the Marxist approach sees caste oppression in India in the dominant feudal social relations and the liberation of oppressed castes including the Dalits intrinsically linked with the struggle against feudalism. Com. Anuradha explains the rise and consolidation of feudalism in the following lines:

From around 6th century AD in the early medieval period the caste system, based on jatis, began to consolidate in most parts of India. It is clearly linked to the rise of feudalism all over India, when a class of intermediaries was created which expropriated the surplus in the form of revenue or share of the produce from the labouring masses. This was accompanied by the development of the self-sufficient village economy. The decline of trade and artisan guilds, primarily

due to the collapse of the Roman Empire after the 3rd century AD, the contraction of money circulation, the settling down of artisans in the villages, created the conditions for the rise of feudalism. Land grants began to be given to Brahmins, Buddhist monasteries and to army officials. Though this process began in the Satvahana rule in the 2nd century AD, and with the Guptas in the 4th century AD, it became widespread from the 5th century onwards. From the 7th century onwards appointing feudal intermediaries who collected revenue and food on administrative tasks became common. The distribution of land grants to Brahmins, in the period of rising feudalism, meant that from the beginning they constituted a part of feudal class. This process essentially took place between the 5th and 7th centuries, especially in the parts that were colonized by the migrating peasant settlers – in Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat and central and western Madhya Pradesh, in the Deccan. It began under the Pallava rule in the 6th century in the South, but reached its peak during the Chola rule from the 9th century onwards in Tamil Nadu, parts of Karnataka and the Kerala regions.

In this period the proliferation of jatis also began. Jati, originally a term used for a tribe with its own distinct customs, coming into a Varna, gradually replaced Varna since it became the main organization in which people were bound together. The original peasant settlers emerged as specific peasant jatis in particular regions. In the South the dominant peasant land owning jatis were considered as Satvik Shudras, ranked only next to the Brahmins. A number of jatis and upa jatis, each with an occupational specialization necessary for agriculture, or for social life in the village also developed. The carpenter, blacksmith, potter, tanner, skinner of dead cattle were available in the bigger villages. As also the barber, the washerman and the priest. They provided their skills to the peasant and other families including the families of the feudal intermediaries. In return they began to be given a share of village produce. Initially the share was decided by nattar, the association of the dominant peasant community. In later times the shares became more formal, they were also given the right to till a part of the village

lands. The jagmani system, the balutedari or ayagari system emerged within the new arrangement of the village structure. Money was not needed for daily exchange. This arrangement greatly aided the Brahmins and the other upper castes from the land owning, feudal intermediaries to raise their ritual status and social prestige, since the lower castes were available in full complement to do all the various types of physical and menial labor. The upper caste did not have to soil their hands. The jati system was suitable for the feudal mode of production and it would not be wrong to call it jati feudalism.

It is in this period that the number of untouchable castes swelled greatly. From the 4th century BC itself, these are references to the untouchables, in Patanjali, who mentions two types of Shudras, the Nirashrit (excluded) and the Ashrit. But their numbers were restricted. Gradually newer tribal groups began to be included. But it is in the feudal period that their numbers went up greatly, the Chamars and Rajaks, for example, were reduced to the untouchable status of an untouchable. Tribal groups, subjugated by force after being dispossessed of their forests/lands, mans of livelihood and freedom were relegated to an untouchable status. Some artisan groups too were pushed down from Shudra to the ati-Shudra ranks. They were in the main bonded agricultural labourers who were denied by religious injunctions any right to own wealth (gold, etc.) and land. Their only dharma was to labour for the entire village at a distance, polluting even by their shadow. Maximum surplus could be extracted from the untouchable labourers, forced into a low level of material existence and perpetual servitude.

Brahmins, both as individuals and as groups, were granted lands and a share of the revenue from the villages. They lived off the surplus created by the villagers. The Brahmadeva villages in South India became the centres for Brahminical culture and learning. In these villages and the surrounding region, Brahmins were allowed to keep the revenue of the villages, or the larger share (melavarm) of the total produce, they got their own lands cultivated through tenants or sharecroppers. The Dharma allowed them the right to own land, they could supervise cultivation, but they could not cultivate it

themselves. A section of the Brahmin castes were closely associated with the rulers. Apart from providing fictitious genealogies to prove Kshatriya status of the ruling groups, they were the royal purohitas and in many kingdoms they held administrative posts. These Brahmins, who helped to generate the surplus, gained the highest social era.

As land owners and revenue collectors, closely associated with the rule of the kingdom, the Brahmins held wide authority in the political, social and religious life. They were active members of the feudal ruling class, and its ideologies as well.

Turkish Invasion

Com. Ghandy succinctly explains the impact of Muslim rule on the feudal mode of production beginning with the Turkish rule. The establishment of Turkish power in North India, through the slave dynasty in the 13th century, marked an important phase in the feudal mode of production. They centralized the administration and introduced a systematic system of revenue collection. The composition of the ruling class underwent a change. Initially, it was the Turk slave families and their relatives that ruled, they were successively replaced by ex-slaves of Indian origin, Indianized Turks and foreign immigrants, to be replaced by even foreigners. The most important changes related to the methods in which the rights to revenue collection (iqta) were assigned. Originally restricted only for life, on the decision of the king, by the end of the 15th century they were made hereditary. The Turks were urban-based, and favoured Islam. Thus, Turkish rulers displaced the original feudatories and created new ones over a period of time.

The administrative changes induced by the Turks, and adopted in the Deccan too, introduced changes in the powers of revenue collection and administration, affecting military service holders, administrators, village headmen and the priestly clans, the office holders came to be called inamdars, watandars, iqtadars, deshmukhs-desais, and later as jagirdars, during the Mughal rule.

Although some of the earlier intermediaries who had lost their posts regained them during the later part of the Turk rule, yet in this period the composition of the feudal classes in north India was not stable. However, this did not affect the structure of the village economy. The Turks introduced new techniques in the science of war. They also gave a fillip to trade, commerce and artisan production in the urban areas. Hence, this period saw the development of the productive forces in Indian society.

By the 17th and 18th centuries when Mughals consolidated their rule by associating with the Rajput chiefs and other upper caste intermediaries and the ruling groups of kingdoms annexed in north India and in the Deccan. This throughout the early period, though the Mughals monetized the collection of revenue to some extent, and also increased the exploitation of the peasantry, yet, they did not basically affect the social structure of the agrarian village economy as it had evolved over the previous centuries. It consisted of the intermediaries at the top of the rural structure, who were also invariably large landlords themselves. Often they held a post from the ruler, which gave administrative responsibilities and powers. These were also village chiefs and village level officials like accountants. These office holders and feudatories lived off the revenue collected from the peasants. They also controlled lands which they got tilled by either tenants or sharecroppers.

In some areas, they used bonded labourers from tribal or untouchable castes. Most of these feudal intermediaries were from the uppermost castes – Brahmins, Rajputs and even if they originally came from the Shudra cultivating castes, they had elevated themselves to Kshatriya or to a high non-Brahmin status.

The control of temples had given the Brahmins wide control over the resources of the agrarian economy in the south. The appointment of Brahmins to high administrative and military posts during the Vijaynagara rule further concentrated power and resources under their control. In western Maharashtra too, the Maratha rule concentrated economic and political power in the hands of the

Brahmins. The main cultivating castes were exploited for revenue and innumerable taxes. Yet their rights to the land had evolved over the centuries, even if they were under feudatories. The jajmani/balutedari system institutionalized the system of exchange between the services of the various castes – the peasants and the landlord. On the one hand, it formalized the share of the various castes to the produce, but on the other, it increased the power and prestige of feudatories and Brahmins, and formalized the system of beggar (forced free labour). Higher caste landowning sections could withdraw from all manual work, especially work connected with agriculture. The other castes served as their jajmans. It involved free labour for a number of artisans and service castes, who served various families at the same time, but the untouchable castes, were in many areas attached to a particular family.

The Impact of British Rule

Writing about the colonial period, she says that the British did not touch or tamper with the Brahminical system. By passing local customary and caste practices, they upheld the Dharamshastras, appointing Brahmin pundits to advise the British judges in interpreting the shastras in disputes relating to family and marriage, property and inheritance, and religious rights, including the status of specific castes. Hence, the British legal system upheld the entry into the temples to the untouchable castes in the name of protecting the established rights of other castes. The British courts entertained caste claims regarding privileges and precedence of exclusiveness in respect to religious rituals as well.

In the name of respecting the autonomy of castes, they upheld the disciplinary power of castes against violators of caste norms, even in inter-caste disputes. Thus, they upheld caste although in a much more restricted sphere than in the feudal period.

The economic changes introduced by the colonial rulers in the 19th century in order to consolidate their rule and intensify the exploitation of India, had an impact on the relations of production in the rural areas and created new classes from among the various castes, the

various revenue settlements – the zamindari, rayatwari, etc., the introduction of railways, defence works, the colonial education system, the uniform criminal and civil law and colonial bureaucracy affected the caste system and modified its role in society.

In the land settlements, the British ignored the inalienable rights of the actual cultivators, in many areas made the intermediaries, the non-cultivating sections that only had a share in the produce traditionally, become the sole proprietors of the land.

In the zamindari settlement areas, the Shudra peasants became tenants at the mercy of the landlords; in other areas a class of peasant proprietors arose, but even in this the larger peasants gained while the actual cultivators became tenants or sharecroppers. The Shudra peasantry was divided into an upper section of the rich; intensified exploitation coupled with famines and other crises, indebted peasants of all the cultivating castes who were pushed into the ranks of the landless.

A section of artisans became landless labourers. A class of rural poor, landless or poor peasants, emerged from the ranks of most of the middle and lower castes in the 19th century. She gives a brilliant account of the Bhakti and non-Brahmin Movement in the pre-British and colonial period and also gives an excellent account of the dynamics of caste system after the transfer of power, including Dalit politics and caste atrocities.

The most significant changes have been in the countryside. The close correspondence between caste and class no longer exists in most parts of the country. The old upper caste zamindars and other big feudal landlords have, to some extent, been weakened and feudal authority is, to a large extent, asserted by smaller landlords, the former big tenants of the zamindars and the large peasant proprietors. While the position of the upper castes has weakened the most, the new landlords are from the middle castes. The middle castes are, today, significantly divided along class lines. The landlords and the rich peasants are a small group from the traditionally cultivating castes, and these castes are also found in

large numbers among middle and poor peasants and even among the landless.

The lower section of the middle castes, i.e., the artisan castes are primarily middle, poor or landless and some are continuing their traditional occupations. Therefore, today, the main exploiting class in the rural areas consists of the earlier upper caste elements, i.e., the Brahmins, the Rajputs, together with the upper stratum of the middle castes, such as the Patidars, the Marathas, the Jats, the Yadavs, the Vellars, the Lingayats, the Reddys, the Kammass, the Nairs, etc.

The middle peasants, comprising about 25 percent of the rural households, largely come from the major cultivating castes and from other lower castes, as well as a small section of Dalits. This section has contradictions with upper sections of the rural elite, but due to the caste relations and low class consciousness in areas of low class struggle, they are trailing behind the elite landlord sections of the other castes.

The poor and the landless, who consist of 60% of the rural households, have the greatest number of caste divisions, including a large number of small artisan and service jatis, and even Muslims. This class consists also of a large number of households from Dalits and Adivasis. Of the rural agricultural labour families, 37% are Dalits and 10% Adivasis, while the remaining half are drawn from the cultivating castes and other lower castes. Here, caste divisions among the exploited is the greatest. The caste-class relationship in the present period is indeed complex (Anuradha Ghandy: "Caste Question In India").

COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL ANTI-BRAHMINICAL AND DALIT LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

Apart from historicizing the caste question its emergence and feudal mode of production, Com. Anuradha wrote perceptibly about the Anti-Brahminical and Dalit Movement in Colonial and Post-Colonial

India, including mapping the anti-Brahminical Bhakti Movement. Her writings on Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar and Dalit assertions in Maharashtra assumes importance because those were important milestones in the sub-altern resistance to Brahminical oppression in India.

The non-Brahmin Movements

The anti-Brahminical movements in India, especially in Maharashtra, are important because the specific characteristics of Indian caste feudalism and the way it was transformed and yet essentially maintained by British colonial rule, defined the specific anti-feudal tasks of the Indian revolution. The most basic anti-feudal task, the land question, took on extremely complex features as a result of Indian caste feudalism. Because of the way in which hierarchical relations were maintained within the village and among the exploited classes themselves, and because of the way in which productive work for the land was institutionalized through the jajmani/ balotedari system, it was insufficient to look at the land question simply in terms of landlordism. Similarly, the slogan of 'land to the tiller' was abstract and insufficient in the Indian context without understanding the overall Brahminical domination. For the fact was that much of the land had two tillers – the cultivating middle caste peasant, whether tenant or ryot, and the Dalit field servant, whose connection to the land was equally long-standing.

The very inequality among the exploited, institutionalized through the feudal caste hierarchy, meant that the need for creating unity in the context of resolving land question was crucial. It is hard to see how this could be done without a specific programme of action constituting poor peasants including Dalits, as well as caste Hindu toilers who would have the responsibility of seizing and distributing the village lands and instituting necessary programmes of co-operative and collective agriculture.

Though attempts were begun by the Dalit castes from the late 19th century to organize themselves, the various sections of Dalit liberation movement really began to take off from the 1920s in the

context of the strong social reform and anti-caste movements, which were beginning to develop a genuine mass base. The non-Brahmin movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu especially provided an important support. It is not accidental that Jyotirao Phule, the mali (gardener caste) who lived in the middle of the 19th century, made the initial ideological advances and formulated a theory of Brahminism and 'Irani Aryabhat' conquest turning the Aryan theory upside down to identify with the original 'non-Aryan' Shudra and ati-Shudra inhabitants of the country.

Dalits, to some extent, were organizing the 19th century also. An early attempt in Maharashtra was the movement of Gopal Babu Wangankar. Much organizing focused on the effort to regain their rights to serve in the British Indian Army, which they had helped till the 1870s, but which was then withdrawn from them. It was in the 1920s, however, that the Dalits began to organize strongly and independently throughout many regions of India. The most important of the early Dalit movements were the Adi-Dharma movement in Punjab (organized in 1926); the movement under Ambedkar in Maharashtra, mainly based among Mahars, which had its organizational beginnings in 1924; the Nama-Shudra movement in Bengal; the Adi-Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu; the Adi-Karnataka movement; the Adi-Hindu movement mainly centered around Kanpur in UP; and the organizing of the Pulayas and Cherumans in Kerala. [3]

In most of the cases the Montagu – Chelmsford Reforms provided a spark for this organization of Dalits, but the crucial background was the massive economic and political upheavals of the post-war period. The movements had a linguistic-national organizational base and varied according to the specific social characteristics in different areas, but there was considerable all-India exchange of ideas and by the 1930s this began to take the shape of all-India conferences with Ambedkar emerging as the clear national leader of the movement. The founding of the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942, and its later conversion into the Republican Party, gave Dalits a genuine all-India political organization, though this remained weak, except in

certain specific localities, and did not by any means constitute the entire Dalit movement. [4] Writing about the Non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra led by Jyotiba Phule, Com. Anuradha says,

The movement began with the founding of the Satyasashodak Samaj in Pune. The rise of Satyasashodak Samaj (SS) took place in the context of a rise of Brahminical Hindu revivalism in western India in the 1870s, with its base in Pune, which put the upper caste reformers on the defensive. After working as a social reformer for almost 20 years, Jyotiba Phule founded the SS in 1873 in Pune. The main task of the SS was to make the non-Brahmins conscious of their exploitation by the Brahmins. Phule himself belonged to the mali caste, a caste involved in the cultivation of vegetables, and their trade in the vicinity of Pune. His family was middle class and he was educated in a mission school. The SS did not restrict its activities to any particular caste and worked among the various non-Brahmin (NB) castes in the rural areas of Thane, Pune and later in other districts in Bombay Province and Berar. They also worked among the workers in the textile mills of Bombay. The songs, booklets and plays written by Phule used a popular hard-hitting style and language to expose the various ways in which the Brahmins duped the people, especially the peasants. The SS interpreted the racial theory of the origin of caste in the context of popular tradition – the Aryan invaders had enslaved the local peasantry, the rule of Baliraja, the peasant king was defeated – showing the links of the SS with the democratic sentiments of the peasantry.

In Phule's time, the SS campaigned for social reform – they rejected their own feudal-style marriages and adopted the SS marriages, which were based on principles of equality, mutual respect and loyalty between husband and wife. The SS reform campaign in Phule's time led to a strike by barbers who decided not to tonsure widows leading to tensions in the village. Phule ran a paper called Din Bandhu. His main supporters were Telugu contractors and workers in the textile mills. The first reformist organization among the textile workers of Bombay, the Mill Hands Association, was formed in 1890 by N.M. Lokhande under Phule's guidance. This association

represented the grievances of the mill workers till it was pushed aside by the militant trade unions that emerged among the workers in the aftermath of the First World War. Phule promoted modern agriculture among the peasantry and personally bought land to experiment and set an example before them. He was influenced by the democratic American writings of Tom Paine and the principles of liberty and equality. He wrongly believed that British rule had destroyed the role of Brahmins and brought modern education to all castes, and hence was a supporter of the colonial rule in the country.

After Phule's death, the activists of the SS continued to work. The fact that units of the SS were formed in villages not only in the districts like Ahmednagar, Satara, Kolhapur, but also in the Berar region in Amravati, shows that the growing peasant consciousness was being mobilized through the SS in the beginning of the 20th century. Their propaganda struck a chord among the peasantry. Campaigns against social problems like drinking and against untouchability were taken up. The SS also took up the problems of the peasants, promoting co-operatives among them. The contradictions in the rural areas were expressed by the SS as a conflict between the Shetji/Bhatji and the Bahujan Samaj (money lender/priest and the masses).

The SS functioned systematically, holding annual conferences after 1910, and bringing out a magazine. SS tamashas (the dramas) have toured the villages, singing songs and putting up performers to spread their message. The basic content of the activities was anti-feudal. The propaganda of an SS tamasha led to a spontaneous revolt of the peasants against Brahmin landlords in 1919 in Satara. The peasants were demanding a reduction in the rent. They broke idols and abused the gods and the wives of the Brahmins. This revolt was not supported by the landlord sections of the NBs in the rural areas. Nonetheless, SS activity continued and SS activists were involved in peasant agitations in other districts in the 1920s. The SS attacked the feudal authority in rural areas and aroused the democratic consciousness of the peasants. The SS campaigns led to the exodus of Brahmin landlords from the villages in western

Maharashtra. It laid the ground for the militant anti-imperialist struggles led by the peasantry in the region in the 1940s, like the Patri Sarkar movement in Satara, when a parallel authority was set up against the British.

The SS Movement was the main movement in the early part of the 20th century in Maharashtra through which the anti-feudal, anti-caste sentiments of the peasant masses of the middle castes were expressed. It dealt a blow to Brahminical hegemony and feudal relations in the countryside. But since the leadership of the movement restricted their attack to caste ideology and failed to put forward a programme to break the foundations of the caste system, in the concentration of land, the main means of production, they could reform the caste system and feudalism and not break it. Hence, they were unable to fulfil the interests of the lower caste.

The anti-Brahminical movement was an important milestone in colonial and post-colonial India to challenge the Brahminical hegemony and struggle for democratization in Tamil Nadu. E.V. Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker "Periyar" played a stellar role in this. Apart from this, there were social reform movements like the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association formed in 1892 for promoting education of women, reform of marriage, abolition of untouchability, etc. However, the Self-Respect Movement led by Periyar was much more radical and mass-based, though Periyar also used the platform of Justice Party, which has a more landlord upper caste base. Writing about Periyar's Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party, Com. Anuradha says, "The Justice Party was led by and clearly represented the interests of big landlords and merchants from among the upper castes among the non-Brahmins only. Periyar's movement was based on wider support of the rising working class, the middle class and the traders, especially in urban centers like Erode, Madurai, Coimbatore, Salem, Tiruchirapalli, Tuticorin and other towns. At its peak, the Self-Respect Movement took up the activities of propagating against money lenders' exploitation and the problems of the peasantry.

While the Justice Party took a strong pro-British stand, anti-colonial intellectuals among the non-Brahmins, many of whom were active within the Congress, for instance, Kesava Pillai, EVR, and Dr. Varadharajulu, formed the Madras Presidency Association in 1917 to press for full communal representation for the non-Brahmins.

E.V. Ramaswamy "Periyar" formed the Self-Respect Movement "Suyamariyathai iyakkam" after he walked out of Congress in 1925 for their unwillingness to support separate representation for the non-Brahmins. The conservative, pro-feudal, pro-Varna positions of the Congress leadership had led to tensions within Congress – between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Periyar's movement was concentrated in Tamil areas of the Presidency. It was oriented towards the oppressed castes, including the untouchables, and he took active steps to involve women and the youth. They ran a magazine called "Kudi Arasu". Militant attacks, with an atheistic approach, were launched by the Self-Respect Movement, not only on Brahmins, but also on the religion itself, on superstition, caste dimensions and caste privileges. Periyar wanted to arouse self-respect and feeling of equality among the lower castes. They upheld the pride in Tamil language and opposed the use of Sanskrit. They propagated a ban on the use of Brahmin priests for marriages and popularized self-respect marriages; they opposed the use of the Thali, called for the abolition of caste names, and ridiculed the epics like the Ramayana. Periyar's style was direct, propagandist and very popular. By struggling for the equality of all castes and breaking the hold of religion, the movement paved the way for a materialist analysis.

In the 1930s, the Self-Respect Movement, under the influence of communists in Tamil Nadu, and the influence of Periyar's trip to the USSR, supported socialism. Communists like Singaravelu propagated materialist philosophy and socialism through the magazine. During that period, two trends were active within the Self-Respect Movement, one which wanted to take up anti-capitalist propaganda and activity. The Self-Respect socialists began organizing on problems of the peasantry along with their regular

conferences. Under the influence of the CPI leaders, the Self-Respect socialists (Samadharna group) merged with the Congress Socialist Party in November 1936.

The Revolutionary left alternative complementarity of anti-capitalist and anti-caste movements – the move away from traditional Marxist theory was initiated from the 1970s when serious efforts were made both theoretically and politically to build bridges between Communist and Dalit Movements. The Dalit Panthers made serious efforts in this direction in the early 1970s. This was followed by two important interventions by Marxist scholar activists in the 1980s.

The Dalit Movement

Dalit Panther Manifesto written in 1973, defined Dalits as not only the SC and Buddhist converts, but also laboring class, agricultural laborers, landlords and poor farmers, nomadic tribes and Adivasis. This way of definition is different from conventional categorization and it reflected very strong class factors. Similarly, the manifesto spelled out landlords, capitalists, money lenders, imperialists and bureaucrats as enemies. The political parties, depending on religious sentiment and casteism, and the government patronizing them, were also blamed as Panther's enemies. The ideologue of the group Namdeo Dhasal, emphasized that not only caste system but also class system, should be eradicated. He further argued "casteists, capitalists, and religious leaders are all controlled by the Hindu feudal system. Therefore, issue of untouchability has not remained to be only psychological or mental slavery".

This perspective of Indian social system reminds us of a slightly different version of historical materialism than advocated by the traditional Marxist. This attempt at bringing together the twin agenda of anti-capitalist and anti-caste struggle rested on asserting the materiality of caste exploitation. It firmly rejected the relegation of caste to superstructure and untouchability to the realm of mental or cultural subjugation. In the early 1980s, an important intervention was made to explain the continued relevance of pre-capitalist

relations in “modern times.” [5] Writing about the Dalit Movement in Maharashtra after Ambedkar, Com. Anuradha says,

Discontent with the existing political and economic situation among the youth of the newly converted Dalits burst forth in 1973 in Bombay, in the form of the Dalit Panther Movement.” The general political and economic situation among the youth of the newly converted Dalits burst forth in 1973 in Bombay, in the form of Dalit Panther Movement. The general political and economic crisis in the country, the revolutionary upsurge of students and youth around the world, the frustration of the newly educated Dalit Youth who found their desire for equality smothered, confronted by discrimination and unemployment, led to the emergence of the Dalit Panther Movement. The Movement challenged not only Congress rule, but also the corruption ridden RPI leadership.

On 15 August 1973, Raja Dhale wrote an article in “Sadhana” exposing the hoax of Indian Independence. Dhale abused the Indian flag since it had given the scheduled castes neither equality nor freedom from oppression. The issue of “Sadhna” was banned by the Maharashtra government. This was the spark that gave birth to the Dalit Panthers. A literature of protest burst forth, attacking all forms of discrimination, mocking at those “immersed in plastering withering leaves” expressing the anguish of the injuries ploughed into their banks, calling upon countless suns aflame with blood to advance setting afire town after town. Namdev Dhasal, Yeshwant Manohar, Daya Pawar, Keshav Mesharam and many others achieved overnight fame. The literature of revolt vowed to take revenge for the centuries of oppression; it sprang up on notice boards, in slums, in small magazines and posters. Taking inspiration from Black Panthers, this movement gave itself a name – Dalit Panthers. Meetings were held, the Bhagwat Gita burnt; campaigns to break the practice of untouchability in various forms were organized. In a short span of six months, militant organizational units sprang up in innumerable slums of Bombay and Pune. The state, taken aback by the spontaneous growth and the intensity of this movement, launched attacks on the Dalit Panthers, not directly, but through Shiv

Sena. Minor reasons were utilized in order to arrest activists of Dalit Panthers, and to beat them up in order to prevent them from spreading.

AMBEDKAR

The anti-caste or anti-Brahminical movement in India cannot be understood without discussing the phenomenal contribution of Dr. Ambedkar. He not only led the Dalits, but also had written extensively on the caste system and Dalit liberation strategies. His annihilation of caste is an extremely important tract for any serious anti-caste struggle. Writing about the "Annihilation of Caste", Dr. Anand Teltumbde says, "What the communist manifesto is to the capitalist world, Annihilation of castes may be to the caste India!" Unlike Marx and Engels, who consciously wrote the Communist Manifesto as the clarion call for proletariat to revolt, Babasaheb Ambedkar did not have any idea that the presidential speech he was drafting to be delivered in the annual conference of Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore in May 1936 would turn out to be the manifesto against the Hindu Caste System. Because of its hard-hitting attack on the Hindu religion, which in his analysis came out to be the source of caste system, the organizers of the Hindu Reformist Mandal had cancelled the conference and the undelivered speech, therefore, was published in the book form. The period in which this text was written is the momentous period in Ambedkar's life. As is well known, Ambedkar has started off with the civil rights movement of the untouchables, which he thought would sensitize Hindus to undertake due reforms within the society to remove untouchability and other inhuman practices vis-a-vis then untouchables. But the bitter experience in the very first struggle of this kind at Mahad, where the Dalits were brutally attacked for having dared to pollute the Chavdar Tank, impelled him to rethink this approach. Although he tried to persist with it by calling a satyagraha after eight months at the very same Chavdar Tank, which was again thwarted by the caste Hindus, this time with an injunction from the court, and also supported some of the temple entry movements thereafter

undertaken by his followers, he turned his focus towards the political arena. In the Round Table conferences he had successfully won separate electorates for the untouchables decimating the spirited opposition of Mahatma Gandhi. However, when Gandhi declared his fast unto death against this Communal Award, provoking in turn the entire caste Hindu hostility against Dalits, he had to compromise by accepting the increased number of reserved seats for Dalits but through joint electorates. [6]

Communists ignored his struggles as “Superstructural” and hence unimportant. This conduct of the communists led him away from them. Lamenting the increasing divergence and hostility between these two camps of proletariats today, viz., left and Dalits, one is tempted to imagine the revolutionary possibilities if the communists had duly empathized with and cohered with Ambedkar’s vision.

Evaluating Ambedkar’s important role in Anti-Caste and Dalit Liberation Movement, Com. Anuradha writes,

Following the tradition of the earlier Non-Brahmin Movement Ambedkar did not participate in the nationalist movement though Ambedkar was aware of the exploitation of the British and Depressed classes realized that they needed Swaraj to develop the movement, he felt that it could not take on two enemies (i.e., the upper castes and the British) at the same time. So, they targeted their attack on the caste system. Throughout his political career, Ambedkar was a firm opponent of Gandhi and he exposed the hypocrisy of the Congress leadership on the issue of eradicating untouchability.

Ambedkar played a very important role in mobilizing the lowest castes in Maharashtra to struggle against caste oppression and to demand equality. He gave the people, suppressed for centuries, a self-identity in which they developed a pride in being from the Mahar Community, and he gave them the self-confidence that, given equal opportunities, they were no less than members of the higher castes. The almost total conversion of the entire Mahar Community to Buddhism in 1956 served to encourage this sense of identity and

pride. The public rejection of Hinduism which sanctifies inequality and caste discrimination and public conversion to a religion based on egalitarian principles, is another symbol of desire for equality. It includes also a rejection of the old feudal ideology of Brahminical ritualism.” (Anuradha Ghandy: Caste Question in India”) Underlying the necessity of Marxists having a correct understanding of Ambedkar’s role in revolutionary struggles, she writes, “There has always been a controversy on the evaluation of Ambedkar among communist issues like his attitude to communists, his attitude to violence or his role in trade union movement have been presented to judge Ambedkar. But what is significant in such an evaluation, from a Marxist point of view, is his objective role, in the process of democratic transformation of society.

The democratic transformation of India required a revolutionary struggle against the backwardness and semi-feudal agrarian relations in rural India. The Caste System had been part of the pre-capitalist feudal economy. Caste ideology was part of the traditional feudal culture and ideology. Therefore, to smash the caste system and actively fight caste-based oppression were an integral part of the democratic transformation of our society. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement led by him were an important part of this democratic current against caste feudalism. By asserting the identity of the Dalits, by demanding equality, by attacking the feudal ideology of Hinduism, Ambedkar fought for democracy in social life. But Ambedkar did not connect the caste system with wider agrarian relations in a comprehensive manner. He did not conceptualize the role played by the British in perpetuating and defending this backward exploitative agrarian economy. Hence, his movement remained one part of anti-feudal current. And this led Ambedkar to place hope in constitutional means for gaining political equality. Ambedkar was a leading liberal reformer of his time. He is a source of inspiration for the Dalits not only in Maharashtra, but in other states as well. For Dalits, who have acquired education but face caste discrimination, who demand equality but are denied it in

various ways, subtle and crude, he is a symbol of their identity and desire to gain equality.

Taking to task the mainstream parliamentary left parties like CPI and CPM for their mechanical and opportunistic attitude towards anti-caste struggle, Com. Anuradha writes,

In India the traditional communists (CPI, CPM, etc.) have generally, viewed class struggle as primarily, an economic struggle. They have, most often viewed the caste struggle as dividing the people. What they did not realize is that the people are already divided on caste lines and the basis of unity must be equality (and that higher caste prejudices must be fought in order to gain equality). Also, class struggle is not merely an economic struggle, it is a struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor for control over the main means of production and the political life of society. It includes the struggle in economic, political, social and ideological spheres, and the key aspect of revolutionary class struggle is not economic struggle but political struggle – the struggle for the seizure of political power. In rural India, this struggle for political power involves the smashing of the feudal and caste authority. In the countryside, and also the setting up of new bodies (where the higher castes are not allowed to automatically dominate) through which peoples power is exercised.

The reason why the revisionist CPI and CPM have basically negated the caste question are three:

- First, they did not view the agrarian struggle as primarily anti-feudal and so did not see the significance of attacking caste oppression as part of the anti-feudal struggle.
- Second, because of their reformist politics, and their immersion in economic struggles and electoral battles, caste oppression was not merely negated but brushed aside, as the bulk of the organized workers are from the higher castes and the biggest vote banks are also from the higher castes.
- Third, because of a mechanical linking between the base and the superstructure, they did not feel the need to fight casteist outlook and maintained that common economic struggles will automatically

bring together all castes and remove caste bias. Ideologically, they replaced dialectical materialism with mechanical materialism and assumed a one-to-one relationship between the base and superstructure by further maintaining that, with the transformation into socialist society all caste biases will automatically disappear. Influenced by theory of productive forces whereby, they maintained that social relations of production will automatically change with a development of the productive forces.

Com. Anuradha had a sharp eye on the Mandal-Kamandal debate and anti-reservation struggles. About the opportunist and anti-Dalit prejudices of the ruling class parties and the reactionary nature of anti-reservation agitations, especially the anti-Mandal agitation, she writes, "In an attempt to check the BJP's efforts to dislodge it, the Janata Dal Government announced the implementation of reservations for the OBCs. But this was widely opposed by the upper castes in the form of anti-reservation agitations. The extent of the upper caste control over the government bureaucracy and prestigious professions can be seen from their violence and aggressiveness against the implementation of the Mandal Commission. The Comprador bureaucrat bourgeoisie and its media gave wide publicity to this agitation which was restricted to elite institutions. The techniques they used, like self-immolation to those their opposition, also gave their agitation mere publicity. The upper caste sections of the bureaucracy also support the agitation. The agitating students were from ABVP and NSUI, although both the Congress and the BJP opportunistically remained silent during the agitation.

While recognizing the implementation of reservation policy for OBCs, will in spite of income limits, favour the landlord elite sections of the OBC castes and in that only a few castes may gain, yet the fact is that most of the OBCs are poor and landless peasants or those eking out of their subsistence in their traditional occupation. Reservations will provide only a very few small sections among them a secure middle-class existence, for the majority the agrarian order to be overturned in order to give security and a better life. But the

middle castes have hardly been represented in the administration and they have a right to their share in this sector.

The extent of caste prejudice and caste feelings that are nurtured and bred among the so-called modern sections of the upper castes has been revealed by the vehemence of the anti-reservation agitations. There is a need to oppose the anti-reservation agitations for what they are – an attempt by the reactionary sections of the uppermost castes to maintain their monopoly over the states' resources and prestigious lucrative professions with their vicious elitist caste biases. It is nothing but an indirect attempt to perpetuate the caste system by keeping the Dalits and the lower sections of the OBCs as menials and labourers to be exploited at will.

TOWARDS SOME TASKS FOR CASTE ANNIHILATION

Marxism, above all, is a philosophy of praxis and Com. Anuradha was a revolutionary who dedicated her entire life for the emancipation of the underdog. Therefore, as a mark of respect to her, underlining the seriousness of her praxis, I would conclude by quoting her programmatic agenda for the Dalit liberation struggle, which is intrinsically linked with the question of democratic revolution in India.

The following is the agenda she has systematically laid out for the struggle:

1. The proletariat must direct the class struggle against the caste system as an integral part of the struggle to accomplish the New Democratic Revolution.
2. For this, mobilize all the exploited classes in the struggle against caste oppression, exploitation and discrimination.
3. Smash caste-linked feudal authority in the villages and place political power in the hands of the oppressed classes, led by the landless and poor peasants.

4. Struggle to implement land to the tiller, keeping the interests of landless peasantry and poor peasantry at the forefront.
5. Wage an ideological struggle against Brahminical casteist ideology and all other forms of casteist thinking. Expose the casteist ideology in the scriptures like Manusmriti, the Gita and the Vedas, etc.
6. While upholding the right of the individual to pursue his or her faith, conduct a relentless ideological struggle against all forms of caste rituals and practices, like thread ceremony, etc.
7. Fight against propagation of vegetarianism, based on its link with 'purity' and other forms of superstition regarding 'pollution'. Oppose 'gohatya bandi'.
8. Fight social stigma against certain occupations and customs of lower castes, like beef eating or pork eating.
9. Fight against symbols of caste identity and degradation, and the culture having a caste slang.
10. Defend and actively support the struggle of the Dalit masses for self-respect. Defend the right of the Dalits to enter temples and convert.
11. Struggle for the civic and social rights of the Dalits and other lower castes, and oppose discrimination, e.g., use of common wells, hotels, toilets, hostels, etc.
12. Struggle for equal participation of lower castes in social functions. Try to establish social intercourse between the people belonging to various castes participating in the class struggle. Encourage inter-dining among different castes.
13. Oppose housing schemes based on caste segregation.
14. Defend and encourage inter-caste marriages. Demand incentives for all inter-caste marriages. Children of inter-caste marriages should get facilities as accorded to either parent.
15. End use of caste names in official records.

16. Encourage trade unions to take initiative in the implementation of reservation policy. Fight reservations in private sector.

17. Fight bureaucratic delays and corruption in loans and subsidies for Dalits and OBCs.

18. Demand special schemes to upgrade technology and the skills of lower castes and artisan groups.

19. Demand increase in scholarship amount and improved facilities in hostels for Dalits and Adivasis.

20. Expose the reactionary nature of caste associations, especially upper caste associations.

21. Fight against and expose the casteist leadership within the oppressed castes, who prevent the class unity of the toiling masses. There is a false consciousness among the poor people belonging to the upper castes that they are socially equal with the rich people of their castes. We have to expose this myth and make them understand that their real comrades-in-arms are the oppressed people of other castes. We should never put caste before class.

22. Fight and expose the opportunistic and reformist trends within the leadership of the oppressed castes. Fight bourgeois democratic illusions among oppressed castes.

23. Struggle against caste prejudices and caste beliefs within the ranks of the proletariat and other sections of the toiling masses, and build up a struggling unity among the exploited classes.

24. The communists should be one among the oppressed people of all castes and be with them in words and deeds. At the same time we should expose the pseudo communists who are rank casteists in practice.

25. Educate and struggle against casteist beliefs of activists of mass organizations.

26. Form special platforms of democratic sections to fight caste discrimination and programs against lower castes.

27. Form anti-riot squads in defense of lower castes in areas of caste tensions.

28. Propagate materialist scientific ideology, promote atheism.

29. Struggle to create a democratic culture, based on equality of all irrespective of caste and gender.

(From 'Caste Question in India', by Anuradha Ghandy)

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CASTE AND POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL: THE CHANGING FRONT OF THE LEFT FRONT

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NOTE: This article is taken from the book 'West Bengal under the left' instead of copying the one from the book. The author mentioned that at the time of his presentation, his work was still in progress and Arvind Memorial published his incomplete work without taking his permission. I mailed him and, He asked me to read the chapter titled 'The Caste Question and Decline of The Left in West Bengal' from mentioned book instead, so I am just going to paste that chapter here.

*“Mouchake dhil poreche (a stone has struck the beehive)!”
– Rezzak Mollah, former CPI(M) leader¹*

The firebrand peasant leader, Rezzak Mollah, who has been elected to the state assembly for consecutive tenth time now in 2016, formally launched a vehement attack on his former party CPI(M) three years back in 2013 for persistently ignoring the caste question and development of the minorities during its longstanding regime for over three decades. He criticized the party for being brahminical in its composition and actions and argued that “the Dalits and minorities are giving their lives for the party while the Brahmins and the Kayasthas are bossing over.”² A former Dalit leader of the party, Kanti Biswas, supported Mollah’s criticisms and himself pointed out that “since the days of the undivided Communist Party to today’s CPI(M), nobody from the scheduled communities could find a place in the state secretariat.”³ Although an integral member of the CPI(M) since 1972 who had won nine elections at a stretch as its candidate,

Mollah was immediately kicked out of the party for his “serious anti-party activities” and “tarnishing the party’s image in the eye of the people.”⁴ Given his personal charisma and support base, he launched a new forum without much delay to uphold the political concerns and demands of the Dalits and Muslims and called it the Samajik Nyayvichar Mancha (SNM) or Social Justice Forum. The forum became an amalgamation of a host of Dalit and Muslim organizations which had found a perfect platform to now launch a united struggle against the perennial upper-caste dominance in the state. The leaders of the forum decided to fight the state assembly elections in 2016 and aimed at having a Dalit as the chief minister and a Muslim as the deputy.⁵ However, quite surprisingly, Mollah soon dumped the nascent forum,⁶ joined the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in 2016 before the state assembly polls, and became a minister in the second Mamata Banerjee government after winning as a TMC candidate.

What is interesting about this story is not simply the peasant leader’s alleged hunger for power, as his critics often easily conclude; rather it brings before us larger questions regarding the changing dynamics of caste in the politics of contemporary West Bengal. Mollah’s entire episode provokes us to investigate the story of the metaphorical beehive: the mighty structure with delicate networks that has ruled the state for decades and has been unquestionably dominated by the urban, upper-caste elites, but is finally on the verge of ‘dying.’⁷ On the other hand, the SNM, although a short-lived political venture, rekindled the possibility of Dalit-Muslim alliance, albeit momentarily, in order to contest the urban, upper-caste *bhadralok* hegemony in the postcolonial politics of the state.⁸ Lastly, the voices of dissent surfaced not only from within the party alone, rather the mainstream Left as a solid coalition has increasingly lost its political salience, social base and ideological impetus in its erstwhile bastion over the last decade. This has been reflected in the Left Front’s (LF) poor electoral performance. One of the crucial factors behind the LF’s electoral and organizational debacle, as different studies have

already shown, is the loss of support from the minority communities: the Dalits and the Muslims.⁹

This chapter therefore seeks to interrogate this changing politics of caste in West Bengal. It asks: why and how the Dalits, who have been loyal supporters of the official Left for a considerable period of time, are now shifting their allegiance towards new political choices over the last couple of years? I shall argue that it is the Left's disregard towards the caste question at the theoretical level as well as cunning engagement with it in praxis during its prolonged regime in the state has led to the eventual alienation of the Dalits. The different lower caste groups have started to mobilize themselves autonomously over the last decade under the banner of different group-organizations which politically represent their specific group rights and demands, and negotiates the political parties and government in exchange of electoral support. One such important group in contemporary West Bengal are the Matuas,¹⁰ who are almost exclusively Namasudras, and led by their frontline organization called Matua Mahasangha (MM) which claims to have political influence over its followers populated thickly in more than 70 constituencies,¹¹ I shall talk about three specific cases from the contemporary political life of the Matuas in order to address the central question of this paper. These instances, as we shall see later in this chapter, expose the upper-caste character of the mainstream Left and show how it has failed to address the local concerns and demands of the Dalits in West Bengal.

The Left and the Caste Question

Let us begin with the question: how did the Left perceive caste? The nationalist Left and the Marxists, as Partha Chatterjee has argued, from the very beginning didn't accept caste as "essential to the characterization of Indian society", and regarded it as "a feature of the superstructure", that is, an "ideological product of the specific pre-capitalist social formations" which shall disappear with the advent of modernity.¹² Clearly, this didn't happen and caste continued to perpetuate in different forms in the postcolonial context.

Leaders like B.T. Ranadive, who is one of the few communist leaders who at least seriously engaged with the caste question, accused the bourgeois nationalists for being double-faced who embraced the legal-political principles of modern state while retaining the old feudal production relations and the hierarchical social ideologies.¹³ The memorandum of the CPI(M) on National Integration (1968) stated: "...It is a common practice, throughout the country – the legacy of the evil practice of untouchability and social oppression and brutality that persists in our rural areas, even after 20 years of independence and in spite of our laws and commissions for Scheduled Castes and Tribes! It is a result of the growth of feudal and semi-feudal landlordism and of the 'new rich', on the same feudal caste and social basis, and of their grip over the village economy and life! It is a reflection of the failure of the government to liquidate the medieval feudal economic base, of its failure to abolish landlordism, give land to the tiller and assure him land and employment, fair wages, and decent living conditions..."¹⁴

In a nutshell, the struggle against untouchability and caste has been linked by the official Left exclusively with the need for an agrarian revolution, redistributive economic policies like land-reforms and common struggle against imperialist and reformist forces.¹⁵ Such a theoretical perspective on the caste question by the official Left didn't improve much till date. The CPI(M) Resolution adopted at the All India Convention on Problems of Dalits held at New Delhi on February 22, 2006 says: "There has been no basic change in caste system after nearly 60 years of independence... as the bourgeois compromised with landlordism fostered caste prejudices."¹⁶ This particular resolution of the CPI(M), the most influential partner in the LF, quite interestingly, also acknowledged as well as criticized the stalwarts of anti-caste movements: "The 19th and 20th centuries saw great social reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Sri Narayan Guru, Jyotiba Phule, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker and others. These social reform movements conducted many struggles against the caste system, caste oppression and untouchability in many ways. But despite the struggles against caste oppression, the social reform

movement did not address the crucial issue of radical land reforms. It got delinked from the antiimperialist struggle”.

Following the official declarations of the mainstream Left on the caste question, what we realize is that it subscribes more or less to an old orthodox view of caste only as a feature of pre-capitalist social order. Such a deterministic view of caste only in terms of economic relations, adopted quite intentionally, eclipsed its understanding of the actual operation of caste at the level of everyday life in its modern avatar. Secondly, the fashion in which it has acknowledged the contributions of Ambedkar and others is evidently half-hearted without any serious engagement with their political thoughts and actions. And lastly, the Left has always labelled the independent mobilizations of Dalits under different political formations, both at the regional and national level, as ‘identity-politics’ which is essentially narrow, “pernicious” in nature and scope, and solely aimed at winning elections. This naive view on the caste question, without any serious engagement with it, explains the ideological poverty of the mainstream Left to appreciate and ally with the different anti-caste movements.

Situating West Bengal

West Bengal is a peculiar case. Compared to the states of north, west or south India, this eastern state didn’t witness any organized Dalit political assertion until recent past.¹⁷ Although Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was elected to the constituent assembly in 1946 from Bengal and the fact that the late colonial politics of the province provides us a rich history of Dalit movement; Dalits continue to be under-represented in the postcolonial politics of the state. The politics of West Bengal, as scholars have observed, has been dominated by the urban, upper-caste *bhadralok* – mostly constituted by the Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas, who apart from their higher ritual status were historically the beneficiaries of the Permanent Settlement (1793), English education and white-collar professions.¹⁸ The hegemonic domination of the upper-caste *bhadralok* ensured “the overall dominance of modes of culture and

thought of the urban intelligentsia” in almost every field of public life in Bengal and thereby “prevented any successful aggregation of caste interests in the state election scene.”¹⁹ post-independence. However, this did not mean that “caste authority and caste linkages” didn’t prove to be important in order to secure vote-bank for all the political parties; rather the caste question broadly remained a hush-hush thing thrown in the unorganized ‘informal’ domain of popular politics.²⁰

The LF didn’t disturb this structure. Unlike Kerala, where the Left movement has contested the hegemony of the Namboodiri-Nair-Syrian Christian elite and produced leaders like K.R. Gowriamma, E. Balanandan and V.S. Achuthanandan who have come from Ezhava background, the Bengal Left parties didn’t contest the hegemony of the urban, upper-caste *bhadralok*.²¹ Rather during its long electoral standing in West Bengal, the LF persistently denied the perpetuation of caste-based discriminations and atrocities on Dalits and publicly regarded ‘caste’ as an irrelevant category in the political life of the state. This was evident when Jyoti Basu commented in 1980 that caste is a “legacy of the feudal system and viewing the social scene from the casteist angle is no longer relevant for West Bengal.”²² The former chief minister’s outlook on caste echoed his party’s unwillingness to critically engage with the category. But his statement was clearly far detached from the real life of caste in the state. As different studies have shown us, there are numerous examples of what Gopal Guru calls “active mode of social boycott”²³ of Dalits, let alone the passive mode, in different parts of the state. These include separate sitting arrangement for Dalit students in schools, denial of entry of Dalits in temples and houses of the upper-castes, manual scavenging and so forth.²⁴ The Marichjhapi massacre is one of the darkest chapters in the present history of West Bengal where the LF government conducted a systematic attack on the refugees who were exclusively Dalits.²⁵ Another eye-opening case of structural violence unleashed on Dalits by the brahminical establishment in higher academic spaces was the tragic story of Chuni Kotal, a Lodha

girl who chose to commit suicide after being abused continuously by the upper-caste faculty of a state university.²⁶ And finally, one can remember the LF government's political position vis-à-vis the question of implementing the recommendations of the Mandal Commission when the chief minister remarked that in West Bengal, "there were only two castes – the rich and the poor."²⁷ The LF during that time formed a one-man committee under Binay Chaudhuri who submitted a report within a month which concluded that Other Backward Classes do not exist in West Bengal.²⁸ However, quite interestingly, as sociologist Anjan Ghosh noted, that in spite of persistent caste inequalities and violence on Dalits, the caste question was virtually absent at the level of formal-institutionalized-public domain of politics of West Bengal. When the Left Front ensured a continuous sixth term electoral victory, Ghosh thus concluded "Cast(e) out in West Bengal."²⁹

The question therefore is: how did the LF then manage to get the support of the Dalits and other minorities during its longest career as ruling coalition in the state? In Bengal, the communist party from the very beginning controlled by middle-class *bhadralok* and, as Marcus Franda remarked, it was "the most elitist movement, at least in terms of its leadership."³⁰ However, the association of communists with the lower-castes dates back to the days of the Tebhaga movement when the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha mobilized the Dalit peasantry.³¹ This was also the time of absolute political turmoil since the transfer of power was going to be accompanied by the partition of the province. The two communist leaders in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Jyoti Basu and Ratanlal Brahman voted against the Partition resolution which, as Sekhar Bandyopadhyay noted, didn't matter much.³² In a more recent work, Partha Chatterjee presents a contradictory argument that "the entire spectrum of Hindu political opinion in Bengal from the Hindu Mahasabha on the right to all factions of the Congress to the Communists on the left were unanimous in 1947 on the necessity to partition Bengal" precisely

because the upper-caste Hindu elites were “alarmed by the prospect of Muslim-majority Bengal joining Pakistan.”³³

Partition, however, led to the fragmentation of the erstwhile Dalit movement in undivided Bengal, the leaders of which were now keen to make “strategic alliances, dictated by the shifting paradigms of partition politics.”³⁴ The CPI, during this period of massive population transfers, led the refugee movement in 1950s and 1960s under the banner of the United Central Refugee Committee (UCRC) and demanded the proper resettlement of the refugees, mostly upper-castes, in colonies which were proliferating in and around Calcutta.³⁵ The lower-caste refugees who were resettled in camps fought for decent rehabilitation measures,³⁶ although the bulk of them were deported and rehabilitated outside West Bengal in Dandakaranya, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Orissa and so forth.³⁷ In the 1960s, the communists also successfully mobilized a large section of the Dalits during the militant agrarian movements in the districts of north Bengal, Birbhum, South 24 Parganas, Midnapur.³⁸ These agrarian movements increasingly brought the Dalits close to the politics of the Left who struggled for the abolition of landlordism and introduction of land reforms.

When the Left came to power in the Writers’ Building in 1977, it immediately launched two path-breaking policies – on the economic front, it broke the concentration of land in a few hands through tenurial reforms, imposition of land-ceilings, and redistribution of small plots of land to the rural proletariat; and on the administrative front, it introduced the three-tier decentralized local government institutions consisting of elected representatives at the grass-roots level for the democratic management of rural issues.³⁹ These initial steps taken by the LF indicated that the new government on the one hand wanted to break the erstwhile political authority of the old Congress regime at the rural level that derived its privileged status from landed property or caste loyalties or religious associations; while on the other, it aimed at crafting its own image as a leadership that derived its “authority from their participation in political

movements and by the fact that they represented the 'party'.⁴⁰ Such initial steps taken by the LF produced "a specific form of sociability" which Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya has called "party society" in West Bengal countryside.⁴¹ Bhattacharyya argued that "the older forms of patron-client relationship based on social and economic hierarchies" was replaced by the organizational grid of the political party which emerged as the "chief mediator, the central conduit, in the settling of every village matter: private or public, individual or collective, familial or associational."⁴² The CPI(M), he noted, was the chief beneficiary of the party-society in the initial years of the LF.

How did the party then engage with the everyday politics of caste in the villages? While Bhattacharyya claims that party-society was "a big step in democratising rural politics,"⁴³ Arild Ruud's research in Burdwan district show that the CPI(M) in practice didn't disturb the caste stereotypes and the "dominant ideology of village society was one of inequality, hierarchy and rank, separateness and distinction."⁴⁴ Dayabati Roy, in her work on everyday politics in two villages in Hoogly district, also argued that caste continued to be "a major reason in rural areas by which everyday politics revolves" as she observed that in the economic field, the lower-caste people depended on the upper castes; at the cultural-ideological level, caste hierarchy prevailed both within the party and the village society; whereas in the legal-political field, the upper-caste leadership pretended to safeguard the interests of the lower-castes.⁴⁵ In another study conducted by Rajarshi Dasgupta in two villages in north Bengal, he concluded that the "working of the CPI(M)...can be conceived as the interlocking of a complex and intricate machinery, whose parts have autonomous functions, even contradictory movements on the face of it."⁴⁶ It is therefore not very difficult to understand that the way the mainstream Left actually functioned in praxis and what it intended to be or rather stood for didn't synchronize when it boiled down to the caste question. The fact that the party could evolve and function as the key mediator in the politics of rural West Bengal during the LF regime is not only because it

successfully dismantled the older hierarchies through the economic and administrative reforms, rather the organizational 'machinery' of the party could also champion itself because of its sophisticated treatment of caste at the level quotidian village politics.

Crisis of Party Society and Emerging Politics of Groups

The 'party society' finally met with a crisis. In the wake of the anti-land acquisition movements in Singur, Nandigram and elsewhere since 2006 onwards, the growing gap between ideology and praxis became explicitly visible in the official Left politics. The Left which once raised the slogan 'Land to the tillers' had become "an apologist for corporate capital" and was forcibly grabbing land from the peasants for industrialization.⁴⁷ Bhattacharyya argued that since the party-society couldn't "reproduce its initial conditions of being" and "regain the spirit of the movement as governing the population became its primary objective,"⁴⁸ it entered a state of political instability. It is during this unstable political situation, a strong opposition to the model of party-society came up from different marginal groups which have been mobilizing themselves independently through the local networks of caste, ethnicity, and/or religion.⁴⁹ This new politics of the group, members of which share similar histories of oppression and marginality, common cultural practices, and identical political concerns, revolves around the question of recognition. And the organizations leading these groups tend to replace the erstwhile role of the political party in rural politics since the moment of crisis, and emerge as the new mediator between the group-members and the formal-institutionalized world of politics. The Matuas, mobilized by the MM primarily on the grounds of their caste affinities, constitute one such important group in contemporary West Bengal who have gradually shifted their support from the LF to TMC under the guidance of their frontal organization. Let me narrate three instances from a field-based study on the political life of the Matuas in order to show how and why the Dalits

have increasingly shifted its support from the LF and mobilized themselves independently over the last decade.

A hunger-strike and changing political equations

In 2003, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government passed a new law – the Citizenship Amendment Act (2003) which denied citizenship to the refugees who have crossed the border after 1971 marking them as illegal migrants. The law came as a threat to the bulk of Namasudra refugees who are mostly Matuas and have migrated to India after 1971. In the past, These refugees had been the victims of the discriminatory rehabilitation policies of the government in India and were resettled in camps outside West Bengal.⁵⁰ While the Congress government had incorporated the refugees from Bangladesh, who have arrived after 1971 mostly as ‘unrecognized refugees’ and the BJP insisted on labelling the Muslim migrants as ‘infiltrators’, as Sandip Bandyopadhyay observed; the LF in West Bengal played a ‘queer role’ on this count as they recognized the refugees in a clandestine manner for electoral benefits although their approach towards issue was not to solve.⁵¹ Interestingly, after the new law was passed, the LF government in West Bengal stood by the central government’s decision and the chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya commented: “...on the question of dealing with illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh, our state government is in agreement with the government of India that whenever such infiltration is detected, the foreign nationals should be pushed back forthwith.”⁵² The non-cooperation of the state government on the question of migration seriously angered the Dalit refugees. On December 15, 2004, a hunger strike was called by MM at Thakurbari, the headquarters of the MM in Thakurnagar, a refugee settlement in the district North 24 Parganas about 50 kilometers north of Calcutta.⁵³ They demanded that the 2003 citizenship Act must be immediately repealed and all refugees migrating from Bangladesh must be given unconditional citizenship. Twenty-one Matuas led by Ganapati Biswas, the former general secretary of MM,

and refugee leader Sukriti Ranjan Biswas, sat for the fast unto death programme. Hundreds of devotees visited on a regular basis their revered *Thakurbari* where the heirs of their preceptors – Harichand and Guruchand Thakur –now live. On the 5th day of the strike, the police along with the local Sub-Divisional and Block Development Officer intervened to dismantle the crowd assembled at the venue of protest. The Matuas surged forward in huge numbers, recalled Ganapati Biswas, in order to resist the police which was encroaching into their sacrosanct space – the *Thakurbari* and the temple premises.⁵⁴ The women, Ganapati babu categorically mentioned, played a significant role in guarding the venue. The massive presence of the Matuas finally compelled the police to leave in order to avoid unwanted tussle. The police intervention was strongly condemned by the MM. On day 7, the strike was ultimately called off when Member of Parliament Ramdas Athavale visited Thakurnagar as the prime minister’s representative and assured the protestors to look into their demands. Later in 2005, a team of Matua delegates met prime minister Manmohan Singh to discuss their demands.

The LF had always enjoyed a prominent support base in the area, especially CPI(M) and the Forward Bloc. Although the Left didn’t have any direct engagement with the *Thakurbari*, the gossips which circulated in the area and outside was that the then *Sanghadhipati* (organizational head) of MM Kapil Krishna Thakur and general secretary Ganapati Biswas were politically inclined towards the LF. However, after the movement which was organized independently by the organization, the Left started to gauge its declining influence and growing unpopularity. This was evident in its changed style of campaign among the Matuas in the coming years. The LF leaders like Subhas Chakraborty, Biman Bose, Ashoke Ghosh, Brinda Karat visited *Thakurbari* to meet the religious head of Matuas Baroma Binapani Devi to win her support. MM received huge attention from other opposition political parties. However, it was now more interested in mobilizing the Matuas independently as distinct group in order to negotiate with the different political parties and government in exchange of electoral. This was evident in 2010 when frontline

leaders of all political parties attended the MM convention at Esplanade in the heart of Calcutta to win their support before the 2011 assembly elections.

Demand for a college and contest over its name

One of central concerns of Matua movement since the colonial times has been their struggle for education. There are numerous stories about Guruchand and Thakur which are widely circulated orally as well as in Matua print literature about his contribution in educating the Namasudras. He had established a number of schools for his community and instructed his followers, as is documented in *Guruchand Charit* written by Mahananda Halder, that education alone is the key to political power. However, the contributions of Harichand-Guruchand towards their community have never been adequately acknowledged.

In Bagdah (North 24 Parganas), the Matuas constitute the majority of the population. In the early 2000s, there had been a demand for a government college in their area and the local Matuas wanted it to be named after their preceptors Harichand and Guruchand Thakur. The MM organized meetings among its followers, mobilized support, and entered into a dialogue with the local administration to look into their demand. Finally, a meeting was held with the local people, convened by the headmaster of Helencha High School, Nakul Chandra Hira, and attended by Upendranath Biswas (the then joint CBI Director) and Sattendra Nath Biswas (chief security officer, Indian Museum), where a resolution to establish a college at Helencha was adopted.⁵⁵

It was eventually decided that the Helencha High School would donate 1 acre of land, INR 50000 as load for the college fund, and 9 classrooms for temporarily starting the college till it builds an own building. A committee was formed with Kamalakshmi Biswas as the president, Bimal Krishna Bagchi as the vice-president and Santosh Kumar Biswas as secretary to look into the administrative procedures to set up the degree college. A disagreement broke out

when it came to the question of naming the college. Nakul Chandra Hira proposed that the college should be named after Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, whereas Manindra Bhusan Biswas (exMLA, Bagdah) subscribed to the popular demand and proposed the name 'Sri Sri Harichand Guruchand College' to commemorate the Matua icons. To resolve the contest over name, a three-member committee consisting of Kamalakshmi Biswas, Bimal Krishna Bagchi and Santosh Kumar Biswas was formed which decided to name it after Ambedkar. The college was finally named 'Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Satabarshiki Mahavidyalaya', and was recognized by the Government of West Bengal in 2005.

The local Matuas furiously reacted to the change in name of the college. The decision of dropping the name of Harichand-Guruchand was perceived as an attack on the religious sentiments of the Matuas. And the entire anger was directed towards the LF because the committee which decided upon the final name of the college was led by the then Forward Bloc MLA from Bagdah and was overwhelmingly controlled by the Left. It was clear among the locals that it was the LF which made the cunning move of proposing the name of Ambedkar as an alternative to Harichand Guruchand. A former office bearer of MM, during our interview, called the LF's decision a '*kowshawl*' or trick played for undermining the efforts of the Matuas in setting up the college. He recollected, "I tried to convince them, that Ambedkar is someone from among us. So are Harichand and Guruchand. There are already hundreds of schools, colleges, and so many things in the memory of Ambedkar. But there is not a single in the name of Hari-Guruchand. Let us at least build this college commemorating them... The LF was determined to not name the college after Hari-Guruchand under any circumstances at that point of time. And they didn't. But they only had to pay the price which they realized later."⁵⁶ After this incident, the MM organizationally campaigned against the Left and instructed the local Matua *dals* (groups) to ensure the LF's defeat in Bongaon's by-election in 2007. The Left lost support in many other Matua-populated areas.⁵⁷

It is a story about the politics around a local popular demand among various in rural West Bengal, but more importantly, it tells us about the official Left's treatment of the demand raised by the Dalits. The fashion in which the LF had pitted Ambedkar opposite Harichand-Guruchand raises a lot of questions on the politics of memorialization. Quite deliberately or unfortunately, the Left has failed to perceive Harichand-Guruchand as modern icons of anti-caste movement in Bengal. It was definitely easy for the Left to memorialize Ambedkar, and not Harichand-Guruchand, precisely because the former can conveniently be posited as a 'national' icon, as currently described in the college website, who had "struggled through his life for the emancipation of the downtrodden people of the society". On the other hand, the icons of Harichand-Guruchand immediately invoke in the public memory a different history which the Bengali *bhadralok* has carefully suppressed and forgotten long back.

The Left couldn't sustain its political position for long. Immediately realizing the decline in support, it began to bridge its differences with *Thakurbari*. In 2008, the Forward Bloc leader Haripada Biswas came quite close to the MM leadership and became the president of the All India Matua Mahasangha Advisory Committee. Later he published an interesting booklet titled 'Life History of Hari-Guruchand Thakur, their Philosophy and Activities in brief' with an introduction by Kapil Krishna Thakur. Biswas in his preface to the booklet made an appeal to the readers: "This booklet is the brief history of the vast works and activities of Sri Sri Hari-Guruchand and Pramatha Ranjan Thakur. I hope that the studious and intellectual readers will read this booklet and accept the life-style and trend of thoughts of these three noble souls. I may also hope that they will join their shoulders with those of the downtrodden and the neglected people for leading a simple, happy peaceful life and then the glory victory of the Matua Religion will be ascertained and their lies the success of this effort." – Haripada Biswas (M.L.A), President, *All India Matua Mahasangha* Advisory Committee, Shyamnagar, 15.07.2009

The LF government also instituted an award for Dalit upliftment in 2010 and named it Harichand-Guruchand Memorial Award. The first recipient of the award was Kapil Krishna Thakur, the then

Sanghadhipati of MM. It also sanctioned a research centre at Rajarhat, in the outskirts of Calcutta called Harichand-Guruchand Research Centre. However, all these were done too late.

The death of a Matua and shift in party-politics

The Matua religion, being born out of an anti-caste consciousness, has its own specific religious texts, rituals and practices which are distinct in many ways from Brahminical practices and are widely followed by the followers. The MM since its formal revival in 1988 has been continuously trying to institutionalize their belief and practices as a different religious order of the Dalits, different from Hinduism. A recent demand of MM before the Indian government is to recognize the Matua religion as a distinct non-Hindu minority religion along with Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism.⁵⁸ The organization has also published a wide range of literature on the specific rites and ritual practices regarding birth, marriage, death, and everyday life so forth. Such efforts made it convenient for the devotees to follow these non-Brahminical practices.

Saroj Bepari⁵⁹ is a Matua devotee whose family was rehabilitated in a camp in Chhattisgarh back in the late 1960s. Saroj babu hardly remembers those days as he was only two years old. Later on, he came to Thakurnagar following his relatives who had already settled there. Once a tour-guide in Vellore, then a cycle-vanpuller, and currently a contract labourer; Saroj babu has kept on changing professions. He doesn't possess any land but sometimes cultivates some seasonal crop as a sharecropper. His family includes his wife, two children, mother, and brother. His father was a Matua *gosai* (preacher) who died in 2003. Before his death, Saroj babu's father asked him to perform the last rites following the Matua rituals and without involving any Brahmin. To keep his father's last wish, Saroj babu buried his body in the small courtyard in front of his house and didn't cremate him. He performed all the rituals himself. This act initiated a huge uproar in the neighbourhood. The families in the

village were divided into two factions overnight. One group defended Saroj babu, while the other vehemently opposed him and called him a “Mussalman”. The incident led to some clashes among the two factions. The group which defended Saroj babu, he recalled, went to the local “comrade’s house”. Surprisingly, without even properly listening to them, he asked these people to report it to the local police station. What was the point in supporting the party, Saroj babu continued, whose member didn’t even bother to visit us at the time of need. They expected that local CPI(M) leader would visit to the site, see what happened and then decide if at all Saroj babu had done something wrong. The MM firmly stood by Saroj babu and the local TMC leader extended his support to this faction. Immediately after this incident, 14 families in the village decided to join TMC. Before concluding this story, Saroj babu proudly asserted, “We didn’t change the party for a goat or for Indira Abash Yojna. We changed it for humanity”.

All these three instances explain the Brahminical character of the mainstream Left in West Bengal. In case of the first, the LF’s decision of police intervention to dismantle a hunger-strike movement of the Dalit refugees reflects on its harsh political stance on the question of migration from Bangladesh. Sumanta Banerjee has rightly pointed out that the LF’s position on cross-border migration from Bangladesh under the Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya administration was no different from that of the BJP and other Hindutva forces.⁶⁰ The migration question in fact exposed the Left’s upper-caste Hindu political character. The second case shows us the Left’s incapacity to appreciate and acknowledge the contributions of the local icons of an anti-caste movement in Bengal. And from the last narrative, we can conclude that the party, which was otherwise the sole mediatory institution in village politics during the LF regime, actually failed to settle a local dispute when it boiled down to the question of defending the cultural rights of a Dalit religious group. Finally, all these instances show that the politics of West Bengalis undergoing a change over the last decade which is marked by the crisis of party-society and introduction of a new politics of the group

in rural areas. With regard to the caste question, the politics of the Matuas in contemporary West Bengal as a cohesive group under the leadership of MM over the last decade have undoubtedly played a significant role.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the crisis of party-society was no sudden phenomenon. The anti-land acquisition peasant movements since 2006 onwards in Singur and Nandigram only formally declared the crisis which actually was taking shape in the different corners of the state for some time. Popular demands which were brewing at the village level among various marginal groups, as we discussed above, could not find expression within the model of party-society and required a different model for political representation. The politics of the group organized independently outside the realm of party-society as well as in constant dialogue with it therefore helps us to understand more clearly this changing political landscape of the state. What we see is a constant politics of bargaining done by the respective organizations of the different groups like the Namasudras, Rajbanshis, Gorkhas, Lepchas, Muslims and so forth over the last decade with the all the political parties in order to achieve recognition as well as material benefits. A recent demand of a number of these groups, for example, is that of a separate development council. In West Bengal, the TMC has so far most successfully negotiated with many of these minority groups. In case of the Matuas for instance, we have seen that the members of the Thakur family, Manjul Krishna Thakur and Kapil Krishna Thakur have been given party tickets by TMC in 2011 state assembly elections and 2014 Lok Sabha elections respectively. The religious head of the community Baroma had also campaigned for his sons during these elections. After the untimely death of Kapil Krishna Thakur, his wife Mamata Bala Thakur won the by-election in the Bongaon Lok Sabha constituency in 2015 as a TMC candidate. The Left quite evidently could not catch up with this changing scenario. Apart from the Left and TMC, the other important candidate at the

realm of party-politics currently is the BJP which has received significant percentage of votes in the last couple of elections. The BJP has also managed to get the support of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha in the last decade and has promised them a separate state.

Since the Lok Sabha polls in 2014, the state-election scene in West Bengal is shifting from bipolarity to multipolarity contest. The results of the 2016 state assembly elections show that the TMC, with 44.9% of the vote share, has been the biggest gainer in the process of bargaining with the different marginal groups. The BJP has also managed to get a significant 10.2% of the votes. The LF, which had entered into a disastrous alliance with the Congress this time, saw a steep decline in its vote-share (25.6%) while its partner Congress received 12.3% of votes. This result reconfirmed the paradigm shift from bipolarity to multi-polarity which I argue is a consequence of the crisis of the party-society in the last decade accompanied by the independent politics of the different marginal groups who are at present important actors in the multipolar arrangement. With TMC, essentially a centrist political party, getting an absolute majority with 211 seats in the state assembly, the future of opposition politics in the state however cannot be predicted. Whatever diversion it takes, one cannot deny the emerging trends of group politics and their powerful assertions which have successfully challenged the urban, upper-caste *bhadralok* hegemony in the present politics of West Bengal.

Endnotes

¹Rezzak Mollah is the former CPI(M) leader who is known for his organizational abilities and political influence as a vocal peasant leader. Unlike the white dhuti-kurta-clad urban, upper-caste *bhadralok* leaders of the party, Mollah's public image has developed over the last couple of decades as the quintessential village leader through his political actions, vocabulary and certainly his sense of public dressing, always accompanied by a gamcha (towel) around his neck. While serving as the Land and Land Reforms minister in the last Left Front government under

Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya, he alarmed the party to revise its policies of land acquisition in the wake of peasant movements in Singur and Nandigram. In the aforementioned statement, a part of a telephonic conversation with two social scientists, he justified his criticism of the party using the metaphor of beehive struck by a stone. See Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya and Kumar Rana (2013), "West Bengal Panchayet Elections: What Does it Mean for the Left?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(37), pp. 10-13.

²Bhattacharyya and Rana (2013), "West Bengal Panchayat Elections," p. 13.

³Ibid.

⁴See link: <http://ganashakti.com/english/news/details/46025> *The Hindu*, February 23, 2014, Kolkata.

⁶ In a meeting held at Bharat Sabha Hall in central Calcutta on January 30th, 2016, which I attended during my fieldwork, leaders like Sukriti Ranjan Biswas and Dr. Nazrul Islam, who were part of the Samajik Nyaybichar Mancha, expressed their discomfort with Rezzak Mollah's decision to join the TMC and condemned him for backstabbing the newly formed forum. These organizations are now retrying to initiate some similar umbrella organization in the coming future.

⁷ Saroj Giri (2015), *The Left is Dying, Long Live the Left*, *Outlook*. See link: <http://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/the-left-is-dying-long-live-theleft/294977>

⁸ A Dalit-Muslim political alliance is an interesting chapter in the history of Bengal politics. At the time of Partition of India in 1947, Jogendranath Mandal, the leader of All India Scheduled Caste Federation allied with the Muslim League since he believed that the Dalits and Muslims share similar political interests and concerns, and they must necessarily ally in order to contest the upper-caste dominance in the province. In contemporary West Bengal as well, a section of the Dalit activists and writers like Sukriti Ranjan Biswas and Manoranjan Byapari advocate for rebuilding such an alliance. For a detailed discussion, see Dwaipayan Sen (2016), *An Absent-minded Casteism?* in Uday

Chandra, Kenneth Bo Nielsen, Geir Heierstad eds. *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, New Delhi, Routledge 2016, pp. 103-124.

⁹ For detailed discussion, see: Bidyut Chakraborty (2011), The Left Front's 2009 Lok Sabha Debacle in West Bengal, India, *Asian Survey*, 51(2), pp. 290-310; Jyotiprasad Chatterjee and Suprio Basu (2014), Bipolarity to Multipolarity: Emerging Political Geometry in West Bengal, see link: http://www.lokniti.org/punjab_pdf/West-Bengal.pdf (accessed on June 2, 2016).

¹⁰ The Matuas are the followers of an anti-caste religious movement which was initiated by Harichand Biswas a.k.a Harichand Thakur (as his followers called him) in the late 19th century eastern Bengal and institutionalized by his son Guruchand Thakur. The followers of Harichand-Guruchand are almost exclusively Namasudras and are variously scattered over Bangladesh and India after the Partition of India in 1947. In West Bengal, the Matua movement was revived by Pramatha Ranjan Thakur, the grandson of Guruchand and also a member of the Congress party. The Matuas use the term Dalit, patito, pichiye-pora-manush, sudra-samaj to describe themselves. For detailed discussion on the Matua community, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2011), *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal 1872-1947*, OUP, Praskanva Sinharay (2016), Building up the Harichand-Guruchand Movement: The Politics of Matua Mahasangha, in Uday Chandra, Kenneth Bo Nielsen, Geir Heierstad eds. *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, pp. 147-168.

¹¹ Praskanva Sinharay (2012), A New Politics of Caste, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(34), pp. 26-27.

¹² Partha Chatterjee (1993), *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp. 173-174.

¹³ B.T. Ranadive (1991), *Caste, Class and Property Relation*, National Book Agency, Calcutta.

¹⁴ Cited in Ranadive, 1991, *Caste, Class and Property Relation*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶See http://cpim.org/sites/default/files/documents/2006_feb_Dalit_res.pdf link:
(accessed on June 2, 2016).

¹⁷Since mid-2000, the different Dalit groups have started to mobilize themselves independently in the politics of West Bengal. For instance, the Matuashas successfully mobilized them in the last decade and vociferously asserted their presence in the state politics. In West Bengal today, no political party can ignore the Matua factor while contesting elections, particularly in the districts bordering Bangladesh. In other words, the politics of Matuas have broken the long-drawn silence on the caste question in the state. See Praskanva Sinharay (2012), *A New Politics of Caste*.

¹⁸Partha Chatterjee (1997), *The Present History of West Bengal*, OUP, New Delhi, pp. 69-86; Anjan Ghosh (2001), *Cast(e) out in West Bengal*, *Seminar*, 508.

¹⁹Partha Chatterjee (1997), p. 82.

²⁰Ibid, p. 83.

²¹Prabhat Patnaik (July 16, 2013), *In the Long Run*, *The Telegraph*, Kolkata.

²²Quoted in Christopher Jaffrelot, 2003, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics*, Permanent Black, Delhi, p. 255.

²³Gopal Guru (February 1, 2016), *A Tragic Exit from Social Death*, *Outlook*. See link: <http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/a-tragic-exit-fromsocial-death/296480> (accessed on June 2, 2016).

²⁴Anjan Ghosh (2001), *Cast(e) out in West Bengal*, *Seminar*, 508.

²⁵Ross Mallick (1999), *Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre*, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58(1).

²⁶Manohar Mouli Biswas and Shyamal Kumar Pramanik (2011), Introduction, in Manohar Mouli Biswas and Shyamal Kumar Pramanik (ed.), *Satarshe Bangla Dalit Sahitya*, Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha, Kolkata.

²⁷Anjan Ghosh (2001), *Cast(e) out in West Bengal*.

- ²⁸The irony is that the same LF after its defeat in 2009 Lok Sabha and 2010 civic polls “reckoned Muslims as OBCs and has accordingly announced 10% reservation for them”. Santosh Rana (2010), *The Crisis of Identity*, *Frontier*, 43(12-15), also see Sweta Kushry (1991), Mandal Commission and Left Front in West Bengal, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26(8), pp. 419-420.
- ²⁹Anjan Ghosh (2001), Cast(e) out in West Bengal.
- ³⁰Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2008), The Story of an Aborted Revolution: Communist Insurgency in Post-independence West Bengal, 1948-50, *Journal of South Asian Development*, 3(1), p. 3; also see Marcus Franda (1971), *Radical Politics in West Bengal*, MIT Press, Cambridge and London.
- ³¹Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2011), *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India*, pp. 210-237.
- ³²Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2008), The Story of an Aborted Revolution.
- ³³See Partha Chatterjee (2016), Partition and the Mysterious Disappearance of Caste in Bengal, in Uday Chandra, Kenneth Bo Nielsen, Geir Heierstedts. *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, pp. 91-93.
- ³⁴Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2011), *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India*, pp. 247-248.
- ³⁵For a detailed discussion on UCRC, see Prafulla Charabarti (1990), *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*, Lumiere Books, Calcutta.
- ³⁶Ranabir Samaddar (2013), Whatever has Happened to Caste in West Bengal? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(36), pp. 77-79.
- ³⁷Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2011), *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India*, pp. 249-262.
- ³⁸Ranabir Samaddar (2013), Whatever has Happened to Caste in West Bengal?
- ³⁹Dwaipayan Bhattachatyya (2009), Of Control and Factions: The Changing ‘Party-Society’ in Rural West Bengal, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(9), pp. 59-69.
- (2011), Party Society, its Consolidation and Crisis: Understanding Political Change in Rural West Bengal, in *Theorizing the Present:*

Essays for Party Society, in Anjan Ghosh, Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Janaki Nair (eds.), OUP, New Delhi, pp. 226-250.

⁴⁰Partha Chatterjee (2009), *The Coming Crisis in West Bengal*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(9), p. 42-45.

⁴¹Dwaipayan Bhattachatyya (2011), *Party Society, its Consolidation and Crisis* 42 Dwaipayan Bhattachatyya (2009), *Of Control and Factions*.

⁴³Ibid, p. 69.

⁴⁴Arild Engelsen Ruud (2003), *Poetics of Village Politics: The Making of West Bengal's Rural Communism*, OUP, New Delhi, p. 146.

⁴⁵Dayabati Roy (2012), *Caste and Power: An ethnography in West Bengal, India*, *Modern Asian Studies*, 46(4), p. 973.

⁴⁶Rajarshi Dasgupta (2009), *The CPI(M) 'Machinery' in West Bengal: Two Village Narratives from Kochbihar and Malda*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(9), p. 81.

⁴⁷For a detailed discussion on the crisis of party-society, see Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya (2011), *Party Society, its Consolidation and Crisis*, pp. 238-240.

⁴⁸Ibid, p. 238.

⁴⁹Bhattacharyya too anticipated the coming up of such an opposition, which he termed 'opposition from outside the party society' and gave us the examples of political formations like the Kamptapur People's Party (in case of the Rajbanshis), Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (in case of the Gorkhas), Jamiyat-e-Ulema-e-Hind (of the minority Muslims). However, he uses the term 'identitarian politics' to denote the politics of these communities. See Ibid, p. 245.

⁵⁰For a detailed discussion on the politics of rehabilitation and discriminatory policies vis-à-vis resettlement of lower-caste refugees, see Anasua Basu Raychaudhuri (2010), *Politics of Rehabilitation: Struggle of the LowerCaste Refugees in West Bengal*, *Voice of Dalits*, 3(1); Pradip Bose (2010), *Refugee, Memory, and the State: A Review of Research in Refugee Studies*, *Refugee Watch*, 36.

- ⁵¹ Sandip Bandyopadhyay (2011), Who are the Matuas?, *Frontier*, 43(37).
- ⁵² Cited in Sumanta Banerjee (2003), Bengal Left: From Pink to Saffron? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(9), p. 864.
- ⁵³ For a detailed discussion on the refugee resettlement in and around Thakurnagar, see Ranabir Samaddar (1991), *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp. 96-106.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Ganapati Biswas on November 12, 2014.
- ⁵⁵ One can get a version of events behind how the college was established in 2005 in their current website. See link: <http://drbrasmahavidyalayahelena.in/about> (accessed on June 4, 2016).
- ⁵⁶ Interview with Sunirmal Biswas on November 12, 2014.
- ⁵⁷ Debanjan Das (March 29, 2009), Vote-e Matua Mahasangha Niye Eto Rajnoitik Utsaho Keno?, *Bartaman*, Kolkata.
- ⁵⁸ Praskanva Sinharay (2016), Dalit Question in the Upcoming West Bengal Assembly Elections, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(9), pp. 17-20.
- ⁵⁹ Interview with Saroj Bepari on April 22, 2016.
- ⁶⁰ Sumanta Banerjee (2003), Bengal Left: From Pink to Saffron?

TOWARDS A PROGRAMME FOR ABOLITION OF MATERIAL BASIS OF CASTEIST HIERARCHY

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The Author could not come to present his paper at the Seminar, but it was circulated among the participants with his consent.

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The nature and role of caste relations in India including during the current post-colonial period, is a matter of debate within Left. Traditional Marxists consider caste relations as a part of only the 'superstructure' and in modern India they consider 'caste-hierarchy' to be only a feudal remnant; an instrument of only 'oppression' and not of exploitation of surplus labour. In their view, remnants of feudal relations have continued because according to them, Bourgeois Democratic Revolution has not been completed in India. Hence in this framework of understanding of caste relations, casteist hierarchy would require only Cultural Revolution. Shramik Mukti Dal a Left organization in Maharashtra has been arguing for last many years that this view is flawed; that along with socio-cultural measures, specific economic measures would also be required as a part of the revolutionary programme to abolish the caste system. Let us see how.

Feudal, Brahminical caste system

The production relations in ancient India had its peculiar development spanning many centuries and took many forms in different periods in different areas. We restrict ourselves to the immediate pre-British period in which a peculiar Indian variety of feudalism was prevailing in large parts of Indian subcontinent. To understand production-relations in pre-British feudal India, along with class relations, we need to understand caste-relations also. This is because caste relations were not merely about cultural-social

practices. Caste relations through the casteist division of labour also shaped the relations of toilers with the means of production and with the social process of production. Who would or would not get access to the means of production and which specific means of production can be operated by whom was very much decided by the caste in which people were borne. For example, toilers born in the carpenter caste were compulsorily tied to carpentry all their life. Same was the case with toilers in the barber caste or in the tailor caste and so on. This 'division of labour' was laid down juridically also and in the eyes of the feudal State, it was a crime to break these caste-based rigid boundaries. This division of labour was also division of labourers as Ambedkar put it, and that too a life-long division. This 'by birth permanent division of labour' continued for centuries and led to caste-based cultural-social norms. If we want to fully understand the dialectics of these social norms/practices, class-caste analysis and not class-analysis alone would be needed.

Pre-British India was a caste/class society. Leaving aside various details, variations and at the risk of simplifying the complex, varied reality across India, it can be said that in the immediate pre-British period, in India there were basically four classes, each one of these were made up of a group of castes –

The lowermost class, the 'ati-shudras' was formed by the group of 'untouchable' castes whose surplus labour was pumped off to the ruling class through two routes. Firstly, it went directly to the exploiting class made up of the brahmins and the royalty-castes. The 'untouchables' served the Brahmins and royalty-castes through forced, free/almost free labour on the farms of these ruling castes as well as by rendering them gratis, services of various kinds. Secondly a part of their surplus labour was funneled through the village system in which also they were exploited. One form of this forced, unpaid labour was 'veth-bigaari'. Though there was some hierarchy within 'untouchable castes', they all belonged to a single class of the most exploited and oppressed toilers in India.

The Balutedar-castes i.e, the artisan castes (barbers, carpenters, weavers, masons etc) together constituted the second exploited class of toilers, the balutedars. In social hierarchy it was above the 'untouchables' and rendered various services to the peasants in exchange of whatever part of the produce the peasants would share with them at the end of harvesting. Their social status and standard of living was below that of the peasant class because what they contributed to the peasants and the village system was more than what they received in exchange at the annual distribution of the agricultural produce. They also served the Brahmins and royalty-castes through rendering gratis, the respective services which these castes could provide. Though there was some hierarchy within 'balutedar castes', they all belonged to a single class of 'balutedars', the 'Shudras'.

The peasant castes together constituted the third class. The peasant castes on the one hand 'exploited' the balutedars and the 'untouchables' and functioned as a conduit for transferring surplus from them to brahmins and the royalty-castes, the ruling class. On the other hand they themselves were exploited; they had to pay the king taxes and also had to part with a portion of their produce to the local brahmins and royalty castes or by tilting their farms through various arrangements. The caste-hierarchy thus led to the siphoning of the surplus labour in a step-wise fashion to the ruling class. Though there was some hierarchy within peasant castes and sub-castes, they all belonged to a single class of the 'peasantry'. The toiling peasants were also recognized as 'Shudras.'

The ruling class was composed of the Brahmins and the royalty-castes. The non-brahmin royalty-castes were different in different parts of India and in different periods whereas everywhere the Brahmins were part of the ruling class and in caste-hierarchy they were at the top. These ruling castes were appointed by the king as tax collectors and for this work they were allotted lands or were given a portion of the collected tax. In their own farms (given by the king) they exploited the toilers by extracting from them land-rent and free labour/service.

In the caste hierarchy, the brahmins were at the top and had an overwhelming ideological influence over the rest of the society. In this sense it was brahminical feudalism. But it may also be noted that Marx pointed out that dominance of ideology in feudalism should not distract us from the fact that in feudalism too, economic relations were the determinant factor. In capitalism the economic is both determinant and dominant because in capitalism the toilers have been divested of means of production and hence to survive, they have to necessarily go to the capitalist for wage-work 'voluntarily', without any 'extra-economic' force. In capitalism there is the separation of the economic sphere from the political; there is separation of the civil society from the State. The ideology of political equality and ideology of 'equality in the market' is the accepted ideology. It is commodity fetishism which primarily masks unequal relations and ensures the ideological subjugation of labour to Capital. In contrast, in feudalism the toilers possess means of production (land, artisan-instruments) and hence extra-economic force is needed to ensure that despite this, they serve the rulers. Thus in feudalism the acceptance by toilers of the openly hierarchical ideology and openly hierarchical political structure is necessary for the exploitation to take place. This explains the apparent overwhelming ideological domination of the Pope in Europe and of Brahmins in India, when in fact the ruling class was composed of both brahmins and royalty-castes and when in fact the material reality of production-relations determined the nature of the society.

The beauty and strength of class analysis lies in the fact it explains dialectics of social-cultural practices and guides the movement in this field better than the analysis offered by bourgeois sociology. But in case of India class analysis alone is not sufficient to do so. If we want to understand why in pre-capitalist India, certain group of people within the same class had very different cultural-social practices or mythologies or when we want to understand how surplus was pumped off in a step-ladder fashion from the ati-shudras to the Shudras and then to the royalty-castes and the Brahmins, use

of only 'class-analysis' is not adequate. Similarly, if we want to understand the concrete mechanism of maintaining the hegemony of the rulers in pre-capitalist India, this cannot be done without understanding the inter-relation between the brahmin caste, the royalty and the toiling castes and this complex phenomenon cannot be grasped scientifically, adequately if caste-relations are understood as a mere derivative of class analysis.

Women were the most exploited, oppressed section of the society. Logic of the private property and of patriarchy (not of private property alone!) demands that women are 'loyal' to their husbands to ensure that the father of the child borne to the mother is the husband and of nobody else. (Men were allowed to be 'disloyal' and were allowed to have relations with prostitutes, 'keeps'.) Casteist hierarchy adds additional dimension to it by strictly restricting marriages within castes. Strictly restricting women to marry within the caste was necessary to maintain the 'purity' of the caste. Brahmins and upper castes were obsessed with property and with purity of caste. That is why these sexual taboos were stricter in brahmins and in other upper castes. Secondly upper caste women were hardly involved in any social production; their role was mostly restricted to the reproduction of labour-power. Hence, they were left with no role in this world if the husband dies. That is why Sati-practice was prevalent in some areas among some upper castes. But more often than not widows were allowed to survive in exchange of a lot of domestic labour they must do. In addition, in some areas brahmin widows were shaved and could wear only dark brown plain clothe to make them sexually unattractive; underscoring the value that woman's sexuality is totally tied to her husband. The tradition in certain lower castes of 'devoting' a girl-child to a particular 'deity' meant in practice that (upper caste) men would use her for their sexual gratification. These 'devoted' girls generally came from certain 'untouchable' castes. Pure class analysis cannot explain these peculiar, complex traditions.

Here, one would like to make a broader point about class-relations and **non-class production relations**. It may be pointed out that in fact, in his own formulation about his method of analysis, **Marx in**

his famous 'Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', introduces the concept of social relations of production, but does not even mention the term 'class'! 'Preface' outlines a summary of materialistic, dialectical method of analyzing history and it should be noted that this conceptualization is broader than a framework of exclusive class analysis. Starting with broader basic framework of the dialectics between productive forces and social relation of production and some fundamental theoretical concepts, Marx studied mainly the European history, that too with whatever material available to him, and came to the conclusion that, "All history is history of class struggle". This idiom is not his starting, basic, methodological proposition, but is a derived one.

Empirical evidence and searching arguments put forth by some feminists about patriarchy ("patriarchal relations cannot understood merely as derivative of private property") and in India the issues raised by Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar about caste-relations, have raised a question-mark about this derived idiom by Marx if it is understood as "All history is history of only class struggle".

Bourgeois Caste system

Capitalist development imposed by the colonial rule has broken down the feudal caste system, it's totally rigid, by birth, 'mandatory life long division of labour' that was a hallmark of pre-British India. However instead of withering away of the caste-based hierarchy, during last 150 years, a new caste-based division of labour has come-about. In this new form, toilers borne in Dalit and tribal castes are largely confined to unskilled, hard labour and to dirty jobs. Toilers borne in middle castes are generally confined to blue collar industrial jobs and to non-remunerative, hard farming work in the fields whereas people borne in higher castes have mostly occupied the white collar and managerial jobs. Thanks to spread of education and reservations, an increasing proportion of Dalits are getting employed in white-collar jobs and have also entered elite professions. But only about 10% of Dalits have thus benefited. This broad new division of labour mentioned above is being reproduced and it constitutes the

material basis of the **new, bourgeois caste system in which the place of the individual in the hierarchy within various classes is broadly decided by the caste in which one is born.**

The exploitation of the **Dalit and tribal wage-labourers** is of course in the form of surplus value; but the nature of work they are involved in and the remuneration they get for the work is decided by the new bourgeois caste system also and not only by the dynamics of the class struggle. Wages for unorganized farm and non-farm labour are extremely low partly because these labourers come from Dalit, tribal castes. The caste system thus influences the price of labour power of the lower caste labourers. Even when a middle peasant employs a Dalit/tribal labourer, he extracts some surplus because of the very low wages paid to these wage-workers and caste-hierarchy is partly responsible for these low wages. For example, it is not incidental that wages in the construction industry are so low given the fact most of these workers come from the lower castes and the tribal people. In this bourgeois caste system each individual is not totally tied down to his/her occupation which is given at birth by the caste system. But as mentioned above, members of the caste-groups are largely confined to certain types of occupations and this social division of labour is being reproduced for generations.

Even the **non-wage work/services** carried out by Dalit and tribal caste toilers is lowly paid. Thus when a service of a mason or of a launderer or a sweeper is bought by the capitalist or by an urban middle class person, the service is bought at a very low rate, partly because those who render the service generally hail from lowermost caste/tribal castes. Thus both the capitalists and the middle class derive material benefit from the bourgeois caste system.

Even 150 years after the British introduced modern capitalist development in India and 60 years after Independence, not only that newer generations continue to be subjected to casteist division of labour, marriages continue to be largely intra-caste and housing colonies continue to be largely caste-based even in cities. This is despite the fact that on the one hand, the Bourgeois State's policy

has been to promote inter-caste marriages and inter-caste housing. Caste-based social organizations continue to operate along with class-based social organizations. In politics, caste-based identities have strengthened and strong influence of casteism in elections and other politics is a modern, bourgeois phenomenon; these are instruments to further bourgeois, petty-bourgeois interests also and not only interests of the concerned caste. All these caste-based social relations constitute the modern bourgeois caste system which operates as a sub-system in the overall capitalist social formation. This sub-system reproduces social relations based on the caste in which people are borne. It is dominated by and subservient the class-system.

Traditional Marxists argue that the continued prevalence of casteism is due to incompleteness of the 'bourgeois revolution from above'. They gloss over the fact that pre-modern relations like caste (and gender) have been transformed into their capitalist form and in this new avatar they continue to be reproduced as part of the capitalist social formation. The new casteist division of labour mentioned above has been integrated into capitalist production relations. The new caste system is central and not peripheral part of the bourgeois order.

Towards a programme for abolition of material basis of casteist hierarchy

Whether this sub-system of hierarchy, exploitation would continue or would be progressively undermined by the capitalist mode of production is debatable. Capitalist development promotes bourgeois equality and hence it was expected that with the development of capitalism, caste-hierarchy would wither away. However, despite 150 years of capitalist development, the caste-system has not disappeared; it is being reproduced in a new, bourgeois form. To overcome this caste-based hierarchy, along with social, cultural, political measures specific economic measures are also needed which would progressively eliminate the current caste-based division of labour and also the current caste-based marriage system. Unless

the material roots of the casteist hierarchy are eliminated, this casteist hierarchy in all walks of life will not be eliminated. The measures outlined below are not exhaustive but should give an idea about what kind of **economic measures would be required to abolish the material basis of the caste system.**

1) **Inclusion of the landless labourers in redistribution of land and water in the agrarian revolution.** Majority of the landless labourers come from Dalit castes. Their conscious inclusion (as well as those of deserted, single women) in the redistribution of ownership/control over productive resources, would empower them and would lay the material foundation for progressive abolition of caste-based hierarchy along with overcoming of class-exploitation. After this redistribution, revolutionary transformation would have to rapidly move towards cooperative socialist agriculture and erstwhile lower-castes would be equal partners in this new venture.

2) Modern technology of **organic farming**, will have to be taught (free or subsidized) to the toilers from the erstwhile downtrodden castes and tribals to enhance and to improve upon their traditional knowledge of agriculture. This is especially needed for the Dalit castes because they have been primarily used merely as labourers and hence their traditional knowledge and skill in agriculture is limited compared to the peasant castes.

3) **Special concession** to toilers from erstwhile lower castes **to access seeds, samplings, farm implements**, etc. required for modern agriculture.

4) Toilers from erstwhile **artisan castes** (including lower caste Muslims) would have to be given training to enhance, their traditional artisan knowledge, skills to move towards modern decentralized socialist agro-industry. This training should not be restricted to their traditional profession and they should be enabled to master any modern technology. This policy would have to be applied also for the **lower caste Muslims** because in feudal India majority of them belonged to Dalit castes and have been part of the artisan community in India.

5) Special **credits, encouragement packages** including subsidized socialized inputs for modern co-operative agro-industrial transformation will have to be designed for these artisans (including Muslim artisans) and implemented.

6) **Reservations policy and special encouragement policy** in education and other spheres will have to be continued. [2]

7) **Inter-caste marriages** will have to be especially encouraged as caste-based marriages and families are a material basis of continued casteism.

8) **Inter-caste housing colonies** will have to be created and caste-based segregation in housing colonies will have to be consciously broken down.

The Indian bourgeois state has been taking up some of the above-mentioned measures to some extent. However, these above policy measures cannot be taken up in the entirety by the bourgeois state. Only a revolutionary Socialist power can do this.

There may be some difference of opinion within the Left about the specific nature of material roots of caste-based hierarchies in India today and the specific remedial measures needed to overcome them. But the fact that caste-based hierarchies are not merely a 'super-structural phenomenon' and that specific economic measures would be required in the post-revolutionary Socialist March to abolish the material roots of casteism needs to be squarely acknowledged.

Caste-based hierarchy will not of course get automatically get abolished with the undermining of its material basis. A cultural-social revolution is also required. But this paper's conclusion is that cultural-social revolution alone would not abolish caste-based hierarchy.

Note

- 1) This is a revised and somewhat expanded version of the note circulated for the 'Samuhik Khoj' meeting in Bhopal in February 2009. The views in this paper are based on the

numerous discussions in Shramik Mukti Dal (Democratic) with which the author is associated.

2)The reservation policy will have to be continued for some time after revolution. In capitalism, there is cut-throat competition for very limited opportunities or to compete in the race of money-making. This will be absent during post-revolutionary Socialist March as there will be no such fierce competition. However, for some period, competition would continue in some form to a certain extent. Hence equal opportunities will have to be created for people coming from deprived sections. The need for such measures would dwindle during forthcoming decades after the revolution in proportion to reduction in the material differences amongst people among erstwhile castes. However, so long as these systemic, social differences exist, the reservation policy and special encouragement measures will have to continue.

DR AMBEDKAR OR DR MARX

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Author is a Professor at Glasgow University, Scotland and the writer of 'Towards a new Socialism'. This essay was circulated as a background note in the seminar and he was scheduled to give a presentation via internet link-up but the presentation could not happen due to technical problems.

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Abstract

(1) How do our ideas on socialism relate to those put forward by Dr Ambedkar.

(2) How do the ideas we put forward regarding democracy relate to issues of minority rights and communalism.

Economic basis of caste - division of labour vs division of labourers

In his lecture on the Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar remarked:

The Caste System is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour; it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers. Ambedkar (1982)

He goes on to point out the peculiar unjustness of such a social system

in the following words:

This division of labour is not spontaneous; it is not based on natural aptitudes. Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career. This principle is violated in the Caste System, in so far as it involves an attempt to appoint tasks to individuals in

advance selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents. Ambedkar (1982)

Reading his lecture today, reading his description of the manifold indignities that heaped upon the Untouchables by the Hindus one thinks how unjust this is. How can anyone tolerate such cruelty and inhumanity?

What kind of civilization did the Hindu's have when they not only reduced tens millions of people to the miserable and humiliated status of untouchability, but also condemned millions of others the abominable status of 'criminal castes'?

These forms of discrimination seem so un-natural, so inhuman that anyone from the rest of the world, on hearing of them will be flabbergasted at their grotesque complexity. Such a response seems sane and natural. But consider. Ambedkar would not have had to make his protest did not Hindu public opinion of his day, and indeed a significant fraction of Hindu public opinion even now, consider caste and untouchability both natural and proper: an essential component of a well-ordered society.

How can such divergent views about what is natural and proper exist. How can what most people today would consider an abomination, appear to millions of others as something laudable?

Ambedkar born as an untouchable, had then rare opportunity of education, travelling indeed, as a student, to the USA. One who had both experienced the woes of the depressed castes, and the libertarian philosophy of America, Ambedkar was placed for an eloquent denunciation of the evils of caste. Stepping from the dungheap to the Ivy League, he could look down on brahmin apologists of caste, mired in centuries old prejudice.

The contrast between Ambedkar and his brahmin political contemporaries was the conflict between social ideals that originated in industrial capitalist society on the one hand, and the ideologies of an agrarian pre-capitalist economy on the other. When Ambedkar says 'Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the

capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career' he is using language that only makes sense in a society in which:

- (1) People have careers
- (2) Efficiency is an issue of concern
- (3) This efficiency demands an ever-changing distribution of people into careers

All of these are traits which come to the fore with capitalism. In traditional agrarian society the opportunity to follow a career in the modern sense was limited or non-existent, nor was efficiency in its modern sense, something that people worried about. True enough, all society has some form of division of labour, even if it is no more developed than a sexual division of labour. All society must distribute its labour time between the various concrete tasks that survival demands, and, if this allocation is grossly disproportionate, if too much time is spent building houses and not enough acquiring food for example, then society would perish. But this need not entail any sophisticated idea of economic efficiency.

Efficiency only starts to be something to worry about once it can be calculated. This calculation was born out of commercial society. Once production's cost is expressed in money and its outcome likewise, then, you can talk about efficiency.

In this book we emphasize the fundamental insight of the philosopher Adam Smith who realized that when one talked about sums of money one was indirectly talking about quantities of labour.

The opening sentence of his *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) announces a perspective in which labour plays a central role:

The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes, and which consist always either in the

immediate produce of that labour, or in what is purchased with that produce from other nations.

He remarked that “The greater part of people ... understand better what is meant by a quantity of a particular commodity than by a quantity of labour. The one is a plain palpable object; the other an abstract notion, which, though it can be made sufficiently intelligible, is not altogether so natural and obvious.”

The “abstract notion” of labour as employed by Smith is not entirely new with him. His friend David Hume had written that “everything in the world is purchased by Labour” in his *Political Discourses* of 1752, and John Locke had hinted at a labour theory of value in the chapter on property in his *Of Civil Government*. But these earlier statements were undeveloped, and it was Smith who brought this insight to the center of an analysis both of society, and of the division of labour in society.

Smith was a historical materialist, tracing the political and ideological character of a society back to the means by which it earned its living. Writing at the very dawn of industrial capitalism, in an already mercantile, but still predominantly agricultural society Smith identified 3 stages of social development in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*:

- (1) Hunting nations.
- (2) Nations of shepherds.
- (3) Nations of farmers.

Although he did not appreciate the way that the industrial revolution, just starting as he wrote, was to usher in a new stage of development, Smith was nonetheless an apostle of capitalistic efficiency, and of the rational division of labour to which he expected it to give rise. Indeed, it was from him that we got the very notion of a division of labour.

Smith denounced as *unproductive* such feudal hangovers as priestcraft, the employment of personal servants and retainers

When Ambedkar castigated brahmin priestcraft, and denounced caste not only because it was cruel but because it interfered with efficiency, because it impeded the division of labour, because it artificially divided the population into hereditary sections, he was first a disciple of the moral philosopher Smith. Buddha came later.

Given that caste, by the standards of capitalist society impedes the division of labour, what explains its existence. Can Marx's views on the division of labour in society help understand this and shed light on what Ambedkar criticizes?

Marx recognized that the allocation of labour between tasks was a necessity for all economic systems, but that the form in which this took place could vary.

Every child knows that any nation that stopped working, not for a year, but let us say, just for a few weeks, would perish. And every child knows, too, that the amounts of products corresponding to the differing amounts of needs demand differing and quantitatively determined amounts of society's aggregate labour. It is self-evident that this necessity of the distribution of social labour in specific proportions is certainly not abolished by the specific form of social production; it can only change its form of manifestation. Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the form in which those laws assert themselves. (Marx Letter To Ludwig Kugelmann, 11 July 1868)

All societies are constrained by the hours in the day and the size of the population. They differ in the means by which human individuals are taken from being undifferentiated infants to being productive agents fulfilling concrete roles. In caste-based societies the abstract potentiality of each individual may not be realized but that abstract potentiality is there. There is no significant genetic difference between an untouchable infant and a brahmin one, but the fixed nature of social customs may make it appear to the actors in such a society that such differences exist. Christianity and Islam could preach human equality but on the abstract level of equality of souls - the religious abstraction of humanity, but in the absence of the

appropriate social conditions it was an equality realized by the soul after death.

Capitalist society, which in principle allows any person to be hired for any job they can be trained to do, brings out the abstract polymorphism of human labour more clearly than previous modes of production. Of course, we know that discrimination on grounds of skin colour, religion or gender exists in such countries, but such discrimination is visible as a contradiction with the underlying principle of labour mobility, and the tendency in capitalist society is towards reducing such discrimination. This abstract fluidity of human labour is further held back in capitalist society by what are lived as caste, race, class divisions which restrict education and training. But it is just these remaining restrictions on abstract labour that socialism will abolish allowing all

children the same choices of occupations. This is an essential feature of socialism: that it transforms the abstraction of human equality into a social reality.

Ambedkar justly complains that the caste system not only impedes the division of labour but that it prevents the re-distribution of labour between different branches of production.

Looked at from another point of view, this stratification of occupations which is the result of the Caste System is positively pernicious. Industry is never static. It undergoes rapid and abrupt changes. With such changes, an individual must be free to change his occupation. Without such freedom to adjust himself to changing circumstances, it would be impossible for him to gain his livelihood. Now the Caste System will not allow Hindus to take to occupations where they are wanted, if they do not belong to them by heredity. If a Hindu is seen to starve rather than take to new occupations not assigned to his Caste, the reason is to be found in the Caste System. By not permitting readjustment of occupations, Caste becomes a direct cause of much of the unemployment we see in the country. (Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste)

Here he is calling our attention to the needs of *industry* for a rapid change in the allocation of labour. But, if we are to believe Marx, the caste system arises from an economic form in which economic change occurred either very slowly or not at all.

However, changing the political aspect of India's past must appear, its social condition has remained unaltered since its remotest antiquity, until the first decennium of the 19th century. The hand-loom and the spinning-wheel, producing their regular myriads of spinners and weavers, were the pivots of the structure of that society.

These small stereotype forms of social organism have been to the greater part dissolved, and are disappearing, not so much through the brutal interference of the British tax-gatherer and the British soldier, as to the working of English steam and English free trade. Those family-communities were based on domestic industry, in that peculiar combination of hand-weaving, hands-spinning and hand-tilling agriculture which gave them self-supporting power.

We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow. Marx (1853))

Marx saw the agricultural communities of India as being characterized by

(1) stagnation of technology

(2) exploitative relations

Castes not only allocated people into hereditary occupations, but also

and most importantly they divided them into exploiting and exploited casts, with the latter providing labour services to the former. The roots of caste oppression thus lay in the combination technical backwardness of production and the slavery or quasi slavery to which the lower castes were subjected.

TABLE 1. Cloth Production in India by Sector(*meters*²)

Year	Mill Production	Decentralized Powerloom Production	Decentralized Handloom Production
1900-3	483	0	793
1936-9	3,630	0	1,420
1980-1	4,533	4,802	3,109
1997-8	1,948	20,951	7,603

Sources:Clark and Wolcott (2003) ,Mazumdar (1984) , pp. 7, 36.

Ambedkar was politically active some 70 years after Marx wrote the articles we cite above. In the interim there had obviously been changes in the Indian economy, but these had not gone nearly as far as might have been expected. The economy was still overwhelmingly dependent upon human and animal power. Mechanization had made little inroads into agriculture, and even in textile production - which is normally the first industry to be automated the transition from manufacturing to machine industry was far from complete (See Table 1.).

By the 1830s in England handloom weaving of cottons was largely superseded by power looms in factories, even though the wages of handloom workers were only about half those of factory workers.¹³ Yet 170 years later the handloom sector in India is still very large, particularly in cottons. Indeed, the output of the handloom sector has grown steadily since 1900 when statistics were first gathered. In 1997, output of woven cloth from handlooms in India was about 10 times as great as in 1900. In 1997-8 25% of cloth production in India was still from handlooms. Clark and Wolcott (2003)

And although slavery had formally been abolished in India in 1843, in practice it continued in Ambedkar's day, and still exists with estimates that there are around 40 million bonded labourers in

modern India Narula (1999). Scheduled castes tribes made up 24% of the Indian population in 1991. But, the Government itself accepts that more than 86% of bonded labourers are from these groups. This occurs despite the prohibition of all forms of forced labour under article 23 of the Constitution and the 1976 Bonded Labour System Abolition Act. Bonded labour by members of the lower castes is rife in agriculture, even in more developed regions like the Punjab Srivastava (2005). In the brick kiln industry, some 3 million workers are employed in conditions amounting to bonded labour. Brick kilns are heavily guarded and severe restrictions placed on workers movement. Workers are typically in debt to their employers and the debt relation persists from season-to-season Gupta (2003).

At a brick kiln in Gautam Budha Nagar in Uttar Pradesh, near Delhi, 180 bonded labourers (53 men, 36 women and 91 children) were rescued in February 2000. The condition of the workers came to light when one of the women workers were raped, and her husband and a child were killed in gunfire by the employer and his henchmen when they resisted. The workers were prevented from leaving through threat and intimidation. The employer retained more than half their wages and gave them only a small sum for subsistence. (Srivastava (2005))

Similar conditions of near slavery exist in other sectors where heavy manual labour is being done quarries, mines, handloom weaving, salt pan work and construction. In Tamil Nadu of 750,000 workers in the quarries 2/3 are bonded labourers, with, in many cases, whole families being enslaved.

When we see the close link that exists between slavery and caste oppression one begins to doubt Ambedkar's claim that caste was an evil unique to India - worse even than slavery. The instances he cites to show the comparative benevolence of slavery come from the ancient world, and anyway pertain only to a small minority of slaves (For a discussion of this see Ranganakyama (2002) chap 7). But consider the USA where Ambedkar went for his higher education. Although the founding documents of the USA proclaim liberty and

the pursuit of happiness, slavery had remained legal in the USA even after it was formally prohibited in India.

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were to be ensured for one sort of people only, they did not apply to negroes or tribal peoples.

Dilip Menon Menon (2006) recounts how already in the 19th century, novelists of the lower castes saw the similarity between their own condition and that of the negro in America. Even after the civil war and Lincoln's abolition of slavery, a social upheaval far greater than anything India went through in its path to independence, the negroes in America remained a caste apart. Deprived of civil rights until the 1960s, segregated from the white population, denied entry into many jobs and professions - prohibited even from fighting for their country.

Ex-slaves or descendants of ex-slaves, they faced many of the same prejudices as untouchable slaves and ex-slaves. What was it but a fear of pollution that which in each case forced them to use separate water supplies - Dalits being prohibited from using the tanks supplying Hindus and negroes having to use separate drinking water fountains?

The whole edifice of segregation was a series of pollution taboos meant to enforce a sub-human status.

One system was called 'caste' and the other 'race', but what is a name?

Both are imaginary justifications for real oppression. Given the fundamental mixing of the human gene pool, and fact that we are all of African descent, race was as much an imaginary social construct as caste. Its functional meaning was the same, to demarcate a servile section of the population. Both categories drew on religion for their support - with negroes being labelled as children of Cain by white Christian sects.

The notion of caste and the notion of race are part of what the philosopher Althusser (1971) termed the ideological state apparatus of an exploitative society. By this he means the set of ideas by which

human agents come to be constituted as 'subjects' and whose function is to ensure the continued reproduction of the existing relations of domination and servitude.

In the context of what we have said about the role of economic backwardness in sustaining caste in India, the economic background to the struggles of the negroes in mid-20th century USA are relevant. There was nearly a century of delay between the abolition of slavery and the winning of civil rights by the negroes in the 1960s. Why did it happen then and not in the 1890s for example?

A theory put forward by Marxists among the black proletariat of the USA, who lived through this change, is that during the 1950s and 60s a crucial economic change had occurred. When the slaves were freed, they had remained a semi-servile class of share-croppers. They continued to carry out the same agricultural labour as before as their erstwhile masters transformed into landlords. The former slave owners continued to profit from the labour of the freed slaves, but now it was done with a semi-feudal relation. The crucial fact was that the mode of material production had not changed. Cotton production still depended on manual labour to tend the elds and harvest the crop. The negroes were formally free, but they were still doing the same sort of physical labour as the slaves had done.

In the 1950s machines were introduced that could harvest cotton, weeding came to be done by spraying chemical weedkillers, and the whole process of agricultural production shifted from manufacture (The word manufacture is derived from the Latin manus for hand, indicating hand production) to machineofacture. The mode of material production became specifically capitalist. Consequent upon a change in the mode of material production, the social relations of production had to change too. The semi-feudal sharecropping system gave way to capital intensive agriculture. The class of sharecroppers was freed from the land to become a proletariat who migrated to the great urban manufacturing centers of the USA. The physical movement away from the rural south, and the social movement from the personal dependence of share-cropping laid the

grounds for a political struggle for equal civil rights. Blacks were now participants in the labour market like any other, working side by side with white workers on the assembly lines of Detroit. Under these circumstances the clash between their caste status and the formal equality of labour pre-supposed by the capitalist market became intolerable. But the process of gaining civil liberty was not automatic. It was only through a prolonged and bitter struggle that legal rights could be enforced. Like any state apparatus the ideological apparatus of race could only be broken by struggle. This struggle in the USA is clearly not complete:

- blacks are disproportionately found in the less skilled and worse paid sections of the proletariat;
- and as proletarians they are still very much exploited, now by capitalists, where previous generations were exploited by landowners and slaveholders

but their struggle has progressed further than that against untouchability in India.

In this process there have been feedbacks between social relations and technology. The class of white farmers and landowners introduced machinery to their farms in the mid-20th century, not with the view to its social effects, but in order to make more profit. The social consequences that followed, the black struggle for equal political rights were unforeseen. Social relations favoured a particular form of technology, this in turn brought political conflict which changed society. But one should not assume from this that technological change must come first. If slavery had persisted in the Southern states, had, for example, the Confederates won the civil war, it is doubtful that there would have been the motive to mechanize.

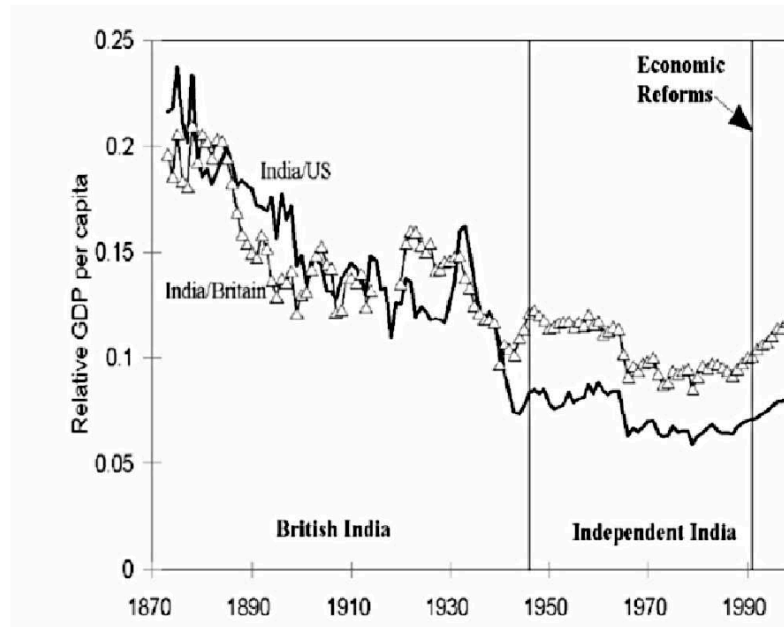


Figure 1.1. Indian GDP per Capita relative to the USA, 1873 to 1998 (Clark 2003).

What implication does the US experience have?

The points of similarity are:

- (1) the existence of a depressed caste subjected to at first openly servile and later semi-servile relations;
- (2) the predominance of manual labour in the semi-servile sector;
- (3) the use of violence and terror to maintain the depressed caste in its place;
- (4) severe social segregation.

The significant differences are:

- (1) the somewhat more advanced level of capitalist industrialization in the USA during the 1960s relative to India now (see Fig 1.1);
- (2) the fact that historically the USA suffered from chronic shortages of labour relative to capital;
- (3) religious support for discrimination was somewhat less entrenched in the USA.

We know, from the general laws of capitalist development that the peasant class of India, like the earlier peasant classes of Europe and America, are, to use an US phrase 'dead men walking'. As classes they are on death row. Their social execution is fore-ordained, it may be postponed for a period, but it will come. Eventually, Indian agriculture, will mechanize, and the peasantry be dispersed. The mines, quarries, brickworks etc within which Dalits are enslaved will use Leibherr's and Komatsu mass excavators rather than human labour.

This is what one can expect from capitalism, but how long will it take?

One of the basic points we make in our book is that the rate of technological advance in a society tends to be inversely proportional to the rate of exploitation. Where labour is cheap, it will be wasted. Marx and Cairnes and Smith (2003) made this point with respect to slavery, that it was inimicable to technical progress. Marx emphasizes that under capitalism, where wages are low, the most backward techniques of production will be used. From this standpoint, the very intensive exploitation of Dalit labour must itself be a major cause of technical backwardness in the Indian rural economy. Why else should the full mechanization of some industries have been so long delayed?

Until labour becomes expensive there is little incentive to replace it with machinery. This is a crucial difference between India and the USA. The USA, from its founding, had a relative shortage of labour, both compared to available agricultural land and later, compared to capital stocks. The shortage of labour had both been the drive behind the initial capture and transportation of slaves from Africa, and later, in the mid-20th century, allowed the rapid absorption of former sharecroppers into the industrial working class.

The first phases of capitalist development are characterised, except in colonies like the USA or Australia, by an abundance of labour relative to capital. If the capitalist system is to fully take hold, in the form of machine industry, the growth of capital stock must outrun the

growth of the labour supply. It was for this reason that Adam Smith was so keen to emphasize the distinction between productive and unproductive labour. If a man employed a multitude of menial servants, Smith said, he dissipated his capital. If on the other hand he employed workers in manufacture, his capital returned with a profit. Smith emphasized the importance of accumulating and not wasting what Marx would later call surplus value. Smith's polemic was directed at waste occasioned by an idle and profligate aristocracy. Whilst society was, by modern standards, poor, with relatively primitive technology, and a more limited social surplus, productive accumulation and thrift were essential.

This too, emphasizes the importance of thoroughgoing agrarian revolutions of the French, Russian or Chinese types. The forcible suppression of unproductive classes of landowners and priests freed resources for industrialization. China in 2006 was reinvesting 50% of its total national product in new capital goods. It could never have reached this level of accumulation was it not for an agrarian revolution in the 1940s which stopped the landlords from unproductively consuming the peasants' surplus.

Ambedkar's actual economic program

As this revolution was taking place in China, Ambedkar clearly recognized the need for a radical change in production relations in India. At this time he was working on the committee drafting the Indian constitution, and proposals relating to this document are presented in his publication *States and Minorities* Ambedkar (1948). The publication, relating as it does to a constitution is comprehensive in scope, and legal in form, but from the standpoint of modernizing social relations, deeply contradictory.

It contains clauses (Article II clause 2(i)) which enshrine the rights to hold and inherit property:

It shall not be competent for any Legislature or Executive in India to pass a law or issue an order, rule or regulation so as to violate the following rights of the subjects of the State:

(1) to make and enforce contracts, to sue, be parties, and give evidence, to inherit, purchase, lease, sell, hold and convey real and personal property.

But it also contains (Article II clause 4):

The United States of India shall declare as a part of the law of its constitution:

(1) That industries which are key industries or which may be declared to be key industries shall be owned and run by the State;

(2) 'That industries which are not key industries but which are basic industries shall be owned by the State and shall be run by the State or by Corporations established by the State;

(3) That Insurance shall be a monopoly of the State and that the State shall compel every adult citizen to take out a life insurance policy commensurate with his wages as may be prescribed by the Legislature;

(4) That agriculture shall be State Industry; Ambedkar (1948)

In advocating these provisions Ambedkar seems to have been responding to the spirit of the time. The agrarian revolution was underway in China. In Britain the Atlee government which was granting Indian independence, had also, since 1945 been bringing key industries into state ownership and setting up state owned corporations to run them. The Benes coalition government in Czechoslovakia had, again starting 1945, been bringing both key industries and the largest landed estates into state ownership. In 1947 the Gottwald government there was to accelerate this process, bringing in all land and industry into public ownership.

Ambedkar seems to been proposing a transformation of agriculture in India that mirrored Gottwald's proposals for Czechoslovakia:

(9) Agricultural industry shall be organized on the following basis:

(1) The State shall divide the land acquired into farms of standard Size and let out the farms for cultivation to residents of the village as

tenants (made up of group of families) to cultivate on the following conditions:

(a) The farm shall be cultivated as a collective farm ;

(i) The farm shall be cultivated in accordance with rules and directions issued by Government;

(ii) The tenants shall share among themselves in the manner prescribed the produce of the farm left after the payment of charges properly leviable on the farm;

(b) The land shall be let out to villagers without distinction of caste or creed and in such manner that there will be no landlord, no tenant and no landless labourer ;

(c) It shall be the obligation of the State to nance the cultivation of the collective farms by the supply of water, draft animals, implements, manure, seeds, etc.;

Ambedkar (1948)

Like the Gottwald programme, these ideas were obviously influenced by what had been done in Russia in, the previous decade (the proposal to have collective farms). Were such ideas, the commonsense socialism of 1947, proposed today they would doubtless be denounced as a throwback to 'stalinism'. Had they been put into practice they would have amounted to a veritable agrarian revolution.

The explicit aim of these measures was to address economic exploitation and they would indeed have eliminated direct exploitation of peasants and landless labourers. But as Ranganakyama (2002) argues, the devil here is in the detail, or in the debentures. The conflict between the protection of private property in clause 2 and socialism in clause 4 was supposed to be resolved by the issue of government bonds to former landowners and owners of factories. Ranganakayama validly points out that this would not have abolished exploitation, since the peasants would have to pay rents to the state who, in turn, would pay the rent on to

the former landlords as interest on the bonds. The landlord class would have been able to continue to live a life of idleness, a drain on the nation's resources.

On the other hand, the idea of compensating former owners was not unusual for socialist governments in the 40s. Atlee was doing it in Britain, and at least in the first stages of the transition to socialism in Czechoslovakia the same thing happened. In China too, former factory owners were often compensated when their factories were taken over by the state. In this sense, Ambedkar's proposals were not so different from what other socialists of the time were doing.

If the payment of such compensation is seen as a merely short-term measure, later to be rescinded, it may not be of long-term harm from a socialist standpoint. For instance, one could envisage a situation in which bonds were issued to former owners, and then the socialist government followed a deliberate policy of inflating the currency in order to devalue the bonds. Alternatively, there might be a popular vote held on the annulment of debt which would, as a side effect, cancel all bonds. But in the absence of such measures, the continued existence of a class of state rentiers could be dangerous.

- They would have constituted a drain on resources. National income that could have been directed at modernizing the economy would have to be paid out in interest to the rentiers. This would have slowed down the rate of economic growth and industrialization.
- The former landlord class, being in receipt of regular interest payments, would have been in a position to continue moneylending activities and thus engage in further exploitation.
- Because they would continue to be much richer than the peasants and labourers, they would be able to buy influence over local officials, and thus profit from their political influence. Chinese experience shows how a compensated class of capitalists can, over several decades, regain their old wealth and influence.

It is not clear from the context whether Ambedkar saw the payment of interest to former property owners as something permanent or

something temporary, so let us charitably assume that he saw it as something temporary, a concession made necessary by the fact that many of his fellows on the committee working on the constitution hailed from a landlord background: a concession due to an unfavorable balance of forces. It was one thing for Gottwald, backed by workers militias to propose nationalization of Czech industry, or Mao, at the head of the PLA to propose the expropriation of China's landlords. It was quite another for Ambedkar, placed on a constitutional committee by grace of long-term Congress rivals, to make such proposals. He could propose, but who was to enforce?

At the very moment that he was making his proposals fierce agrarian struggles were taking place in the Indian countryside, led by communists, to forcibly seize land from the landowners. The Indian army put down these attempts to redistribute property with great ferocity. Ambedkar's constitutional declarations that land was public property were, when push came to shove, a dead letter.

Of other socialists Ambedkar said:

The Socialists of India, following their fellows in Europe, are seeking to apply the economic interpretation of history to the facts of India. They propound that man is an economic creature, that his activities and aspirations are bound by economic facts, that property is the only source of power. They therefore preach that political and social reforms are but gigantic illusions, and that economic reform by equalization of property must have precedence over every other kind of reform. One may take issue with every one of these premises - on which rests the Socialists' case for economic reform as having priority over every other kind of reform. Ambedkar (1982)

We do not know who Ambedkar is referring to here, or whether in making these criticisms he was portraying these other socialists' views accurately. There may well have been opponents with views similar to those that he criticizes. Whether justified or not, Ambedkar's criticism of these unnamed socialists has an unexpected resonance with criticisms made by a prominent Russian socialist Lenin (1964) of opponents in the socialist movement there. At the

start of the 20th century, he accused Lomonsonov and Martynov of being economists.

He did not mean thereby that they were scholars of economics, but that they gave undue pre-eminence to campaigns relating purely to the immediate economic conditions of the workers of Russia, and underplayed the need for a political struggle for freedom against the oppression of the Czar.

How do our own proposals for socialism differ from those of Ambedkar?

Leaving aside the issue of compensating former owners, the paradox is that Ambedkar's socialism showed the same focus on property relations that he had once criticized in others. He did of course give great emphasis to political rights, but when it comes to eliminating exploitation, he shared with other socialists of the 1940s a great emphasis on ownership and the importance of state ownership.

We too, are in favour of public ownership of industry, but the history of socialism since the 1940s has taught that by itself this was not enough. We believe that mid-20th century socialists had forgotten something that had been well understood by 19th century socialists like Owen, Gray and Marx: that exploitation has its roots not just in private property but in *the wages system*. What distinguishes our, and several other 21st century socialist proposals Peters (2000); Dieterich and Dussel (2000); Dieterich (2002), is their emphasis on the need for:

(1) A replacement of money by a system of payment in labour tokens, what Peters (1996) called an equivalence economy.

(2) A recognition that, except for those unfit to work, labour is the only legitimate source of income in a socialist society.

(3) A system of participative democracy to control planning of the economy and bring the disposition of the surplus product under the direction of those whose work produced it.

These ideas, explained at length in this book, constitute the essential break between the new socialism and the old 20th century socialism.

Religious reform and Buddhism

Ambedkar apparently developed an interest in Buddhism as an alternative religion to Hinduism for the Dalits after contacts with an Italian Buddhist monk in 1936 Bellwinkel-Schempp (n.d.). The appeal of alternative to religions, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, to those specifically oppressed in the name of Hinduism needs no explanation. And if one still had, in the 20th century, to choose a religion, Buddhism was perhaps the one least inimicable to scientific rationalism. It is arguably a more benevolent doctrine than Hinduism, and being a universalist religion like Islam or Christianity can be interpreted as being hostile to the caste system.

From a materialist standpoint, Buddhism might be preferred as containing relatively less theistic superstition or appeal to the supernatural than its rivals. The teaching that the self or personal subject is ultimately an illusion is something that modern materialists, including Marxists, would agree with. The Soviet legal philosopher Pashukanis (1989) argued that the subject as currently understood was an effect of commodity producing society rather than something fundamental to humanity. The French Marxist philosopher Althusser (1971) argued that the subject was ultimately an illusion 'interpellated' by juridical and moral ideologies. Current materialist philosophy of mind Selfridge (1958); Dennet (1991); Norretranders (1998); Churchland (1988, 1995) also argues against the existence of unitary subject. This is in striking contrast to almost the whole of bourgeois economics which is based on the subject as an axiom. Thus philosophically, Buddhist doctrines of mind are not antagonistic to Marxism.

But one should be aware of the difference between presentations of Buddhism, which like all religions and philosophies becomes adapted to different times and different class interests. Consider for example the question of rebirth. Ambedkar (1997) (book 4 part 2.) presents this in very materialist terms - that on death the energy and

elements that make up the body are dispersed but that subsequently born bodies will contain matter that had once been in other people. This is valid enough, Avogadro's constant (It specifies the number of molecules in a gram mole of matter, so that 18 cc of water, one gram mole of water, will contain about 6×10^{23} molecules) is so high, that it ensures for instance, that whenever we drink a cup of tea we consume water molecules that the Buddha passed as urine.

But it is evident that Ambedkar's interpretation of rebirth, while perhaps part of the esoteric doctrines of Buddhism, conflicts with exoteric portrayal of reincarnation in Buddhist practice as an actual transmigration of souls from body to body. Once a religion advocates that people must act against their own interests, then it must offer some imagined incentive for this moral behavior. Christianity and Islam offer the prospect of paradise or hell as incentives. Exoteric Buddhism offers amelioration or punishment after rebirth.

In a class society, some of the moral precepts of religion, such as not stealing have quite different import according to who are. If you are a rich factory owner, with many employees, the profit you make from their labour will not be seen as stealing. But if a seamstress in a factory takes home one of the shirts she has made, that would be seen as stealing. In general, we can say that old religious and philosophical doctrines of morality, interpret their moral precepts in a way that favours the rich versus the poor, Buddhism included.

“Though it could well be argued that the Buddha made life in the world more worth living, that surely was an unintended consequence of his teaching. To present him as a sort of socialist is a serious anachronism.

He never preached against social inequality, only declared its irrelevance to salvation. He neither tried to abolish the caste system nor to do away with slavery.

While a famous sermon, the Samanna-phala Sutta, stresses the practical benefits for a slave in leaving his servitude and joining the Order, in fact runaway slaves were not allowed to join the Order.

Moreover, though in ancient India there was no caste or other form of social ranking within the Order itself, the Order soon came to own (lay) slaves.”

Gombrich (1988)

Indeed, the very existence of communities of monks engaged only in contemplative religious duties, presupposed the existence of an exploited class who would provide them with sustenance.

We are thus unconvinced by Ambedkar's general claims about a socially progressive character of Buddhism. But since religions are a form within which different social content and different class interests are expressed, this is not to deny that there can be socially progressive strands within Buddhism.

Constitutional issues and special representation for minorities

One of the major questions that Ambedkar was concerned with was how to gain adequate democratic representation for minorities, especially the depressed castes.

It is easy to see that in a standard parliamentary electoral system the depressed castes would fare badly. Electoral systems always tend to favour candidates from the higher social groups in society. It would thus be expected that members of the depressed castes would end up being systematically underrepresented in the parliament.

The solution adopted under Ambedkar's influence, the reservation system, addresses the problem but only partially. Consider who ends up representing the depressed castes under this system. It makes little difference whether there is a separate electorate as Ambedkar intended, or a shared one. In either case we would find that the representatives of the depressed castes are themselves unrepresentative of their own communities. Are 50% of Dalit MPs women?

Are the majority of them uneducated?

Are the Dalit MP's themselves poor people?

An electoral system is so biased towards the upper ranks in society that caste reservations can only have minor influence on the overall composition of the parliament. Ambedkar was concerned about reservations as a protection for oppressed minorities, but why is there no system of reservation for oppressed majorities?

Women make up about half of the population (Actually 46.6%), but make up less than 10% of Lok Sabha. The 1996 Women's Reservation Bill would have made some difference here, even if it reserved only 33% of seats for women (as if there were 2 men to every woman in India).

Suppose that a women's reservation bill reserving half the seats to women were passed. What then about the poor, they make up the majority of the population, but the Lok Sabha is dominated by the elite. Should you then have a system of reservation for the poor, should they be entitled to 70% of the seats?

If you once concede the principle of reservation, it is clear that they should.

You then have 70% of seats reserved for the poor, 50% for women, 15% for scheduled castes 8% for scheduled tribes etc. The reservation soon adds up to more than 100%. You would then have to say that these categories would have to intersect. Of the 50% women's seats, 35% would have to go to poor women, 7.5% to Dalit women, 5.4% of these would have to be poor Dalit women etc.

The system would become very difficult to manage and increasingly incompatible with the territorial electoral principle.

It is because of the complexities associated with any attempt to make an electoral mechanism genuinely representative of the population, that we reject it in favour of the ancient principle of selection by lot. If 543 people were chosen at random from the electoral register across India to fill the Lok Sabha, then its composition would, with slight random variations, be very close to

that of the electorate on all issues. The gender mix would be right, the balance of young and old would be right, the balance of rich and poor would be right, the caste and religious composition would be right.

Only by such a mechanism can you ensure a system that is fairly representative on all counts. We also believe, that such a system, which gives to those currently without power, real access to political power, would be the most favourable environment for the propagation of socialism and the achievement of real social justice.

It would immediately remove the underpinning of support from political parties who whip up inter-communal strife, for behind such anti-social behaviour there often lies sordid electoral calculation. Political parties, in the parliamentary sense of organizations existing to support groups of politicians, would become obsolete. Extra parliamentary parties, those that exist as social movements to mobilize the people themselves against injustice, would still exist. But their political influence would be exerted only indirectly through their mass membership, since it would only be mass membership that would offer a route to getting into parliament.

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