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**Contextualising Dalit Movement
In
South India**
Selfhood, Culture and Economy

Editorial:

Contextualising Dalit Movement in South India: Selfhood, Culture and Economy

The Dalit movement in South India charted a distinctive course highlighting the Dalit question but at the same time making it integral to the larger question of emancipation and enablement. But it is at cross-roads today and the larger issues of emancipation and Dalit oppression as integral to it seems to have been sidelined. The internal conflicts and fragmentation within the Dalit movement and its inability to set the course of public life are amply in evidence everywhere.

In this context it is not merely necessary to recall the contribution of Dalit movement in South India to the larger project of Dalit emancipation in the country as a whole but also to reflect on the central questions before the Dalit movement in South India. Given the distinct trajectory of Dalit movement in different regions of South India, it may be worthwhile to focus on Tamil Nadu, keeping this perspective in view.

Three distinct concerns of Dalit movement in South India may be highlighted in this context. It recognised that the denial of selfhood to Dalits in the prevailing social relations that are embedded in both the public and social institutions from early on manifests in such deprivation as self respect, human dignity and rights. It joined hands with concerns of other similarly oppressed groups in struggling for those sources, which would facilitate the development of a confident self. It can be said that even today this remains one of the primary drives of the dalit movement holding out the possibility of bringing Dalits and the allied groups on a common platform.

The issue of dignity and self hood are centrally related to the question of culture. Dalits laid claim to such resources as language, religion, symbols and traditions and on their basis attempted to carve out a distinctive cultural autonomy for their future. This legacy which it shared to a great extent with the self-respect movement remains in tatters today as a succession of ruling regimes have attempted to own up these resources and tried to use them and reproduce their dominance over Dalits. Besides, Dalits through their movement have generated their own cultural resources. But a fragmented Dalit movement has not been able to effectively make use of these resources. A number of concerns that the social movement of dalit have raised closely reflect on their search for a self, which can elicit its due recognition and anchored in an egalitarian community.

Concerns of selfhood and culture are related to the issue of economy through innumerable ties. Among other things, land has been a central concern of the Dalits in South India and many movements that they have launched revolve on this issue. There are other issues closely bound up with land and livelihood,

which have been effectively employed over time to reinforce the degradation of Dalits. But there are other concerns which exacerbate the marginalisation of dalit in terms of land question. A political economy of untouchability is till widely prevalent in South India and particularly in Tamil Nadu. Besides, the recent changes in the economy in the wake of globalisation, affect the condition of Dalits, to say the least, deleteriously.

The meeting of the **Dalit Intellectuals Collective (DIC)** was held in Chennai from the 25th to 27th of February 2005 at the University of Madras. It was jointly organised by the Dr. Ambedkar Centre for Economic Studies and Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai. The three day meeting was inaugurated by the Vice Chancellor of the Madras University, Dr. S. P. Thyagarajan attended by dalit intellectuals, representatives from the NGOs, and students.

The DIC is essentially a dialogue and solidarity forum whose objective is to challenge prevailing hegemonic discourse and to evolve shared understanding of the dalit universe. This activity, we believe, has emancipatory potentialities for society since it exposes the shadows in the hegemonic discourse and in doing so suggests different possibilities. DIC is seen as an enabling forum for younger dalit scholars to present their work and reflection.

As a forum DIC has acquired a national character drawing on intellectuals and activists from all over the country and has become a focal point and space to interrogate dalit theory and practice and formulate a framework of Dalit theory and modes of dalit engagement.

The said Consultation of DIC, 6th in the series, was on the theme “**Contextualizing Dalit Movement in South India: Selfhood, Culture and Economy**”. The Consultation dwelled on the following sub themes: Major Phases of Dalit Movement in South India; Self-respect and dignity as central concerns of Dalit movement; Dalit movement and the issue of rights; Dalits and gender concerns; Non-brahmin and self-respect movement and dalit movement; Dalits and the quest for religious identity; Dalits and the Land question; Political Economy of Untouchability; Dalits Search for Community; and Dalit-livelihood in the context of globalization. We have compiled some of the papers that were presented at this consultation for our current issue of e-Vikalp.

The first article in the issue is titled ***Contemporary Dalit Movements in Tamil Nadu- Since 1990: A Perspective from Below*** and is written by *Anbuselvam*. In his paper Anbuselvan has narrated the history of the dalit struggle beginning with Bodhi Riots of 1889 led by Schedule Caste Liberation Movement to the present Dalit Panthers Party. He has stated in the paper that these movements have failed to resist the atrocities as they were fragmented among themselves on the lines of sub-caste and political ideologies. As a result the Dalit unity encompassing the whole of Tamil Nadu is still a distinct possibility. Also, the dalit movement is yet to establish relationship with the Marxist, Periarist, adivasi and

revolutionary movements as well as with the agricultural labourers, construction workers and other people's movements.

The second article is titled ***Dalit Movement in North Arcot District*** and has been written by *Dr. A. Krishna Moorthy*. In the article he has discussed the resistance movements in North Arcot and Vellore districts of Tamil Nadu, which had C. Ayothidos Pandithar's Buddhist movement as a source of asserting dalit selfhood. The issue of dignity and self-hood are centrally related to the question of culture. Dalit intellectuals claim to resources such as language, religion, symbols and traditions that are asserted through culture.

The third article is written by *Dr. Ajay Gudavarthy* and is titled ***Dalit and Naxalite Movements in Andhra Pradesh: Solidarity or Hegemony?*** In this article Dr Ajay Gudavarthy has argued that sense can be made of the contours and changes in the dalit movement by the impact created by three major massacres of dalits, in Karamchedu in 1985, Chundur in 1991 and Vempentta in 1998. Around these gruesome events, the dalit movement shaped and re-shaped its agenda, political discourse and strategy of information. In course of its struggles against caste atrocities, it perceived the naxalite movement as both an ally and at times representative of the same caste hierarchy that society at large replicated. The issue of solidarity between these movements therefore becomes extremely crucial not only in shaping these movements but also in determining the nature of social transformation in times to come. The PWG not only organised separate anti-caste mass organisation but also fought for legal and socio-economic benefits such as implementing reservations in the private sector, yet carried ideological propaganda against privatisation itself.

Next we have an article by *Dr. Anand Teltumbde* called ***Suicidal Divergence of the Left and Dalit Movements: Cause and Remedy***. In this article he has emphasised that it is imperative for both the left and the Dalit movement to converge for the purpose of working out a radical agenda for both. Because the communist movement in corollary takes a long term view of the solution whereas the dalit movement is anxious to find immediate relief for dalits from caste oppression. Tracing the history of both movements he pointed out that they diverged from one another on account of their limited understanding of the Indian reality. Dr. Teltumbde has concluded with the statement that until dalits come on a revolutionary path, the communist project will remain a distinct dream.

The next article is written by *Dr. J. Somashekar* and is called ***Dalit Movement in Karnataka: A Historical Perspective***. Dr. Somashekar has analysed that the Dalit Movement in Karnataka created a new spirit in the minds of the exploited people. It broadened its base by supporting the Backward Classes and Minorities in their cause for justice. The Dalit Movement always upheld the dignity of women in a patriarchal society and served as a weapon of social change by vigorously addressing, indignities and atrocities heaped on Dalits. By supporting different political parties the movement got divided. However majority pulse is in favour of capturing political power.

Dr. P. Kesava Kumar has written the next article and it is called **Performance of Social Memory....In Search of Dalit Culture**. He has asserted that culture as a lived social experience can be a useful tool in understanding society. The 'culture' in India got its feudal character as every 'cultural' form was decided by feudal lords and pundits who denied space for the culture of the lower castes. The dalit movements are rediscovering Dalit art and culture. The dalit literature came with specific purpose of liberating dalits from exploitation. He has contextualised dalit culture by analysing a number of Telugu dalit literary works particularly Antarani Vasantham (untouchable spring) and the performances of Gadar-the revolutionary singer who sustained the movement by reducing the gap between two parallel cultural traditions-oral and written.

The seventh article is written by J. Mohan and is titled **Dalit Movements In French India- Some Historical Perspectives Of Caste Questions In Pudeucheri (AD 1873 – 2005)**. In this article J. Mohan has evaluated the dalit movement in Pondicherry, where the dalits converted to Christianity to escape caste oppression where as the upper castes did so for economic and political benefits from the French. In the *Renonciation* movement of Ponnuthambi Pillai the dalits renounced caste which liberated them from the personal laws and placed them under the French civil law along with the Europeans. This placed the former dalits above the caste Hindus and Christians but below the Europeans. This was not tolerated by the caste Christians and the Europeans alike. Thus, they joined hands so as to remove the *renoncants'* list and dissolve it.

The eighth article in the journal has been written by J. Prabhash and is called **Social Change and Mobility Through Protest: Dalit Movements in the Erstwhile Princely State of Travancore, Kerala**. In this article Prabhash has talked about the changes brought about the colonial modernity in Kerala which liberated both land and labour from the control of the feudal lords. The Christian missionaries extended the educational facilities which empowered the dalits to a certain extent. The dalit movements like Ayyankali tried to situate the dalit community firmly within the Hinduism and wreck its inhuman core from within and provided an organisational base to the movement. Poikayil Yohannan and Pampady John Joseph flirted with Christianity but rejected it as the caste based discrimination continued hampering the liberation of the dalits.

The next article in the series is written by Manohar Yadav and is called **Dalit Movement: A Critical Analysis of its Current Realities in Karnataka**. Dr. Manohar Yadav explains that the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti posed a serious threat to the hegemonic order in Karnataka. Dalit literature grew as an inherent part of the Dalit movement in Karnataka. In the face of this literary movement's formation the fulcrum around which the entire movement began to emerge that gave birth to many literary figures. The writers had developed rarest style of using a language whose rhetoric effect could successfully break peoples silence and at once instilled in them strength, courage and confidence.

The tenth article in the series is written by *P. Dayanandan* and is called ***The Religious Quest of Dalits of Tamil Country***. In this article Prof. Dayanandan has analysed the persecution faced by the Dalits since the dawn of the history both in Hinduism and Christianity. A large number of dalits opted for Christianity as the Missionaries were the first to give education and health care. It is unreasonable to expect all dalits to give up their spirituality and rituals and a belief in divinity given their long suffering under oppression. This is perhaps one reason why Ambedkar's ideal Buddhism without priests, images worship, rituals and belief in divine spirits has not taken root in Tamil country.

The next article is written by *Prof. K.S. Chalam* and is titled ***Post -Ambedkar Scheduled Castes Agitations In Andhra Pradesh: A Critical Evaluation***. In this article Prof. Chalam has made a critical evaluation of the agitations in Andhra Pradesh and questioned the widely held notions on the question of identity. He refrains from using the term dalit as there is no social cohesion among the 59 identified schedule castes. He also opposes the term social movement for the dalit protest movements as these movements took place only in the southern coastal districts. The social movements of Telangana was absorbed by the left and radical left struggles and in Rayalseema it was dominated by factionalism and the scheduled castes are the active players in this game.

The last article in the series is written by *Prof. G. Nancharajah and E. Krishna Rao* and is called ***Land and Dalit Movement in Andhra Pradesh: A Historical Perspective***. In this article Prof Nanchariah has stated that in rural areas land ownership determines leadership and predominantly under the control of the upper caste in rural areas e.g. Reddies, Kammias and other upper castes control most of the agricultural land. 85% of the dalits on these lands are agricultural labourers. Tracing the history of the dalit struggle for the control of the agricultural land in Andhra Pradesh, he argued that the Adi Andhra movement fought for 'self-respect' and social equality but did not concentrate on agitating for the land control. It was the communist movement which led an anti zamindari struggle and addressed the question of economic equality like minimum wages for the agricultural labourers and labour welfare.

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Contemporary Dalit Movements in Tamil Nadu- Since 1990: A Perspective from Below**

Anbuselvam*

*The sum of self-respect has burnt into flame-
Let it burn up these castes!
Smash, break, destroy
These walls of hatred
Crush to smithereens this eons-old school blindness,
Rise, O people! (Revolutionary song of 1970's)*

In the contemporary climate of economic globalization, military aggressions, new forms of exclusions, the significance of the Dalit movement as a liberalized principle is undeniable. The struggle for the liberation of Dalits has now moved somewhat to the centre stage in contemporary TN politics. Last decade was a decade of new social movements. The new mobilisations by women, Dalits, tribal, unorganised sectors and ethnicity's raised issues and demands that could not be easily understood or dealt with in the theoretical and political paradigm. Hence, to understand this 20th century moves one has to take a position. In the words of Antonio Gramsci's it would mean a different position, a '**war of position**'. It simply means that earlier Dalit history means that they were pushed outside the central arena and excluded from the power game of acquiring offices of governance. If there is a change in the *Sanathana* Hindu society, it is only because of the collective struggles of the oppressed and the suppressed in the caste-ridden Indian society. All these realities were possible because the oppressed united under the banner of revolt irrespective of the losses. If at all the dominant forces and the ruling government are afraid of anything it is nothing but the unity of the Dalits.

There is a theoretical vacuum especially in understanding "**struggle**". Most of the time it is understood as a struggle against "**victim-hood**". But it is a struggle to articulate the collective will of the emerging Dalit conscious in Tamil Nadu. If peace and calm pervade the life of Dalits without a struggle, it only means that either a violent oppression has taken the upper hand or that there liberation is at hand. (It is not real peace; it is nothing but the silence of the socially dying). Today, if Dalits fight breaking all obstacles and barriers, it is only because they have become united and organized. To put it plainly, struggle which was a part of the daily life of the oppressed, became their life itself. Formerly, struggle itself was a tradition in the life of a Dalit. Now it has become their liberative life in totality. It is this movement that has created and necessitated the Dalit movement today.

Locating the Context:

** This paper was presented at the National Seminar on "Dalit Movements in South India" held at *Dr. Ambedkar Centre for Economic Studies* of the Madras University in Chennai, from February 25th to 27th 2005.

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Many have used different criteria to understand and analyze the experience of the struggles in the Dalit movement that came into existence in Tamil Nadu in the past 15 years. The Marxist, Periyarist and Revolutionist interpretations of Dalit movements arise out of such judgements or conceptualizations. Let me share the context from where I try to understand the Dalit movements.

As contemporary Dalit movements were awakening, the “*Dalit Resource Centre*”ⁱ that was established at Madurai, had contributed to these Dalit movements in a significant way. Many Dalit movements have in fact associated themselves with the *Centre*. Since I am also part of this *Centre*, I can’t but take a critical look at the contemporary Dalit movements from the point of view of the role that has been played by the *Dalit Resource Centre*. From this background, the present essay tries to focus on the Dalit movements from 1989 to 2004 with the backdrop of the role, played by *Dalit Resource Centre*, Madurai.

Since this Centre functions in Madurai and has Madurai as its field of action or its pivot, I have taken only the Dalits movements in the southern districts and I am specific to this region only. I accept the fact that this essay does not fully deserve to be called ‘*Contemporary Dalit Movements in Tamil Nadu*’ since it concentrates on the southern districts only.

History of Dalit Struggles from the Perspective of ‘Movement’:

The writings of Dalits cannot be considered as a mere social analysis, or a mere discursive study of social structure. More importantly, there is a compelling necessity to discover and reclaim the hidden and buried history of the Dalits. In this way, I do not take this essay to be a mere analysis but an effort at situating Dalit movements in history.

Buddhism remains the root for the research regarding the history of liberation and cultural identity. Similarly Buddhism is the beginning of the tradition of struggles against the suppression of Dalit movements and for the identity-based politics. The first revolution of the oppressed people against dominance started in *Buddha*. “In the days of the Vedas, Buddha with his followers started a social struggle for the liberation of the oppressed in society. This movement was given the name *Sangam*. This movement was started on a full moon day, in *Vaikasi*, in 589 BC on the banks of the *Ganges* at *Isiyadhanam* in the city of *Kasi*. This was the first movement for the liberation of the oppressed people against the orthodox Brahminic religion that shaped into a dominant institution through its four *Varnas* based on caste injustice. The Buddha was the first to oppose this. The *Sangam* emerged as the opposing force against the Aryan Brahminic principle of born capitalism; and Buddhism emerged as the camp for humanist social liberation.”ⁱⁱⁱ “In the 2400 years, starting from *Kosar* invasion to the British invasion or rule, all the 104 dominant characters who came to power through invasion carried out only the principles of modern Brahmanism.”ⁱⁱⁱ Only from there, the Dalits learnt the lesson and the tradition of struggle to oppose the tradition of dominance. Inspire of this the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *the Law of Manu*, and *the Hindu Varnashrama dharma*, continued, retained and maintained their supremacy even today.

On the contrary, throughout history, only the Dalits in the mould of oppressed Buddhists, *Chakyas* and *Nagas* continue to fight for a humane society. This struggle is personified in Baba Saheb Ambedkar, who said: “For, it is important that everyone who was able to understand the history of India must know that it is nothing but the history of the struggle for supremacy between Brahmanism and Buddhism”.^{iv} The umbilical relationship and the struggling tradition among the Dalit movements were born out of this understanding. The struggles of the Dalit movements should be understood only from this history.

The Contemporary Dalit Movements:

The Dalit movements that took off from Buddha and Ambedkar, took deep roots in the Tamil soil due to the efforts of many leaders like *Pandit Ayodhidasar*, *Rettamalai Srinivasan*, *Thiyagi Emmanuel Sekaran*, *Thekkampatti Balasundararasu*, *N. Sivaraj*, *Aannai Meenambal*, *L.C.Guruswamy* and many others. Towards the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century when the Bhakti movements, Renaissance movements and Congress organizations were propagating aloud their fraudulent social changes, the spirited rise of these leaders completely changed the history of the state.

There are two ways of understanding their struggle. According to M S S Pandian the discourse of caste movements are: 1) the language of the upward mobility of the caste Hindus and 2) the language of the Dalits. For instance M N Srinivas the famous Indian (Sanskrit) / western sociologist says that Gandhi, Tilak, R M N Roy and Ranade are modern India torchbearers. But, he is silent about Ambedkar and Periyar. Therefore, for us the leaders of Dalit movements are the symbols of dignity and struggle for a just space in modernity.

We cannot but acknowledge *Dalit Panther* movement in Maharashtra that greatly awakened the contemporary thundering atmosphere in the Cheries of Tamil Nadu. Thus, the history of the disappointed and duped Dalits who trusted the Congress and Dravidian parties for half a century was sidelined. Particularly, the representative of the Dalits *L.Ilayaperumal* who trusted the Congress had to meet a series of disrespect and were treated like curry leaf. *Vai. Balasundaram* who trusted the Dravidian parties had the same bitter experience.

After emergency period both left their respective parties and realized their own autonomous space in the struggle of Dalit community. Then only they came to be known as contemporary Dalit leaders and had the sense of shame and self-respect. *L. Ilayaperumal* who came out of Congress formed the ‘*All India Human Rights Party*’ and *Vai. Balasundaram* who came out of Dravidian party formed ‘*Ambedkar Maakkal Iyyaakkam*’ in 1977. It was in this atmosphere that *L.Ilayaperuman*, *Saakthidasan (RPI)*, *Puyal Ponnaiah*, *Devakottai Dr. M.Subramaniam*, *Vai. Palanivelu*, *Kodikkal Chellappa* and *Dalit Gnanasekaran* joined together in 1988, and started the *Scheduled Caste Liberation Movement (SCALM)*. In the heat of starting it, they organised a very successful first state conference at Chennai on 21.8.1988. *Bahujan Samaj Party* leader *Kanshi Ram* addressed a rally of more than one lakh Dalits assembled there. “That more than the fact that Dalits of Tamil Nadu have come together under a single banner of

SCALM our true victory lies in the fact that all of them have come out of the dominant political parties that were cheating us all along”.^v After this conference, they were fast moving with the task of strengthening SCALM. The caste riot spearheaded by Vanniyars in the northern districts was the fighting ground for a strong struggle by SCALM. They strengthened SCALM regional wise in the southern districts.

The Impetus of 1989-90:

When we demarcate the history of the Contemporary Dalit movements in south Tamil Nadu, we have to consider it pre 1989 and post 1989. In the same period, the election atmosphere in Tamil Nadu weakened Dalit movements and was responsible for the *Bodi riots*.^{vi} At the same time, it was also the period of the downfall of the top political leaders of the Dalit movements and the beginning of the new era of the rise of younger generation. This period can certainly be called a period that taught some lessons.

In September-October 1989, the caste clashes that took place at Bodinaikanoor, Devaram, Allinagaram, Theni and Usilampatti were converted into *Bodi riots* by the then government. “As it was the constituency of the then opposition leader *Jayalalithaa*, all the attention of the media was turned to her instead of finding solution to the violent oppression of Dalits and Dalit women. Both ‘*Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam*’ (DMK) and ‘*Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam*’ (ADMK) made capital out of these riots for their own political gains”.^{vii} In fact, this riot was an attempt to hide the terrible caste oppression by *Kallars* on *Pallars*. Yet, on behalf of *Devendra Kula Vellalar Sangam*, *John Pandiyan*, *Irumporai Gunasekaran*, and *Vadivel Ramanan* and others place a direct and open challenge to caste Hindus. They drove the consequent losses and went to jail. *Bodi* town reeled under the mammoth public meeting held on 10th September 1989. The rally of *Pallars* rattled others. Only after the loss of many lives and property, the *Kallars* withdrew.

After the murder of *Thiyadi Emmanuel Sekaran* in the Muthukulathur riots in 1957, the courageous and mighty struggle of the *Pallars* followed. After this *Pallars* with landed property was awakened and stood firm. This further gave rise to the awakening of the *Pallars* through out Tamilnadu.

The SCALM was a meeting at *Madurai* on 19.9.1989, condemning the government’s attitude in the handling of *Bodi* riots. “We condemn the partial decision of the government in support of *Kallars*, and the arrested *John Pandiyan* should be released immediately, the army should be brought out for the protection of Dalits...”^{viii} Ten such resolutions were passed in the meeting.

Struggle against the *Vanniyars*, agitation-condemning Villupuram riots, and festival of initiation into Dhamma Dheeksha under the leadership of *Mu. Sundararajan*, the brutal murder of a schoolboy at Kodumbanoor, meeting of all leaders at Palayamkottai, demonstration against non-implementation of the *L. Ilayaperumal Committee Report* and many such struggles were organised by *SCALM*. In this situation, the parliamentary election in 1989 brought a big set back.

Instead of calling it a set back, it should be called a planned demolition of Dalit awakening and rise. Since *SCALM* leaders *L.Ilayaperumal*, *Sakthidasan*, *Vai. Balasundaram* and *S.P.Raj* were also in mainstream politics, many parties approached them easily. These leaders put themselves to shame by supporting these political parties and campaigning for them.

“*DMK* created a compulsion and extended invitation to *SCALM* that it should support and work for *DMK* during the elections.”^{ix} Since *L.Ilayaperumal* was a supporter of Congress; as usual, he supported the congress, which was in alliance with *DMK*. *SCALM* promised to support *DMK*, but *RPI* differed from it and took the stand of secret supporter to *AIADMK*. Because of this friction arose among *SCALM* leaders. *L.Ilayaperumal* wrote a letter condemning *Saktidasan* in his magazine ‘*Jothi*’. *Saktidasan* began to explain his stand with the help of *Mail Munusamy* and *Dinamani*. Problems arose in getting the joint support of *C.Veeramani* of ‘*Tamilnadu Arundhathiyar Sangam*’, *G. Moorthy*, ‘*Bharathiya Kudiyarasu Katchi* and *Mu. Sundararajan* *SCALM* became very weak and had a set back because of such contradictions.

Since quarrels and misunderstandings arose because of the involvement of *SCALM* in elections, the younger leaders were highly dissatisfied. *John Pandiyan* and *Dr. M.Subramaniam* commented, ‘All the Paraiyah leaders of the Northern districts came here and completely confused us. They could have as well castrated us (politically).’

After the elections, although it appeared that *SCALM* was left in the lurch or a desert, here and there a few activities were carried on. A few dissatisfied leaders came out of it. “*Dalit Gnanasekaran*, who was spearheading the struggle against naming the district as *Pasumpon Thevaar Thirumaganar* District, started ‘*Dalit Liberation Movement*’. He consolidated it in 1989. This movement which involved itself in *Allalaperi riots* near *Kariyapatti* in August 1990 expanded its area of action to *Madurai*, *Ramnad*, *Sivagangai*, *Dindiful*, *Karur* and *Salem* districts.”^x

In the same period, a new kind of foggy smoke began to engulf the *cherries* in the southern districts. The Dalit shooting stars, which were looking forward to the centenary of *Baba Saheb Ambedkar*, began to stun and rattle the spacecraft of dominance. At this time, a new era of Dalit youth began to emerge. “In 1983, *Bharatiya Dalit Panthers* started by comrade *Malaichamy*, *Vellore David*, *Avaniyapuram Ingulab* and such under the leadership of *Sabita Ambedkar*, slowly began to be familiarize themselves with the masses. In those days, there was no leader who did not identify himself with *Dalit Panther Movement*. When *Dr. Krishnasamy* was working in the student wing, *S.T.Kalyanasundaram*, *Avaniapuram Ingulab*, *Dr. Dhyanchand Carr*, *Melur Sakthivel* was engaged in various struggles.”^{xi} When comrade *Malaichamy* died in 1989, *Thol. Thirumavalavan* (who was working in the field struggle or propaganda theoretician) accepted the leadership at the condolence meeting for *Malaichamy*.

The Swirling Typhoon that awakened the Cheris:

The streets of *Madurai* were overflowing with crowds of *Dalit Panthers*. The Protest rallies shocked and rattled the police machineries. Small groups of youth rose in revolt in

various areas. *Bharatiya Dalit Panther Movement* became *Dalit Panther (DPI)* movement. With the slogans, “Refuse to be subdued, Break the fencing, Disengage, Hit back” and with war cries, the movement began to enter the nooks and corners of Cheries in Tamil Nadu with majestic and bold strides. The entry of *Thol. Thirumavalavan* created a tense atmosphere and such was the starting step of his entry. “Today posters and signboards in *Cheris* in Tamil Nadu hail and herald the arrival of their *Che Guevara*. *Cheri* youth bravely retaliate, aware of the consequences yet embellished with the courage to face it all. To smash subjugation and oppression, once passive lay people, that is, ordinary people have become *Liberation Panthers, Viduthalai Chiruththaigal*.”^{xii}

Viduthalai Chiruththaigal began with the aim of annihilation of caste, retrieval of Tamil identity, Right to land, retrieval or reclaiming of political rights, boycott of Assembly and Parliamentary politics.

The Awakening of Dalit Movements in the Centenary Celebration of Ambedkar:

In the 1990s, Baba Saheb Ambedkar’s Centenary celebrations created an awakening in the Southern districts. In this atmosphere of upsurge, the groups functioning in regional level carved an autonomous space for themselves. Just like the *Dalit Panther Movements in Maharashtra*, “*Dalit Panther Movements* in Tamil Nadu created a wave of defiance and disobedience. This surging wave shook the very foundations of many social movements, which have already established themselves in the country. It acted in such a way as to give open expression and outlet to the boiling within. They integrated their struggles with the struggles of the oppressed all over the world.”^{xiii}

- ‘*All India Devendra Kula Vellalar Sangam*’ headed by John Pandiyan, strengthened their movement in Tirunelveli, Virudhunagar, Ramnad, Theni and Sivagangai districts. They let the youth to enter the arena in the forefront with the idea of struggle with carrying arms to put it plainly, if *John Pandiyan* were to be invited for a meeting, he will come only if the Dalits of the village clash with caste Hindus. This was the bold and courageous motto of that movement. He used the fighting spirit of the *Pallars* in favour of his movement. This movement after a change of name into ‘*Tamilaga Munnetra Kazhagam*’ joined hands with *PMK* and *ADMK* and entered politics and elections. The leaders of the northern districts like *Poovai Moorthy* wanted to have closer relations with *John Pandiyan*. This movement clashed with *Tirunelveli Maravars* and the police and more than nine murders took place. After experiencing many cases, and going underground and getting prison experiences, this movement fell on evil days and met with a great downfall.
- In 1992, *Saathai Packiyaraj* started *Parayar Peravai* consisting of *Paraiyals* and *Sambavars* after the riots in *Nalumoolaikinaru (Paraman Kurichi)* near Tiruchendur. This movement consolidated its units in Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Virudhunagar districts and in Chennai. Instead of carrying arms, this movement adopted the strategies of making country bombs, petrol bombs, and hand grenades and they entered the field armed with these. After a certain period of loss of life, court cases, police chase... it was converted into a political party called ‘*Makkal Desam*’ and had political alliance with *ADMK*. Dissatisfied and disillusioned with the emergence of border quarrels

arising out of the emergence of area lease among Dalit leaders, joining hands with *Kakkan's* son *Viswanathan*, it merged with '*Ambedkar's Makkal Pasarai*', inaugurated by *Sankarachari*.

- After *Mudhukulathur* riots in 1957, special task force personnel were brought to quell to control the Pallars of Ramnad. They camped at Kamudhi and Mudhukulathur and acted as guardians and protectors of caste Hindus. *Chandrabose* opposed this and acted against this. In 1990, he started *Thiyagi Emmanuel Peravai* in the two districts of Ramnad and Sivagangai. Till this day it is active with the following aims of annihilation of caste, retrieval of Tamil nationalism, opposing violence and atrocity, opposing usury, opposing Assembly and Parliament. In particular it integrates second level movement in regional levels. With great effort, it has not joined hands with *PMK* and other political parties and still functions with leftist outlook.
- *Aranga Gunasekaran* who was active in the *Naxalite* movements left that movement with a lot of comments and observations. He brought to the outside world the truth of the reality in *Marxist Leninist (ML)* movements that when it comes to the question of losses Dalits in those movements are made the scapegoats and the sacrificial lambs and that caste hierarchical structure remains unaltered in *ML* movements too. Till 1990, he was active in the '*Human Rights Party*' of *L.Ilayaperumal*. Coming out of it in 1990, he started '*Tamilaga Manidha Urimai Kazhamgam*'. Agricultural labourers' Sangam, SC-BC integration, Marxist approach, integration with SC/ST Federation are the points with which it functions as its core of activities. It is active particularly in the districts of Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam.
- In the 1990s when Dalit movements were broadly awakened and were becoming well spread, no one felt that there was the need for a separate movement for *Arundhathiyats*. However, we have to accept whole-heartedly that in general Dalit movements did not pay any attention to *Arundhathiyats*. Taking these into consideration comrade *R. Adhiyaman* started '*Tamilnadu all Arundhathiyars Coordination Committee*' in 1991. Since there were difficulties in coordinating this committee, in 1994 he started for the whole lot of Dalits, particularly for the most backward and oppressed among the Dalits, the *Arundhathiyars*, '*Adhi Tamilar Peravai*'. It is functioning in Madurai, Coimbatore, Tirunelveli and Salem districts with all the identities of the camp of *Thanthai Periyar* and *Ambedkar*. Among the sub divisions of Dalits, oppressing the *Pallars* and *Paraiyats* unleashing extreme violence on *Arundhathiyars* are interpreted and commented by it.
- *Dr. Krishnasamy* who was functioning under the identity of '*Devendra Kula Velalar Federation*' placed him-self in the frontal position and acted against the *Kodiyangulam* riots in 1995. In the party elections held after these riots, he started a joint federation called '*Puthiya Tamilagam*' and converting into a political party, participated in the elections. It raised its head in the atmosphere of tamilnadu with such activities as participation in parliamentary politics, snatching political power rightist parties etc. in addition to these; they also fought for the living rights of tea plantation labourers in the Western Mountain ranges. They also coordinate with trade unions and *SC / ST* federations.

- *S.T. Kalyanasundaram* who came out from the *Bharathiya Dalit Panthers* with the aim that Dalit liberation includes the liberation of *Aundhathiyars* started '*Tamilnadu Arundhathiyar Youth Front*'. This front was busily engaged in eradicating the practice of usury among *Arundhathiyats* and scavengers. After 1997 the same front became '*Tamilnadu Arundhathiyar Democratic Front*'. Now they concentrate on participating in election the schedule of *Arundhathiyats*. When *Puthiya Tamilagam* and *Viduthalai Chiruththaigal* fought the elections as '*Makkal Kottani*', this movement took the stand to support them.
- Besides these, after 1999 many new movements came into existence. Some of them are '*Puratchi Vengaigal*' under the leadership of *Guru Vijayan*, '*Devendra Ilaingar Sangam*' headed by *Murugavel Rajan*, *Cheri Puligal*, headed by *Dileepan*, '*Devendra Kula Ilaingar Sangam*' of *Pasupathi Pandiyan*, '*Adhi Tamilar Viduthalai Munnani*' a breakaway movement from '*Adhi Tamilar Peravai*' and headed by *Kovai Ravikumar*, '*Vidudhalai Veerargal*' headed by *Senthamil Selvan*, "*Ambedkar Emmanuel Peravai*" under *Gnana Prabhu*. A few other movements also sprang up under individual leaders. Some of the workers in NGOs recognising themselves as leaders, started a few movements. There were periodical frictions and brushes between these NGO based movements and Dalit movements.
- Although the above movements were functioning in Southern Districts. In the Northern districts '*Adhi Tamilar Viduthalai Iyakkam*' under *Vinoth*, '*Puratchi Bharadham*' headed by *Poovai Moorthy*, '*Dalit Makkal viduthalai Munnani*' under the leadership of *Vani Dasan*, '*Ambedkar Makkal Viduthalai Munnani*' under the leadership of *Paarvendan*, '*Republican Party of India*'. '*All India Manitha Urimai Katchi*', '*Ambedkar-Makkal Iyakkam*' and such other movements were struggling in the caste society.

Violent struggle as the Strength to be Agents of Dalit History:

All the contemporary Dalit movements are marked with riot on extreme atrocity. At the time of serious atrocities, Dalit movements sagaciously took to Dalit human rights perspective and made use of the struggles for the growth of the movements, you can be certain that a Dalit movement comes into existence there. *Kurinjangulam*, *Chidambaram Padmini*, *Andhiyur Vijaya*, *Unjanai*, *Kodiyangulam*, *Vachati*, *Villupuram* and *Cuddalore* and in other places the felling or cutting down of Dalits in hordes and the terrific heat of atrocities increased the war like militancy of Dalit movements. After 1995, when the *New Panchayati Raj Act-1994* came into effect, the number of atrocities increased in many village *panchayats*. In *Melavalavu Panchayat* 7 Dalits were murdered in cold blood. In 1997 when *Veeran Sundaralingam Transport Corporation* started functioning, once again the southern districts became the lands of big riots. Dalits did not get any benefits or justice from the report of *Mohan Committee*, which Enquirer and submitted a report on caste based riots. After that, the long list of atrocities continued at *Gundupatti*, *Tamirabarani*, *Puliyangudi*, *Paramakudi* and *Sankaralingapuram*.

Not only the opposition by the dominant castes and the atrocities perpetrated by the government but also by atrocities and cruelties arising among themselves weakened Dalit movements. The number of atrocities goes on increasing, for example, *Va*, *Pudupatti*,

Devakottai, S.Kavanur, Karadichittoor, etc. Although it is true that only such atrocities strengthened the service, existence and continuous struggle of Dalit movements, the immense losses suffered by Dalits because of these atrocities can never be catalogued or calculated. Perhaps if these atrocities had never taken place, the Dalits may have had some time to think. Dalit movements could have created alternatives in the field of social transformation.

Ideological Strategies before Dalit Movements:

- The criticism is that Dalit movements of Tamil Nadu have identified themselves on caste lines and are proud to exhibit their identity of particular group. But this fragments the collective identity of the Dalit community. Although they have the objectives, while implementing them, many contradictions, and differences arise because of each one's core principles.
- *Viduthalai Chiruthaigal, Thiyagi Emmanuel Peravai, Tamilaga manitha Urimai Kazhagam, Puratchi Vengaigal, Adhi Tamilar Viduthalai Iyakkam* is movement that function and believe in liberation of Tamil nationality. But, contradictions arise on the question of protection of Tamil and giving Tamil names.
- *Dalit Makkal Viduthalai Munnani, Ambedkar Makkal Iyakkam, Puratchi Bharatham, RPI, Manitha Urimaikatchi, Tamilaga Munnetra Kazhagam, Puthiya Tamilagam, TADF and Makkal Desam* believed in the politics of parliamentary elections. After 1999, *Viduthalai Chiruthaigal* entered accepting election politics. *Thol. Thirumavalavan* says, "Our main principle is annihilation of caste and retrieval of Tamil identity. If we want to fulfil it, we have to get political power through elections. This is our practical stand. Beyond this, there is also another reason or compulsion to participate in elections. Anti Dalit forces should not become too powerful in assembly and parliament. Besides, we have to face elections to show that oppressed people are a political force to reckon with."^{xiv}
- '*Thiyagi Emmanuel Peravai*' takes a slightly different stand. "We are totally opposed to parliamentary and assembly politics. However we support *Panchayat* Elections. When we think of annihilation of caste, the caste structure and the land owners who maintain it can be defeated only through the *panchayat* elections."^{xv}
- *Athi Tamilar Peravai, Thiyagi Emmanuel Peravai, Tamilaga Manitha Urimai Kazhagam, Athi Tamilar Viduthalai Iyakkam* and other such movements, which do not accept parliamentary politics, believe in People's democracy and act accordingly. Even in this, movements like '*Athi Tamilar Peravai*' which tow the line of *Arundhathiyar* Movements argue that reservation for *Arundhathiyars* is totally snatched away and neglected. Therefore, at the time of elections, a special stand should be taken on behalf of *Arundhathiyars*.

The need for integration:

When the Dalits take up the issues, there is a need for a common understanding and a perspective. Based on this "in 1994, *Thol. Thirumavalavan, Chandrabose, Athiyamaan*

and 12 leaders including the above, met at *Trichy* and formed '*Tamil Nadu Dalit Viduthalai Munnani*' On the Principle that the oppressed among the oppressed should preside over this, *Athiyamaan*, the leader of *Arundhathiyars* was unanimously elected the president.^{xxvi} For sometime this front discussed common issues and acted on this but at the time of elections, there was a set back. Then, the same coordination appeared as '*Chaadhi Ozhippu Aikkiya Munnani*,' *Chandrabose* is heading this and continues to function. In the same contemporary period the *Federation for Dalit Action for Liberation (FeDAL)* was also active till 2002. The Dalit leaders should at least meet on another on platforms. They should come together on cultural celebrations like Dalit Kalai Vizha, Dalit Kalai Iravu etc. When there is a clash among Dalits, they should come down to the level of the ordinary human person without moving any question of prestige or dignity. These were the expectations of *FeDAL* and they were acting on it.

The problem faced by Dalit Movements:

The problems faced by Dalit Movements are not new. Throughout history, they have been fighting the planned conspiracy of the dominant forces. Here are few to think about:

- The Dalit Movement, which says 'Annihilation of Caste alone is social liberation' but in reality they're own caste identity becomes very important. But, one has to be extremely careful to see the present and the future. At present the need for negotiation is undeniable but a collective future strategy is the need of the hour. "Because of this, no Dalit movement encompassing the whole of Tamil Nadu going beyond caste identity. Although they are majority on population basis, yet geographically being spread over, they are always counted as minority"^{xxvii}
- Since the Dalits are economically backward, they don't have enough funds and infrastructure to build a movement and find it difficult to cope up with funds or like left or people's movement they should pay attention to street collection of funds. In addition to this, "The movement is very much affected by loss of life and property owing to the high handed cruel atrocities of the dominant castes and the police."^{xxviii} Whenever Dalit movements take a definite stand at the time of elections, the government and the dominant caste file false cases on them and unleash violent control over them. Whenever they go against the ruling Government, they are arrested and cases are framed against them. Dr. Krishnasamy 'Manjolai' case and Thol. Thirumavalavan in 'Thittakudi and Chidambaram' election case were directly threatened for this reason. This has been adopted as a technique to destroy a movement.
- In 1990 Dalit Movements took a clear decision. In all Dalit movements, the head should be a Dalit only. Non-Dalits can only support it and cannot take the leadership. Accepting this decision some Non-Dalits are still with Dalit movements and work in the name of Marx and Periyar. Some, who did not get Dalit approval, call themselves Marxists, Periyarists or Revolutionaries and call Dalit leaders to be henchmen, and petty capitalists. They join hands with splinter Dalit movements which act with Brahminic brains and they carry out the lowest task of betraying cheris and thereby do underground work.

Dalit movements should be introspection on themselves:

- Although Dalit movements are agitating for annihilation of caste eradication and for other aims “they have not given their full attention to reclaiming land and other such economic improvement programs which will make the Dalits self sufficient economically. No movement has come forward to fight for reclaiming of the *Panchami lands* at least”^{xxix}
- In many movements the tendency to put forward individual leaders for hero worship rules high. This is a big obstacle for the growth and emergence of the secondary leaders and for putting forward democratic trends. “To put it plainly, assimilate the central flow leadership of *Dravidian parties*”^{xxx} The revolutionary *Baba Saheb Ambedkar* took the oath of ‘Removing totally the hero worship’ and this oath should be faithfully followed by Dalit Movements.
- There is a very negative outlook towards women leadership; women participation and politics of women’s liberation is not focused, “When there is no smooth and close relationship between Dalit Movements and Women’s Movements, how Dalit women’s problem can be taken up without a feminist outlook and without breaking male chauvinism?”^{xxxi} We are bound to answer this question raised by Women Rights Movements. “*Baba Saheb Ambedkar* fought for women rights and he made them participate in his agitation. Many have built a fence around themselves by saying this and also without any progressive principle of equality between males and females.”^{xxxii} Dalit movements should come out by breaking this.
- Instead of the whole movement taking part in election, one front or movements may take part in it. Although *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)* of Sri Lanka is a military movement, but only the *Tamil National Front* participates in the parliamentary elections. Although there are *RSS, VHP* Hindutva groups only *BJP* contests the elections. Although there is *Vanniyar Sangam*, only *Pattali Makkal Katchi* participates in the elections. Thus creation of a subsidiary organisation and cultural movements thereby facing elections become invariable. “When these movements participate in the elections they always follow the rightist strategies, Because of huge crowds, a row of cars in procession pompous appearance, political symbols like bordered dhotis, require huge financial outlay. For the sake of this, we have to compromise dominant forces and we are forced to spend their money.”^{xxxiii} To put it bluntly “We should free ourselves from the craze of money based elections and from the strategies of striking compromise. Instead we should create and begin alternative strategies and alternative politics.”^{xxxiv}
- “A friendly relationship should be established with Marxist, Periyarist, Feminist and revolutionary movement; particularly with the unorganised sector, fisher folk community, agricultural coolie labourers, construction workers, people’s movements and Adivasi Movements ... co-ordinated actions should be strengthened with them. We should take into consideration that on the basis of class classification half of them are Dalits”.^{xxxv} We should win over Dalit movements which function at the regional level.

- In strengthening the movement, there is no clarity in moving the activities of these movements towards the village. When we take up annihilation of caste, we have to take into consideration the inner sub-castes also. Only the leaders of movements have the inner urge for Dalit liberation. Close contact with movements in the neighbouring states and integration with the all India level becomes imperative. “Warm Dalit movements are used as dice coins in introducing Hindutva and communal dominance into the slums and Cheris.”^{xxvi} The religious beliefs of Dalits that are based on local village religious practices have been swallowed by the beliefs of the Brahminic Hindu religion and they have a sway over these villages. In order to stop this, there is the need to create Dalit cultural groups within Dalit movements. At the same time there is the need to create a Cultural Revolution within this caste society.

Conclusion

In the past 15 years, at many platforms of debate and discussion, seminars, symposia, and public platforms the media, the writings and researches have thrown a lot of criticisms and questions at the Dalit movement, and the Dalit leaders. So if none of the dominant castes (whether he places criticism within his own caste or not) has hesitated to extend his long arm of critique towards Dalit movements, it does not mean that Dalit movements should not be criticized. Now the Dalit movements have to nurture the democratic practice of taking in criticisms, and finding a solution to them.

Although, historically, Dalit movements have been fighting for their own liberation on one side, how far they have been helpful or conclusive to social change is the question that leads us to look into the impact of these movements. Before finding a solution to this, I should know where I stand? With whom do I identify myself? What is the action in coordination with Dalit movements? First, I must put these questions to myself and get an answer that will also show the future strategy for the movements.

In conclusion, one can say that among the different Dalit groups there is a need to re-alter their cultural practices to the ideology and the politics of Ambedkar. This alone would break the cultural bondage to the feudal reality of Tamil Nadu. The *Dalit Resource Centre* has visualized this need in a small way. But disciplined research is a must. Most of the time at the grassroots the Dalit masses derive their cultural meanings from the traditional *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana*. But this cultural borrowing is very much resented by the mainstream writers from the Dalit literary establishment. Does this lead to cultural hierarchies with in the Dalit situation? This question needs to be probed further.

Finally, it was clear by 1998 that it is not enough to say ‘we must become a ruling community’, a political movement has to have a broad agenda and a vision of transformation or development; it has to say why it should rule and what it has to offer. Marx had promised Socialism to all. What do the Dalits promise, besides reservations and a claim to equality or a warmed – over version of state socialism? This has to become clear in the post Ambedkar era.

Notes and Reference:

- ⁱ Dalit Resource Centre was established in 1989 as a programme of Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in Madurai. This is doing important active service in this field having the principle aim of annihilation of caste and Dalit integration.
- ⁱⁱ A.P. Vallinayagam, "Buddham Oer Arimugam" (Tamil) Jeevasahapthan Padhippagam, Madurai: May – 2003, pp.1-3.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Guna,, "Mannurimai" Part – 1 (Tamil): Tamilaga Ayyaren Publ, Bangalore, March – 2000, p.153.
- ^{iv} Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, "Writings and Speeches", Vol. 3, p.267.
- ^v The first state conference of SCALM headquarters released on 21.8.1988 and the press release on that day.
- ^{vi} A fact-finding report of Integrated Dalit Liberation Movement (IDLm) and of Dalit Resource Centre. See also a report in EPW: Dec.2.1989, pp.2640-2642.
- ^{vii} Gabriele Dietrich, "A New Thing on Earth" Delhi: ISPCK for TTS Madurai, 2001. p.205.
- ^{viii} A release issued by SCALM leaders at 3 p.m. on 19.9.1989 after a joint meeting at Madurai.
- ^{ix} On 7.11.1989 on behalf of DMK. M.Karunanidhi, election committee secretary S. Kuppusamy, Sadiq Basha, Nanjil Manoharan sent this letter to the leaders of SCALM.
- ^x An interview with Dalit Gnanasekaran, "Thamukku" Newsletter of Dalit Resource Centre, Madurai, Vol.5, No-18, Jan-June 2004.
- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} Thirumaavalavan, "Talisman" (Kolkatta: Samya Publication, Dec, 2003) p.xxv.
- ^{xiii} Dr. Anand Teltumpte, "Dalit Movements after Ambedkar" (Chennai: Alaigal Veliyeettagam, Nov. 1999) p.14.
- ^{xiv} Federation for Dalit Action for Liberation (FeDAL). On behalf of FeDAL a conference was held in Madurai, Tiruparrankundram on 25th and 26th of Nov. 1995. The above is part of a speech by Thol. Thirumavalavan. See also A magazine of Maatram. Jan.2000, p.21.
- ^{xv} An interview with Chandrabose, "Thamukku." Vol. 5, No.16, March-April 2003.
- ^{xvi} An interview with Athiyaman, "Thamukku." Vol. 5, No.15, Jan –Feb 2003.
- ^{xvii} Dr. Mohan Larbeer "Dalit liberation movements and the problems faced by them." TTS integration Seminar paper read on 16.10.2002 in Madurai.
- ^{xviii} Ibid.
- ^{xix} Anbu Selvam, "Kodumai Muriyum" (Tamil) Kalagam Publications, Chennai. Aug 2004, P.156.
- ^{xx} Lata Murugkar "Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra" Popular Pragashan limited, Bombay 1991, P.98
- ^{xxi} Gabriele Dietrich, p-213
- ^{xxii} Dr. Anand Teltumpte, p-31
- ^{xxiii} An interview with Aranga Gunasekaran, "Thamukku" Vol.5, No.17, May-Dec 2003.
- ^{xxiv} Dr. Anand Teltumpte, p-34
- ^{xxv} Anbu Selvam "Kodumai Muriyum" p-84

DALIT MOVEMENT IN NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION:

Today we have much to say about the subaltern studies and the history from below and of people's movement. When there is depression in the bay, storm arises: likewise there is depression in the society reformers and reform movements appear. The Dalits were socially depressed, economically suppressed and politically oppressed in the Indian society from time immemorial. There were hence, movements in India especially in the southern part to place their grievances and to safeguard their civil rights, which were denied to them.^{xxvi}

In many respects the Scheduled Castes (Dalits) were pioneers in forming the movements and establishing the organisations even before the formulation of Indian National Congress to fight for their rights.^{xxvi}

The Dalit movements in Vellore District had a promising beginning in the early 20th century and were beset by factionalism and division that development among its leaders. This research paper draws on an exceptional and event filled record of those times provided by one of the movements protagonists. Buddhist leader, Kaviraja, social worker A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar and others made an attempt to explore the local situation during those decades, the leadership of the time and predicaments they face.

1. PHYSICAL FEATURES OF NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT

Vellore is one of the important towns in the northern Tamil Nadu and it was the capital city of erstwhile North Arcot District. Right from the early times, it played a vital role in the socio-economic and political history of Tamil Nadu in various aspects. North Arcot district was formed in the year 1801 with Chittoor as its Capital. Mr. George Stratton was the first Collector of this District in 1801. In 1911 Vellore become its capital. He made pioneering efforts in the settlement of land revenue and general administration. North Arcot is an area of about 12,166 sq. kms. It is bound on the north by the Andhra Pradesh in the south by the south Arcot district and on the west by the state of Karnataka. Kancheepuram is one of the ancient cities of India, which is on its eastern boundary. Vellore is the head quarters of the district.^{xxvi}

2. AWARENESS MOVEMENT IN NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT

The depressed classes suffered for centuries without education and opportunities for advancement in life and had to remain at the lowest level in the traditional Hindu Society. They were not only prevented from entering the educational institutions to avail opportunities but were also lent to tend the cattle of the caste Hindus under whose exploitation they had to live for ever without thinking of their own improvement^{xxvi}. In view of such stark realities the government decided to improve their condition in order to

absorb them educationally and occupationally in the mainstream society. Missionary societies also contributed towards their educational progress, which in turn determined to a large extent, the social as well as economic status of the person as well. The Christian Missionaries tried to make them conscious of their rights and positions in the society. They took the first effective action for their social upliftment. Hence the credit for initiating the movement, for the advancement of the scheduled castes in the modern times goes to the Christian Missionaries who came to India^{xxvi}. The missionary work began in as early as the 17th century or close to the 18th century and towards the close of the 18th century it had made great progress in South India.

Commenting on the factors that favoured the birth of the Depressed class movements in the second half of the 19th Century, great social activist Vasanth W.Moon reiterates that the growth of the Depressed Class Movement was greatly helped by the influence of the British Officials, the effect of Missionary activities among the local untouchable communities and the growing realisation that education is the key to future political power^{xxvi}. Every movement should have a leader who serves as a source of inspiration, providing a sense of direction and commitment of a common cause. But in the case of the Scheduled Castes awareness movement in North Arcot District, there were many such personalities. Many had worked towards safeguarding the interests of the marginalised group. The main intension was to make their people think of their position and to fight for their Civil Rights which were denied to them and to maintain parity with the Caste Hindus.⁴

3. CONDITION OF ADI-DRAVIDAS IN VELLORE DISTRICT

With the turn of the 20th century, the Dalits constituted more than one-fifth of the total population of Tamil Nadu. Col. H.S.O. Cott stated, “Even the breath of a member of the Dalits was regarded as polluting the people of the higher castes ... permitted as individual of a Dalits to speak to him, the latter required to hold his hand in front of his mouth so as to prevent pollution by his breath. Members of the Dalits did not have access to public wells, tanks, and reads. They denied entry into temples. They could not seek admission to certain schools and colleges run by the assistance of the state. Admission was denied into Government Post Office, Courts and Choultries to these unfortunate people, though such places were meant for the poor and the needy. The place of their residence was called ‘Cere’ or slum. It was located at a considerable distance from the habitations of upper class Hindus. The slums of the Dalits did not have even the basic facilities and civic amenities. Words cannot adequately describe the unhygienic conditions in which they let their life.

Most of the Dalit members were agricultural labourers; some of them were forced to undertake scavenging jobs, hide and skin works, digging the graveyards, carrying the dead bodies etc. They toiled from dawn to sunset during the hot sun in the field of the landlords and filling their galleries. They did not own even their huts and they were built at the corners of the paddy fields of their landlords. Thus, poverty drove them to the extent of pledging themselves to the landlords for sums of rupee between forty-to-fifty

and which was mostly borrowed to meet their funeral expenses of marriages, etc. There was not redemption for them and a life long servitude for a pittance was their lot⁵.

4. PIONEERS OF ELEVATION

A few of the enlightened intellectuals from the depressed class like Kaviraja.C.Ayothidos Pandithar or Madras took up the cause of their own people. He was a great Tamil scholar and edited Oru paise Tamilan (1907). His writings reveal a person well acquainted with Sanskrit, Pali, and English and, of course Tamil. He seems to have been well read in the philosophical thought of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, and Christianity. He founded the Advaitananda Sabha in 1870 in the Nilagris, the Dravida Mahajana Sangam in 1881 and the Chakya Buddhist Sangam in 1898 in Madras. A conference of the Dravide Mahajana Sabha was held on 1st December 1891 at Ooty. Resolutions were passed demanding civil rights, educational concessions, removal of certain objectionable material including Jail Manual and economic advancement on Government services including that of village officers⁶.

In 1892 the depressed class members like P.M. Madurai Pillai (1858-1913), P.Venkatachellam Subramaniam (1859-1936), Rattaimalai R. Srinivasan (1860-1945), R. Veeraiyan s(1882-1938), M.C.Raja (1883-1947), K. Swamy Sagajananda (1891-1959) and .Thanthai Sivaraj (1895-1975) formed another organisation in Madras under the name Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. Both the Dravida Mahajana Sangham and the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha worked together in the matters of common interest of the Depressed Class⁷. The formation of Dalit organisation goes back to the middle of the 19th century even before the foundation of the Indian National Congress.

The work of the Dalit leaders in conjunction with that of the Christian Missionaries bore fruit. The government of Madras accepted the demands of the Dalit leaders and issued favourable orders in the form of G.O. Nos.1010, 1010(A) Revenue dated 30th September 1892. Between 1893 and 1935 forty conferences and public meetings were held in different parts of the Madras Presidency and the various thorny problems of the Dalits were discussed publicly⁸.

The depressed caste leaders in Madras realised the need for launching journals through which they could ventilate their grievance to the Government, formulate favourable public opinion and of course educate their people about their pitiable plights. Between 1896 and 1961 about a dozen magazines were run by the depressed class leaders themselves. Suiyodayam – 1869, Panchama-1871, Dravidar Pandiyan (Later Dravidian) – 1869, Andror Mitran – 1910, Dravida Mirtran – 1885, Makavi Kata Duthan – 1873, Parayan 1893, Illara Ozukkam – 1898, Puloga Vyasam – 1900, Tamilan – 1907, Dravida Kokolam – 1907, Tamil Pen – 1916, Adi-Dravidian – 1919, Dinabandhu – 1924, Adi-Dravida Mitran – 1939 and Jai-beem- (1940). In the columns of these magazines writers like C.Ayodhidas Pandithar, A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar, Pandit Munusamy, Rettaimalai R. Srinivasan, John Rattinam, Muthuveera Pulavar, Thirumathi K.Swappanseswari Ammal and several others vehemently criticised castism, communalism, Brahminism, Manu

Dharma, Kalpasutra and social awareness principles etc. They also took up the cudgels against social evils that were rampant in Hindu society.⁹

5. A. P. PERIYASAMY PULAVAR AND THE DALIT MOVEMENT IN NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT.

A. P. Periyasamy Pulavar born on 12th Feb' 1881 at Thirupattur, North Arcot District and was the son of an agriculture middle class Adi-Dravida Family. He had his early education at Thirupattur and obtained his pulavar in Tamil as a private candidate. His family migrated to the Kolar Gold Fields and was appointed as supervisor there. When he was appointed as a supervisor in the field, he met pandit C.Ayothidas the famous Buddhist Tamil Scholar whose writings reveal a person well acquainted with Sanskrit, Pali and English and he seems to have been well read in the Philosophical thoughts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity too¹⁰.

Pulavar A. P. Periyasamy was elected as Secretary of South Indian Sakiya Buddhist Sangam with the headquarters at Kolar, Karnataka. On 8th February 1925 the District conference of Mahajana Sabha was held at Ambur, which was presided over by R. Veerian. This conference requested the Government in its resolution to appoint honorary Assistant Commissioner of Labour from among the members of the depressed classes and also District Labour Officer preferably from among the member of the depressed classes. Since North Arcot consisted of lot of tannery workers of this community, the conference requested the Government to give proper facilities and awareness of health resort to workers. This conference also demanded the appointment of Honorary Magistrates to the Bench court at Ambur. Another resolution passed by the District Sabha was to remove the toddy shops from the close vicinity of the depressed class people residences¹¹.

In one of the conferences held at Ambur on July 23, 1929 the Sabha passed 18 resolutions demanding the government for various welfare measures to promote the depressed classes. The conference demanded to improve the civic amenities of the depressed class's residences at Ambur and the grant of piece of land for the Muthualamman temple of Adi-Darvida colony at Ambur. The Sabha also requested to reserve two seats in each District Board, Taluka Board and Union Local Board of North Arcot District. The conference passed resolutions to nominate C.Appaduri and C.N. John Sundaram to the Legislative Council and finally the conference thanked the Labour Department, which resumed the welfare measures of the depressed people. Since 1919, various welfare schemes were implemented in the North Arcot District for the benefit of the depressed class people¹².

6. PERIYASAMY PULAVR AND BUDDHIST MOVEMENT

While he was in Kolar, he was attracted towards Buddhism, which was popularised in Kolar by the first Buddhist of Tamil Nadu Kaviraja C. Ayothidas Pandithar. He embraced Buddhism and was elected as general secretary of Sakya Buddha Sangam from 1907 to 1969 and spread Buddhism through out Mysore and North Arcot District. In 1907 Periyasamy Pulavar visited the Buddhist Association at Perambur, Madras and was systematically solemnised by the Buddha Bikku and got Panchaseelam. In 1908 he

strengthened Sakiya Buddha Sangam in which M. Murugesan and N.Gurusamy helped him a lot. Periyamsay started a night school called “Vidhiyavarthini and a library. He regularly organised meetings, seminars and discourses on Buddhism and also threw light on the socio-economic and political awareness to the people on North Arcot¹³.

In 1916, Periyasamy and T.N. Anumand started a branch of Gowthama Buddha Sakiya Sangam at his native place Thirupattur. Further, most of the Adi-Dravida of Thirupattur was converted and Baptised in Buddhism and Thirupattur become a centre of Buddhism. In 1917 Periyamsamy started his branches in its neighbouring villages such as Pallikonda Annaicut, Chakramullar, Vannivedu, Kavanur, Thippasamudaram, Nagavedu, Kilachur, Gudiyatham, Vellore and Walajapet. Kaviraja C.Ayothidas Pandithar’s close relative like M.Y.Murugesan, Guruswamy and M.Ragavan gave valuable advice to Pereiyasamy and run the Gowthama Buddha Sakiya Sangam branches in North Arcot district.

In the year 1915, A. Pattibiraman, son of C. Ayothidas Pandithar and editor of journal “Oru Paise Tamilan” and Thirupathur Municipality Chairman, leading advocate Mittadhar Rao Saheb Ponnu. Krishasamy Pillai (Thirupattur Buddhist cum social worker), Justice party leader G. Samynaidu visited Vellore and other villages. Periyarsamy Pulavar guided their tour and stimulated the teachings of Lord Buddha. They conducted debates, workshops, and seminars in the Adi-Dravidars residences and awakened them in to come up life and joined Buddhism and self-respect.

The noted scholars who served for the development of the Buddhist Sangam were S. G. Appaduraiyar, E. N. Iyakannu Pulavar, M. Masilamani, Madurai Pillai, Bangaru Pavalar, J. J. Dass and Swamy Sagajananda. A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar involved himself in spread of Buddhism and dedicated his life for awakening the Adi-Dravidas of North Arcot district more than 50 years¹⁴. In the year 1952 Periyamsamy organised self-respect and Adi-Dravidar awareness conferences at Vellore. Periyasamy presided over the conference and notable scholars and self-respect Leaders like Kuthusi. S. Gurusamy, Kundhijjaptham Ammal, K.V.Alagiri Samy, Pudhuvai D. Poonamabalnar, Jolarpet V.Parthasarthy, Panithar S.G.Appaduraiyar and Thirupathur Anumandhu delivered the speeches¹⁵.

7. ACTIVITIES OF ADI-DRAVIDA MAHAJANA SABHA IN NORTH ARCOT

At first the leaders of the Adi-Dravida communities ventilated their grievances through the humble petitions but could not achieve the desired result. In 1905 C. Ayothidas’s example was emulated by a host of equally eminent Dalit intellectuals like A.P.Periyasamy Pulavar (1881-1940), G. Appaduraiyar (1866-1966), J.J. Das (1883-1947) were E.N.Iyankkanu Pulavar (18875-1955) and P.Govindaraja Bhagavathar (1883-1947) were formed North Arcot District Branch of Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha at Thirupattur. They worked under the leadership of A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar, untiringly for the uplift of the Dalits and for the promotion of their self-respect and self-consciousness long before self-respectors¹⁶.

A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar was a champion of the cause of the Schedule Caste people and an ardent admirer of Kaviraja C. Ayothidas Pandithar. Even from boyhood his main concern was the upliftment of Adi-Dravidas. He became a life member of Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and gradually occupied a high position as the founder president of North Arcot branch. During his awareness movements he visited every village far and near and met poor Adi-Dravidas and discussed their problems. He realised the fact that the Adi-Dravidas could not come up in life mainly because of their ignorance, illiteracy and superstition. So he decided to work hard for the removal of illiteracy and started Adi-Dravidas Mahajana Sabha night schools at Thirupattur, Vaniyambadi, Gudiyatham and Pasumathur in 1910 onwards¹⁷.

A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar and other leaders of the district branch of Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha conducted awareness public meetings, seminars, workshop, and public debates throughout the district. There were 8 district level conferences organised under auspices of the district branch of Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha at different places in North Arcot district. These places were:

1. Periya Annaicut, which was under the presidency of A.P. Periyasamy. On 8th April 1923, 14 resolutions were passed.
2. At Maricuppam under the presidency of A.P.Periyasamy on 22nd December 1923, where 15 resolutions were passed.
3. At Ambur under the presidency of R. Veeraiyan, M.L.C on 12th February 1925 where 10 resolutions were passed.
4. At Thirupattur under the presidency of R. Veeraiyan, M.L.C on 14th February 1925.
5. At Vaniyambady under the presidency of R. Veeraiyan on 16th April 1925 where approximately 5000 delegates from nearly 200 villages and one hundred caste Hindus and Mohammedans, both officials and non-officials visited this conference pandal hall.
6. At Ambur the conference was held under the presidency of A.P.Periyasamy on 19 March 1926 and 18 resolutions were passed.
7. At Valathur under the presidency of Dharmodhara Bikku on 19th January 1930 where 15 resolutions were passed.
8. At Pasumathur under the presidency of S.G.Pandithamani Appaduraiyar, editor of Tamilan (after the demise of C. Ayothidas Pandithar) on 9th March 1931 where 16 resolutions were passed.¹⁴

Regarding the annual conference, they discussed only two proceedings for Periya Annaicut (1923) and Ambur (1925). In 1923 the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha's annual conference was held at Periya Annaicut. The Adi-Dravida eminent leader A. Periyasamy Pulavar, who was also the President of Sakiya Buddhist Society of Thirupattur, presided over the conference.

The conference passed resolutions and sent it to the Government for free and compulsory elementary education to the Adi-Dravidas and it also requested the Government G.O for getting rid of the caste-ridden teachers from educational institutions. The conference also requested to the Government to form a separate co-operative bank for Adi-Dravidas. The conference passed resolutions demanding from the Government for the nomination of an

Adi-Dravida member on the entire local and Municipal Boards, and Panchayat and Bench Court. It was also requested that the Government appoint at least one person to each of public bodies.¹⁵

On 12th February 1925 the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha of North Arcot's annual conference was held at Ambur and it was presided over by R. Veeraian, M.L.C. This conference requested the Government to appoint an honorary Commissioner of labour from among the members of the Adi-Dravidas. Since North Arcot consists of lot of tannery workers of the Adi-Dravidas, the conference requested the Government to give proper facilities and awareness about health hazards. This conference requested the government to nominate an adequate number of Adi-Dravidas members both on the District Board and Taluka Boards of the North Arcot. The conference requested the District Magistrate of North Arcot to nominate Adi-Dravida as an Honorary Magistrate to the Bench Court at Ambur. The conference also requested to the Collector of North Arcot to remove¹⁶ toddy shops from the vicinity of the residence of the Adi-Dravidas.

A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar was a forerunner among the leaders those worked for the upliftment of the Dalits socially and economically and educationally. He was responsible for the social awareness that prevailed among the Dalits. His works may be divided into two:

1. Service through Buddhist religious awakening,
2. Service through the political organisation called Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha is also notable.

8. J.J. DASS (1886-1963)

J. J. Dass was born on 2nd February 1886 at Melalam Vadakkuppattarai Village in Gudiyatham Taluk, Vellore District. He had himself experienced the cruelty of untouchability and made up his mind to dedicate his life for the sake of the downtrodden brethren, who suffered at the handle of caste Hindu people. J.J. Dass became a prominent leader of the untouchable community in North Arcot, the majority of whom were tannery workers. The Tannery Workers Welfare Association selected him and the government nominated him as a member of the Labour Welfare Committee and solemnly followed his suggestions and advice. He wanted his community to be respected by others and thereby to achieve their self-respect. He took tireless tours throughout the district and visited every village and met his fellowmen and made them think of their self-respect. J.J. Dass injected self-respect in the veins of his people and also to not to serve as menials to the caste Hindus who in turn exploit them in many ways. Thus, J.J. Dass started the social revolution at the grassroots level in the North Arcot District¹⁷. The depressed people did not only support his movement but the social reformers of caste Hindus supported it too¹⁸.

Though J.J. Dass was educated up to standard 8 only he became an elementary school teacher thereafter. His inborn leadership qualities lead him to the highest place in the society. He wanted to spread his self-respect message to reach at the heart of every fellowmen. In 1941 he started the weekly journal called "Udhaya Suryan" ("Rising

Sun”). This journal became the beacon to the Adi-Dravida Community and also the Record Book of the atrocities on the depressed classes. The record shows that even a single day was not passed in Tamil Nadu without some atrocities being committed on the Adi-Dravidas.

Dass also authored many dramas one such drama called “Sooryavathani” was appreciated by C N. Annadurai who presided over the enactment of the drama at Vellore in 1940¹⁹. Moreover Dass was a life member of the District Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. He took active part in its district conferences held at Ambur, Vellore, Tirupattur, Vaniyambadi, Valathur, Melpatty, Pasumathur, Pallikonda, Gudiyatham and other places under the dynamic leadership of A.P. Periyasamy Pulavar¹⁹. The journal became a popular magazine among the public. The emblem of was also fixed as the symbol at the centre of the Scheduled Castes Federation flag, which shows that the “Rising Sun” which was originally a symbol of the depressed classes. Following this Rettamalai Srinivasan, the famous Adi-Dravida leader who represented the Round Table Conference in 1930 with Dr. B.R.Ambedkar started his provincial Scheduled Castes’ Federation in 1939 and the flag of the Federation was designed with the Rising Sun at the centre. In 1942 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar started his noted organisation Scheduled Castes Federation in Maharashtra. Following this, J. J.Doss started the Scheduled Castes Federation movement in North Arcot District. So North Arcot District is the pioneering place where the voice of the downtrodden was endorsed against the suppression and it was nothing but the voice of J.J.Doss²⁰.

9. NORTH ARCOT BRANCH OF THE INDIA SCHEDULED CASTES FEDERATION AND ITS ACTIVITIES

The North Arcot Branch Of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation was started on September 10, 1942 under the leadership of J. J. Dass. The inaugural function of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation’s North Arcot branch was presided over by N. Shivaraj, the All India leader at Ambur. A. Adimoolam, Pallikonda M. Krishnasamy, Bangaru Pavalar, R.T.S. Moorthy and A. Jeyaraman were some of the leading figures those who took active part in the activities of the Federation in North Arcot.²¹

The first local annual conference of the Federation was held at Bagayam, Vellore on January 10, 1944 and N. Shivaraj, presided over the conference. His wife Meenambal Shivaraj and J. J. Dass were also present in the conference in which several resolutions were passed in order to uplift the depressed classes.²² One year before the annual conference the local unit of the Federation took steps to meet the people in various places in the North Arcot District. Mrs. Meenambal Sivaraj belongs to the North Arcot District. She was with the Women’s wing as a Secretary of the unit federation and was able to tour all over the District.²³ Pallikonda M. Krishnasamy (1916-1970) as a staunch follower of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar became the familiar member of the AISF. He visited many villages and made his people aware about their age-old ignorance and preached the ideology of Ambedkar. One of the brave activities of Krishnasamy was opening of the Ranganatha Sawamy Temple at Pallikonda to his people. When (1929) Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu, he wanted to worship Lord Ranganatha Swamy of Polikonda. Krishnasamy met Gandhi

and brought to his notice that the depressed people were not permitted inside the temple. Gandhi got dejected over this and refused to go inside the temple until it was opened to the Adi-Dravidars. Finally the temple authorities opened it to the depressed people, which provoked the caste Hindus against Krishnasamy²⁴. The main intension of the Federation was to create awareness among the depressed classes. N.Sivaraj, the national leader met Krishnasamy and explained the message of the AISF. Gudiyatham M. Dhanapal, at Vellore, K.M.Samy at Ambur and M. Adhimoolam, C. Appadorai at Ranipet, and A. Jeyaraman, R T S Moorthy and Santhampakkam Bangaru Palvar joined hands together with Krishnasamy to fight for the rights of the downtrodden community. Many times Krishnasamy arranged the banquets in many Adi-Dravida settlements and explained the importance AISF that was fighting against the monopoly of power in the feudal hierarely²⁵. Krishnasamy also ran a daily ***** ***** called which became organ of the depressed classes of North Arcot District²⁶.

10. ACTIVITIES OF NATTANMAIKKARARGAL SANGAM IN NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT – (ELDERS ASSOCIATION):

***** - Elders Association was a native organisation of the North Arcot District depressed classes which was formed on 16th October 1977 and was duly registered on July 2, 1978 under the Registration Act of 1868²⁷. It is an organisation imitating the AISF formed by Ambedkar in the year 1942. Maintaining equality, fraternity and unity among the depressed classes were the aims and objectives of the association²⁸. There are at present 238 ***** in the district to ventilate the grievances of the downtrodden in the association. This organisation was started with good intensions to work as a mouthpiece of the Adi-Dravidas by the leaders like G. Krishnasamy, A. Jeyaraman, S.Perumal, M. Jaganathan and A.M. Varadaraj²⁹.

***** as an association of the elders worked as an organisation between the government and the Adi-Dravidas. They brought to the notice of the people about the welfare schemes and their position in the society. This association conducted free coaching classes for those who were preparing for UPSC examinations from the community and coaching classes for other opportunities. Hence the ***** became an important association to uplift their people educationally which in turn improve their socio-economic status in future.

CONCLUSION:

Every action will have its own impact on the society or the life of any individual. The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, the All India Scheduled Castes Federation and the North Arcot Elders Association were founded to get the people out of the clutches of age-old poverty and ignorance. The educated intellectuals and leaders from this community worked a lot to make the people of the depressed, oppressed and the suppressed to realise their pathetic condition. In the year 1937 the social activists formed the North Arcot District Adi-Dravida Educational Association as an impact of the work done by the district branch of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. This association founded a hostel

called ***** (R.H) at Vellore in order to provide accommodation to 75 school going girls and boys. This hostel is under the District Adi-Dravida Welfare Departments' Control at present.

Similarly as a result of this hostel's formation philanthropists from this caste like A. Jeyaraman the former member of Parliament, A. Sundaram, V. L. Mohaganam, G. Jeganathan, J. V. Ragavan, Gangadaran, R. T. S. Moorthy and K. P. Arumugam established a hostel at Ranipet called Rettamalai Srinivasan hostel which accommodated 50 school going girl children. It is still functioning with a subsidy from the government. The likeminded personalities in the district from ***** conduct social, educational and cultural programmes in order to inculcate in them an awareness. As education is considered as the key to social, economic progress the organisations concentrated on educating them as Dr. Ambedkar, the champion of the Depressed Classes proclaimed in his mission. Except ***** all the organisations, the AISF and Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha faded away due to the demise of the prominent leaders from this community.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

Dalit and Naxalite Movements in Andhra Pradesh: Solidarity or Hegemony?

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This paper is an attempt to construct a narrative of the evolution of the dalit movement through its various phases, and its interaction with the naxalite movement in Andhra Pradesh. It argues that the contours and changes in the dalit movement can be made sense of through the impact created *on the* and *by the* three major massacres against dalits, in Karamchedu in 1985, Chundur in 1991 and Vempentta in 1998. Around these gruesome events, the dalit movement shaped and re-shaped its *agenda*, political *discourse* and *strategy* of transformation. In course of its struggles against caste atrocities, it perceived the naxalite movement as both an ally and at times representative of the same caste hierarchy that society at large replicated. The issue of solidarity between these movements therefore becomes extremely crucial not only in shaping these movements but also in determining the nature of social transformation in times to come. Ironically, in a transitory phase glorifying and eulogising the ‘proliferation’ and ‘fragmentation’ of identities and struggles, there seem to be radically new possibilities to forge solidarity.

Karamchedu: The Independent Dalit Movement

The contemporary independent dalit movement originated with the massacre of dalits in Karamchedu, in coastal Andhra Pradesh, in 1985. The Karamchedu massacre had its roots in the complex economic, political and cultural changes that this village witnessed over the past quarter century. In the 1970’s the Kamma small peasants of Karamchedu, who were well versed with tobacco cultivation, began to migrate to far off districts like Karimnagar and began to cultivate tobacco on larger portions of land. “While the migrant Kamma farmers struck gold in tobacco and cotton on larger portions of land. “While the migrant Kamma farmers struck gold in tobacco and cotton cultivation elsewhere, the others in Karamchedu did experience the spill over effects”.¹ The scheduled castes filled this vacuum and graduated to share cropping and field tenancy. Most scheduled caste (SC) families graduated to become small peasants. Some among the youth also got educated and acquired jobs.

These changes in the economic positions of the SCs were in conflict with their extremely demeaning social position in the village. Practices of untouchability, extreme subordination, sexual exploitation of women and bonded labour, all began to be questioned and experienced in a changed context. Politically Karamchedu did have a history of Left politics, which made a decisive difference to their consciousness. “Almost isolating the landlords, the Kamma small peasants, tenants and agricultural labours along with the harijans and others aligned themselves with the communist party. In 1950’s, Karamchedu was a veritable bastion of the communist party and the major segment of Kamma settlement in the village is even now unbelievably called ‘Moscow’.² The contradictions between all these ‘levels’ compounded to only result in the ghastly massacre of the 17th July 1985. The incident clearly depicts a cultural assertion by the

dalits and the intolerance of the Kamma's to the changing situation. On July 16th a Kamma boy bathed a buffalo at the steps of the water tank of the dalits and directed the dirty water into the tank which was meant for their drinking water. A lame dalit youth and a young dalit woman protested against this.³ The Kamma community retaliated against this protest by massacring several dalits in the early hours of 17th July. Six dalit men were killed and more than 25 others, including several women, were injured. The incident has severe repercussions in terms of the physical and mental health of the dalit community of the village.

Immediately after the incident, the dalit villagers fled to the nearby Chirala town and set up a *shibiram* (camp). It is around this *shibiram* that the dalit struggle with demands and issues 'specific' to the community emerged. Initially, leaders began to mobilise their community all over the state around the issue of cultural assertion against the dominance of upper castes. This assertion for an autonomous movement demanded autonomy from both the state institutions and the mainstream parties and also the radical left movement led by the various ML groups. Dalit leaders protested and rejected the Marxist Leninist (henceforth ML) group's depiction of the incident as 'landlords attack against labourers' (title of the pamphlet distributed by the People's War Group (henceforth the PWG). Instead, they represented it as an attack by 'Kamma landlords' on 'Madiga coolies'. Along with demanding autonomy from the ML groups, dalit leaders rejected state institutions and even the dalit leaders within them, both political representatives as well as bureaucrats. Dalit bureaucrats were characterised as *dalit dalaries* (dalit compradors). As a symbolic representation of an autonomous struggle, dalit leaders decided that only dalits' would occupy the dais and address others on the issue of Karamchedu. It was decided that no upper caste, however radical and sympathetic to the dalit cause, would be allowed to share this space. This demand of 'only dalits' was one of the earliest forms in which autonomy was articulated in Andhra Pradesh (henceforth AP). All those dalits who were part of the communist movement were now, *discursively* re-articulated as 'dalit communists'. Ambedkarism emerged as the guiding philosophy for an independent dalit 'social revolution', which was later referred to as a 'New Dalit Democratic Revolution' both as a continuation, and to counter the ML group's struggle for 'New Democratic Revolution'. Such alternate *discursive* articulations created conditions for movements to rethink their position vis-à-vis each other. In course of two months struggle after the incident, dalit leaders also argued that there is need for 'dalit organic intellectuals', who could alone conceptualize the aspirations of dalits along with 'political power for dalits' as the essential demand of an independent dalit movement.

Struggle for both rehabilitate the dalits who left Karamchedu and punish the culprits began soon after. August 15th was observed as a black day, followed by dharnas, and indefinite hunger strikes. However none of this could pressurise the government to take proactive measures. On 1st September 1985, a public meeting was organised where dalits from all over the state were mobilized, rallying under the slogan 'Chalo Chirala'. Jana Natya Mandali, PWG's cultural wing, took an active part and its lead singer Gaddar (a dalit) inaugurated the meeting'. This signified both the proximity an independent dalit movement wished to have with the ML groups such as the PWG, as well as its firm

resolve to maintain autonomy by projecting dalit leaders, writers, singers and conceptualising a *discourse* specific to the caste problem.

At the end of this historic meeting, the formation of a state level autonomous dalit organisation – Dalit Maha Sabha (DMS) was formally announced. Two prominent dalit leaders were elected unanimously as its office bearers. Later, in February 1986, DMS held its first state level conference at Tenali and released its manifesto. It created interest among various sections of the society in general and the ML groups in particular as it was the first attempt to articulate and conceptualise the idea of an autonomous dalit movement.

The manifesto was, again, an attempt to negotiate, incorporate and expand the consciousness built around Marxist struggles in the state. In it dalits were defined not as particular castes or social groups subjected to particular forms of discrimination and oppression. Instead, all peoples belonging to various religions, castes and classes subjected to various forms of economic, social and cultural discriminations were together referred to as dalits (in a sense, close to the Marxist idea of a ‘universal subject’). It in fact very specifically declares that those social discriminated through the practice of untouchability are only a fraction of this larger identity called dalit. Its part of the DMS’ agenda to struggle to realise this ‘hegemonic unity’ between the poor peasants from all castes including the so-called upper castes. This autonomous ‘*strategy of transformation*’ was part of the principles and organisational work of only Buddha, Phule and Ambedkar. Historically Congress party offered only piece-meal benefits never implemented more fundamental demands of transformation such as land reforms, minimum wages, and legislations against the practice of bonded labour and untouchability. Communist parties on the other hand suffered from ‘economic determinism’ and neglected various forms of social discriminations? An independent dalit movement was therefore aiming at both a ‘social revolution’ as well as a ‘cultural revolution’, along with socialisation of land and capital.

‘DMS’ was, however, ambiguous as to how to gain political power. It declared that in order to remain away from ‘political temptations’ it would not admit people who were earlier members of any political party. In other words, it wished to remain as a social organisation at the grassroots within the civil society, with its important demands being land, education, water, library facilities, information rights, etc, which would contribute to obliterate social discriminations. DMS not only made land the focus of its struggle but also kept distance from parliamentary politics, to keep open its option of carrying out joint activity with the ML parties. It recognised the need for militant-armed methods in order to achieve its demands. History, in a sense was repeating itself with DMS formulating a programme partially similar to the Dalit Panthers in 1970s, which had the ‘genuine radical Left’ or the revolutionary organisations carrying out class struggle as their immediate friends. However, their struggle was not just against the existing class system but what they ingeniously referred to as ‘Hindu feudal order’⁹. Dalit Panthers very boldly conceptualised that all struggles based on caste, devoid of a generic and broader social and economic concerns are all ‘casteist struggles’. They therefore believed that for

the emancipation of dalits, there is a need for 'total struggles'. They therefore believed that for the emancipation of dalits, there is a need for 'total revolution', which fights for socialism and not 'psuedo nationalisation' and therefore legal petitioning, demands for subsidies, and electoral methods were considered obsolete¹⁰.

DMS, unlike the Dalit Panthers along with militant struggles took up legal battles against the upper caste culprits in most of the cases. For instance, in the Karamchedu massacre, it filed cases against the main accused (Chenchu Ramaiah) in conspiring the massacre. The government also constituted a judicial enquiry under the pressure of DMS, which however declared that 'it could not find any clear cut reason behind the massacre, hence it is inconclusive'¹¹. While the court case dragged on inconclusively, on 6th April 1989 a PWG guerrilla squad physically eliminated the main accused. The PWG also condemned DMS for its legal struggle abandoning its initial revolutionary and agitational struggle. Dalit leaders however struggle by DMS to expose the laws, judiciary, police and the entire state machinery of the caste bias it suffers from as a part of the dalit movement without denying the need for militant struggles and other forms of struggle. Dalit leaders believed that the specific form of oppression of dalits made it necessary to carry out the struggle on various 'fronts'.

It is against this backdrop of an emerging politics of solidarity that the DMS officially launched its journal called *Nalupu* (Black) in April 1989. Its focus and purpose clearly reflected this need to evolve a broader strategy for the dalit movement. It also reflected the need to forge solidarity with ML parties like the PWG and yet fight for the benefits the existing socio-legal system offered. *Nalupu* emerged as an important platform reflecting the nature of the dalit movement and the possible directions it would take in times to come. Though it was published for a short span of four years (1989-93), when it was discontinued, 'every educated dalit and the whole dalit community felt that their potent leader had vanished'¹². In fact, in most of the issues of *Nalupu* it was repeatedly propagated that it is not just a journal but in fact a 'movement' by itself.

The president of DMS edited *Nalupu*. However, it is interesting to note that the editorial board had leading civil rights activists, academics and journalists from the upper castes along with dalit writers. The structure and issues in focus in the journal are also symptomatic of the 'broader cause' dalit movement stood for in AP. It carried detailed discussions on social movements such as NBP, anti arrack movement; on issues such as problem of housing, health policies of the government leading to 'brain drain' in the medical field, privatisation of education; struggles in Kashmir and other international issues. Most of these issues were analysed with an ideological proximity with the Left politics.

Another significant feature of *Nalupu* was the various debates it carried on regarding issues pertinent to the ML movement. It repeatedly argued through its editorials that the ML movement was a political struggle for demands affecting the lives of lakhs of adivasis and dalits. It also argued that the violence indulged in by the naxalite groups was only 'counter violence' to the violence unleashed by the State. *Nalupu* protested against

the ban on the PWG and the series of fake encounters against them and focused throughout on the issue of land and various militant land struggles taking place in remote villages of AP and that ‘revolution’ is a plausible means of transforming the society¹³. This however does not mean that *Nalupu* did not carry many ideological debates with the ML groups. Most important of them was the debate on using the available legal and constitutional means. *Nalupu* carried a series of articles on various institutions, part of the State structure. For instance, it constantly argued that Panchayat Raj institutions should be used for the empowerment of the weaker social groups, along with the various legal provisions in favour of land reforms¹⁴. It also projected the case bias among some of the ML groups, for instance it carried a detailed coverage of an incident on March 7th 1993, where activists of the CPI (ML) Praja Pantha attacked and killed a dalit boy, due to organisational differences between them and Dr. Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham. They criticised ‘sectarian tendencies’ in the ML groups that made any meaningful alliance difficult.

Nalupu also attempted to expand the contours of the dalit movement by addressing the emerging ‘internal’ dynamics around the issue of larger unity with the ‘bahujans’. For instance, it reported incidents of attacks by the OBCs on the dalits, reflecting the caste-class complexities. It highlighted the necessity to agree with Ambedkar’s interpretation that caste is both base and superstructure¹⁵, in order to overcome the bifurcated nature of the movements. The dalit movement under the leadership of the DMS and its ideological propaganda through *Nalupu* – (a) on the need to pursue both militant as well as legal methods; (b) articulating a broader identity of dalit around caste-class dimensions; (c) emphasising ideological unity between Ambedkarism and Marxism for innovative combinatory discursive articulations; (d) realizing the need for proximity with radical left struggles around social, cultural and economic issues – provided conditions for a fuller articulation on politics of solidarity. However, it is pertinent to ask whether the naxalite movement was in a position to grapple and coordinate with the changing *material*, *discursive* and *strategic* dimensions, initiated by the dalit movement.

To begin with, the ML movement was reluctant to accept an ideological combination of Marxism with Ambedkarism; autonomy (or giving equal significance) to cultural and identity related issues with economic (land) struggles and combining armed-militant struggles with the use of legal-institutional means. This was seen as diluting of revolution and gravitating towards reformism. More immediately, reflection of this was the refusal to recognize dalit movement as an independent political struggle. The naxalite movement also strongly believed in the centrality of the armed wing and a hierarchised relation with various mass organisations. The dalit movement therefore could not fit into their scheme of political organisation and modes of protest and mobilisation. In fact, building mass organisations itself was considered for a very long time as compromising with revolutionary politics. By the end of 1970s and early 80s, due to various historical reasons, most of the ML groups did begin to experiment with alternative forms of mobilization. Revising their earlier aversion, they began to organize ‘open’ mass organizations. Thus the People’s War’s Central Committee wrote in early eighties that, “today almost no revolutionary group in our country clearly holds it as in the 70s that

either building ‘mass organizations itself is revisionism’ or ‘carrying out partial struggles itself in revisionism’¹⁶. However, they continued to enjoy very little autonomy and were considered ‘secondary’ in forging a revolution. Mass organisations were characterized as mere ‘Propaganda agencies’ or ‘recruitment centres’¹⁷.

They were divided into three broad types on the basis of the nature of work they carried out. Firstly, there were the ‘secret mass organizations’ that propagated revolutionary (read armed) politics and recruited members for the party. Secondly, there were the ‘open mass organizations’, which used the available legal-democratic and constitutional means to build ‘pressure, expose the state and contribute to further revolutionary politics’. Thirdly, there were the ‘cover organizations’, which aligned with non-party organizations and carried the agenda of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles into these organizations. Such ‘tactics’ were necessary in conditions of extreme repression¹⁸. Most of these categories of mass organizations reflected the necessity of propagating the agenda of ‘new democratic revolution’ into various sections of the society rather than trying to develop *independent* methods of integrating diversified sections and their demands into the overall goal of forging a socialist revolution. It is with this backdrop that the naxalite movement dealt with the independent dalit movement as one of ‘its’ mass organisations and looked to ‘co-opt’ it both by entering the leadership positions and by characterizing it as a ‘partial’ struggle (the metaphor used was a ‘stream that needs to flow back into the ocean’). The first phase of independent and autonomous struggles thus remained bifurcated and dichotomized and the issue of solidarity ambiguous and under-problematised.

Chundur: Solidarity or Hegemony?

It was to explore further possibilities of solidarity with the naxalite movement that the dalit writers started yet another journal called ‘*Edureeta*’ (Swimming Against the Tide), in May 1990. Two important dalit leaders who were previously part of the Naxalite movement (while the editor of the journal came out of the UCCRI (ML) group, another important member of the editorial board was previously a COC member of the PWG) started it. They together also started the Marxist-Leninist Centre. It is interesting to note that while the journal declared its perspective as ‘Marxist-Leninist’ and as a ‘journal for revolutionary politics’, none of the ML parties owned it but it was the dalit organisations and writers who identified with it. A more explicit articulation of an ideological basis for solidarity in a synthesis of Ambedkarism and Marxism was acceptable to most of the dalit groups, not so for many of the ML parties.

Edureeta’s editorial declared that the purpose of the journal is to,

- a) Critique the anti-democratic, authoritarian tendencies within the various revolutionary groups vis-à-vis the newly emerging caste and gender perspectives.
- b) Invite discussions on caste by both revolutionary groups and autonomous dalit organisations. It was supposed to be a platform for all progressive groups to negotiate their theoretical and ideological differences so as to make unity between them possible¹⁹.

Edureeta was autonomous of both the dalit movement led by the DMS and the various revolutionary groups. It strongly believed that critical intervention into the politics of both the dalit and the naxalite movement alone would make a meaningful dialogue between them possible and purposeful. As for the dalit movement, (a) It was critical of DMS for appealing to the same upper caste State, which was perpetuating caste discrimination in the state; (b) It analysed the shifts in the programme of DMS and cautioned it against its politics of mobilising just SC's and ST's and not addressing issues concerning the Bahujans and other poorer communities; (c) It also criticised DMS for neglecting its original agenda to struggle for land and other economic issues and instead restricting to demanding compensation and reservations from the government. It argued that dalit movement in course of time has restricted itself to the 'socio-cultural' domain and fought as if dalits could be emancipated without addressing the issue of economic equality and redistribution. *Edureeta* was definitely in search of a new framework that could radicalise the dalit movement against its possibilities of getting ghettoised.

On the other hand, it raised series of critical issues on the practice of the ML groups in the state. Among various others criticisms it highlighted that while the ML groups though express outward support for autonomous women's and dalit movement by being active within them, they also always attempted to either merge these movements with the naxalite movement or actively participate in them to take over the leadership positions so that they could be subsumed under class struggle. Similarly, it was also pointed out that ML groups hegemonised the discourse over autonomy by branding all those seeking autonomy as 'revisionists,' 'careerists,' 'opportunists', 'stooges of ruling class' and 'agents of imperialism'. *Edureeta* argued that this was so primarily because the ML movement believed in recognising autonomy only as a 'tactic' to accommodate these independent struggles, which enjoyed mass support. It was also argued that constituting most of the separate women's and caste wings by the ML parties was again only a 'tactical' move and these mass organisations do not enjoy any organisational or ideological autonomy²⁰. In the political discourse on autonomy, *Edureeta* pointed towards a significant dichotomy between 'tactical' notions of autonomy as against 'substantive'. The debate on the moral, political and ideological legitimacy of a 'tactical' approach as a *strategy* of transformation opened new dimensions in the dialogue on solidarity.

The dichotomy of 'tactical' versus 'substantive' notion of autonomy leading to 'fragmentation' between the movements subsumed a more important (hidden) dimension within the ML parties. *Edureeta* traced it to the lack of representation in leadership of members from more organic social groups such as the dalits and women. They argued that most of the leaders of the ML groups came from the 'upper' caste, petty bourgeois strata that joined the movement during the student days from elite/urban institutions. Their 'petty bourgeois' and 'upper caste' tendencies get reflected later on in their functioning and the decisions they took. They also suggested that the naxalite leaders such as T. Nagi Reddy, Com. Pulla Reddy were all perceived, in spite of their radical credentials, as upper caste leaders belonging to the landed community. The movement therefore failed to get organically integrated at the grassroots where dalits constitute the

struggling majority. As a possible solution, *Edureeta* suggested that it should be made mandatory to have only members coming from SC, ST and OBC communities of the society to assume leadership positions. Most of the dalit organisations fiercely agreed and propagated this idea in A. P. They felt that it was only by mutually adopting and incorporating the principles evolved in each movement that they could forge solidarity. In other words, while the dalit movement was taking up the land issue and recognised armed method as valid and a legitimate political method, the ML groups should have incorporated the principle of distributing land in accordance with caste, so as making it mandatory to have ‘only dalits’ as their leaders²¹.

The various ML groups rejected ‘dalits in leadership positions’ as a means to overcome the problem of ‘tactical approach’ and ‘fragmentation’. They countered by arguing that communists are those who have genuinely overcome caste, class and gender prejudices and therefore to fix them in these categories (acquired by birth) was a reductionism; and they also argued that the underlying assumption of *Edureeta*’s experiment was to either combine or equate Marxism with Ambedkarism, which would always remain an aborted attempt, as Ambedkar at worst was a ‘petty bourgeois reformer’ and at best a ‘radical reformer’. They cited instances of atrocities on SCs and STs as part of the repression on the armed movements in Tebhaga and Telangana that Ambedkar did not condemn. He therefore had a narrow and constitutionally constrained notion of transformation²².

With the intervention of *Edureeta* in the on going dialogue between the dalit groups and the ML organisations, the debate got concretised in terms of (a) distribution of land on the basis of caste, (b) making it mandatory to have dalits (and women) as leaders in all the ML groups and (c) to theoretically accept the combined philosophy of Ambedkarism-Marxism as the only alternative for the Indian situation. These alternatives got further legitimised at the beginning of the decade of 90s with the Chundur massacre. It was again, on the lines of Karamchedu, retaliation by the upper caste communities, not against demands for higher wages or land, but about identity assertion by the dalits for self-respect and dignity. This time in Chundur on 6th August 1991 more than 10 dalits were brutally killed²³. Immediately after the incident, in spite of the fierce ideological differences, the ML and the Dalit groups formed ‘Joint Action Committee’, with the DMS, CPI, (ML) Vimochana, UCCRI (ML), Socialist Revolutionary Forum, and Ambedkar Youth Association.

What was significant about the joint activity was, unlike previous times, there was now a ready acceptance to incorporate the issues ‘internal’ to the dalit and ML movements. While the dalits openly declared that ‘counter violence’ is essential for dalit movement (they now demanded that they would bury the dead in the center of the village and are ready to confront the upper castes, unlike the Karamchedu victims who refused to go back to the village and confined the struggle to a nearby town), the ML groups accepted that cultural issues such as dignity and self-respect would be the focus of the struggle and also that ‘only dalits’ would lead the struggle. These changes clearly reflected the emerging ‘inter-subjective communication’ and the possibility of ‘substantive’ solidarity around that. This remained the most significant yet aborted attempt to forge durable

solidarity, due to the drastic changes in the nature of the dalit movement at the beginning of the decade of 90s.

It was at this critical juncture in the history of the autonomous dalit movement in AP that the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) emerged to occupy the social and political space created by the former. At the second state level convention of the DMS, in 1988 at Vizag, strong differences emerged among the leadership over the issue of alliance with BSP. A section of the DMS (led by its president) were for alliance and an active role in electoral politics. They issued a pamphlet titled 'BSP *Evarikosam, Endukosam*' (BSP, For Whom and Why) to explain their position. Another section of the DMS boycotted and argued its need to remain autonomous from all political organisations and working more as a front for 'social revolution' through agitational-militant politics rather than convert into a political party to take part in parliamentary politics²⁴. However, DMS, Dalit Kala Mandir, Dalit Writers, Artist, and Intellectual United Front (DWAIUF), Ambedkar Youth Association and also a few dalits in various revolutionary organisations, gravitated and finally joined the BSP.

One of the immediate reasons and gains that the dalit movement perceived with its merger with the BSP was its success in drawing together the dalits (SCs and STs) and the Bahujans (OBCs), which the autonomous dalit movement had failed to do. It was observed that there was an upsurge in the backward caste whose youth especially in northern Telangana districts gravitated towards the BSP²⁵. Kanshi Ram in course of his campaign argued that it was due to BSP's efforts that the OBCs gained new consciousness and to counter it the Congress party was trying to vie them by constituting the 'OBC Commission'. The combination of being a social movement and a political party, BSP argued apparently created a larger space for dalit politics than what an autonomous movement could.

On the other hand, BSP had to counter the ML groups and the consciousness it had already built among the dalits of the state. Some of the dalit writers characterised the rise of BSP as the 'social revolution', which the ML groups had failed to carry out. They also argued that with the BSP gaining power at the centre there would be 'total revolution' and this is what is the Indianised version of the 'New Democratic Revolution' and this is what is the Indianised version of the 'New Democratic Revolution' and after this there is only 'Socialist Revolution' to achieve. As Ambedkar envisaged BSP would established the aspired State Socialism. Not only was the revolutionary language appropriated by the BSP but also their agenda. Its leaders announced that land reforms would be implemented in the Telangana region. Further, it would lift the ban on the PWG, call back paramilitary forces and stop all the fake encounters²⁶. The leaders of the various dalit groups attempted to pursue the idea of solidarity with the ML parties even from within the BSP. However, 'parliamentary path versus armed revolt' emerged as the most significant dichotomy and important ML groups like the PWG, now distanced themselves from the dalit politics, as pursued by the BSP. Thus, the legal constitutional means, which were only a part of the autonomous dalit movement, and unlike the initial reluctance parliamentary politics now became the key *strategy* for achieving power and social

transformation. The careful balance it was attempting between agitational – militant means and legal – constitutional means could not be maintained anymore.

Though BSP could not gain any seats in the assembly elections, it propelled a process of conversion of dalit social movement in to a ‘political movement’ primarily centered on identity related ‘populist’ and ‘symbolic’ issues. In the post-BSP phase in AP, dalit organisations made independent attempts to come together and form political fronts and continue to pursue electoral politics as the *strategy* for empowerment. One such experiment was the formation of Mahajan Front, with around 22 prominent dalit organisations. It constituted important sub-caste dalit mass organisations such as the Madiga Dandora, Mala Samarabheri, etc. Mahajan Front however attempted to appropriate, like the BSP, the revolutionary language and declared that they would be more radical than the BSP, as they understood the distinction between ‘social justice’ and ‘socialist justice’. Their struggle was supposedly against both ‘Brahmanism and Capitalism’²⁷. However, this experiment did not last long and the dalit movement increasingly distanced itself from its earlier caste-class approach and entered a period of lull.

Ironically, it was around the same period that CPI (ML) People’s War encouraged the formation of anti-caste mass organizations, retracting their earlier stand on building separate organizations for caste. It should be pointed out that mass organisations against caste atrocities were a result of various issues raised by the dalit cadre ‘within’ the CPI (ML) People’s War party. Many of the important leaders of the PWG left revolutionary struggle to join the dalit movement. They questioned the reasons behind the absence of dalits in the leadership, despite a relentless struggle for over three decades undoubtedly, also under the influence of the initial phase of the autonomous dalit movement.

In an International Seminar organized by CPI (ML) janashakti on ‘Marxism-Leninism, Mao-Tse Tung Thought and Revolutionary Movements’ during 9th-12th March 1995, in Hyderabad, CPI (ML) People’s War presented a paper entitled ‘Special Features of Indian Revolution and Marxist Approach Towards Resolution of those Problems’. In many ways, their presentation was considered as a reflection of the change in the approach of the party towards the caste question. Amidst various other specificities enumerated, such as the absence of a unified revolutionary party, existence of highly centralized State machinery, nationality struggles, communal problem, existence of Parliament and other legislative bodies, caste was identified as a significant problem peculiar to the Indian situation. It accepted that “the general tendency among the Communists has been to treat the question of caste mechanically as a super structural category that could be eliminated once the existing social system is changed through a social revolution or to treat it as a question to be taken up only after the resolution of class struggle.... it did not formulate a concrete programme and plan of action to tackle the caste question”²⁸. Though it rightly stressed that complete resolution is possible only after the New Democratic Revolution, they nevertheless transformed Marx’s famous dictum to *discursively* rearticulate it as “all hitherto history of India is the history of class and caste struggles”²⁹. They acknowledged the contributions of ‘reformers’ such as

Buddha, Basavanna, Narayan Guru, Jyoti Rao Phule, Ambedkar, whose writings and ideas were extensively propagated by the autonomous dalit movement born after the Karamchedu massacre in 1985. Regarding autonomous dalit organizations they observed “we must adopt the policy of forging a common front with the cadres of such organizations on specific issues related to caste discrimination while taking care to expose the bourgeois reformist nature and limitations of their leadership”³⁰.

It is with this renewed caste-class understanding that they encouraged formation of anti-caste mass organizations. The Kula Nirmulana Porata Samithi (KNPS) was formed in Vijayawada in 1998. It held its second state level conference on February 18 and 19, 2001 in Ongole. Various other mass organizations that sympathized with the PWG took part in these proceedings, which included, APCMS, VIRASAM, APCLC, Rational Society and BC Rights Protection Committee. The resolutions adopted in these proceedings reflected the approach to integrate dalit problems and movement with various other political and economic struggles, which also affected the dalits. The resolutions included struggles primarily against the growing Market relations (privatization), and the State (declared workers (mostly handloom) and farmer’s suicides and government murders, were against cuts in the welfare budget, and demanded the punishment of the culprits of dalit atrocities)³¹. It was argued that the dalit movement had to struggle against all those issues that affected not dalits alone but also other impoverished sections of the society as well, which ironically was the initial perspective of the dalit movement under the DMS.

In the KNPS’ manifesto, it raised the pertinent point regarding ‘classes within caste groups’. While the autonomous dalit movement perceived the new classes as an empowerment of dalits, KNPS argued that this nascent bourgeois class among the dalits was interested in the slogan ‘political power to dalits’ as it had already acquired economic power. This class also had a nexus with the traditional feudal ruling classes³². Thus, KNPS sought to link dalit movement with the naxalite movement in struggles against feudalism and imperialism. Similarly, it raised the issue of eradication of caste identities as against their consolidation being pursued by the autonomous dalit movement and saw this as possible only through re-integrating a class agenda, which was being increasingly neglected. It is because of this caste-class approach that KNPS could address various issues related to conflicts between the BCs and dalits and sub-caste conflicts more boldly than the dalit movement, which had no means of negotiating them through the prism of identity politics³³. KNPS, for instance also approached the issue of privatization through its caste-class approach, while it demanded reservations in the private sector for dalits, it also mobilized them in struggles against privatisation. In spite of its broad agreement with the People’s War Group, KNPS took no open stand on either armed struggle or elections to keep the process of integrating dalits with the revolutionary struggles open. KNPS with its broad caste-class approach seems to have been effective in mobilizing dalits and aligning them to revolutionary politics.

However, caste based mass organizations of other revolutionary groups, such as the CPI (ML) Janashakti couldn’t be as effective due to a bifurcated integration of caste with the

ongoing class struggles. It formed its mass front DAFODAM – a United Front of dalits and minorities. DAFODAM, however, exclusively took the approach of identity-based politics and adopted Ambedkarism as its ideological perspective, without a corresponding linkage to its class approach. The idea of autonomy got articulated as segregated parallel struggles. While the armed wing (guerrilla squads) carried out class politics, the mass organization attempted to carry parallel identity based politics. Many of its cadre raised pertinent points, including that of Ambedkar not addressing the issue of land reforms and Communism and Buddhism being part of ruling class ideology. They questioned how could these ideological systems exclusively be the basis of a mass front of a Communist party?³⁴ These arguments over a period of time resulted in CPI(ML) Janashakti splitting into many groups – CPI (ML) Janashakti (Rajanna), CPI (ML) Janashakti (Veeranna) and the May 17 Group³⁵. This clearly manifested the point that autonomy cannot be interpreted as leading parallel struggles with segregated ideological basis.

The rather poignant historical opportunity for solidarity created by the Chundur massacre and the consequent decisive changes in the understanding of the radical left struggles, was lost with the decline of agitational-militant characteristic and foray into electoral politics by the dalit movement and focusing more on identity related emotive issues and gradually withdrawing from economic demands such as implementation of land reforms and minimum wages and ideologically distancing itself from Marxism and the caste-class approach. As for the ML movement though it made important corrections to both its earlier theory and practice related to caste atrocities by forming separate mass organisations and ironically moved close to the caste-class approach, it failed to retain its leaders who belonged to the dalit community and therefore the suspicion that these are merely ‘tactical’ changes continued to belie a meaningful dialogue.

Vempentta: The Internal-External Dynamics

It took another major massacre against the dalits for the earlier aborted debates to revive. However, the context this time around was much more complex, and was symptomatic of multiple levels of contradictions. The dalit movement had to negotiate not only with the ML groups but also the ‘internal’ demand for autonomy from the sub-caste groups. The sub-caste movement raised issues similar to the demands made previously by the ML movement. It was in 1995 that the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) came into existence. Both the important leaders of this movement, Krishna Madiga and Krupakar Madiga, were previously associated with the naxalite organisations. MRPS raised the issue of ‘classes within caste groups’ that got consolidated due to the disproportionate appropriation of reservations by the Mala community and demanded that 15 per cent quota allotted to the SCs in the state be subdivided and fixed quotas allotted to properly identified sub-groups of the 59 dalit communities³⁶.

The MRPS also opened up the debate on those 90 per cent madigas who resided in villages and needed land and not reservation, land reforms became an important issue brought to the centre stage by caste struggles. MRPS also debated on whether privatisation would benefit or rob the dalit communities of whatever opportunities they had. Sub-caste movement was pleading for a serious debate on ways of integrating caste

and class and was increasingly critical of the dalit movement that began to distance itself from such a perspective. These demands and the emerging perspective were very close to those raised by the ML movement and had the propensity of drawing dalit movement closer to the ML movement. Similarly, various organisations pressed upon the MRPS to demand 50 per cent reservations for women to be implemented within the sub-division of SC reservations into A, B, C, and D groups. It was this compounded complexity that got exemplified in the Vempentta incident involving sub-caste violence.

In Vempentta a village in the Kurnool district of Rayalseema region in AP, factionalism was the dominant culture. The entire economic, political, and social life of the village was under the control of factions led by the landlords who had direct links (either as MLAs or through control over the representatives) with either the TDP or the Congress. Sometime around 1980, CPI (ML) Peoples War Group entered this village to build a struggle for land and increase in the wages. Around 1996, under the party's leadership the landless labourers occupied temple lands. This land was redistributed among 80 Madiga, 56 Mala and 129 backward caste and lower class (which included some upper caste) families. Each family got half-an-acre land³⁷. As there were more landless families among the Madiga community more land was distributed to them. These struggles and access to land gave an increasing sense of confidence and dignity to the Madiga families in the village. They were also now more openly part of the mass organisation of the Peoples War Group. This obviously earned the wrath of the upper caste Reddy landlord family, which dominated the village, along with the ex-sarpanch who belonged to the BC community. As a counter strategy to the PWG, both the landlord and the ex-sarpanch mobilised the OBCs and the Malas of the village under the pretext that injustice was done to them in the distribution of the land. They went to the extent of organising a social boycott of the Madiga families in the village, in a context where the state was already under the grip of a strong sub-caste (Madiga) movement.

Madiga families were forced to organise their own market to sell their harvest as well as their own panchayats. This further sharpened the conflict between the landlord, malas and the OBCs on the one hand, and PWG and Madigas on the other. Along with this, as part of organisational rivalry in the village, Pratighatana, another ML organisation ironically joined hands with the landlords to weaken the hold of PWG, which was by then very strong over the landless labourers (predominantly Madigas) of the village. Responding to this growing conflict, the PWG killed the ex-sarpanch who belonged to a backward caste. In reaction, the village that had already been polarized across caste-class lines now flared up in a brutal massacre by the landlords (with the active support of the Malas and OBCs) on 16th July 1998, of men and women of the Madiga community. After brutally killing them by chopping off their hands and heads, the landlords threw 9 Madiga men into a lit pyre.

This, in brief, is the outline of the incident in Vempentta, which left a number of questions unanswered – what was the nature of the primary contradiction in the village – was it caste or class? What was the relation between conflicts between sub-castes and dalit politics on the one hand and ML politics on the other? What was the role of the

armed strategy by the ML groups? These questions divided the perspectives of dalit, ML and human rights activists and organisations. It however has to be acknowledged that all these organisations *spontaneously* formed a United Front to protest against the incident (i.e. primarily against the landlords and the connivance of the state). This United Front included the Dalit Bahujan Maha Sabha, KNPS, BC Welfare Association, PUCL, APCLC, PDSU, POW-Stree Vimukti, AIPRF and VIRASAM. On 2nd August 1998, they organised a joint state level convention on the incident. This convention was meant, for the first time in the history of the social movements in AP to discuss the differences and the possibility of *consensus* between these organisations. This step towards forming a united front was possible immediately after the incident in spite of the differences between these mass organisations, as all of them could perceive the emerging commonality of concerns and the evident overlap of issues. While class based issues were now part of the sub-caste movement 'internal' to the dalit movement in the state, ML groups were becoming increasingly answerable and open to debate and discussion on caste-based violence.

Caste organisations such as the Dalit Bahujan Mahasabha have argued that one of the important dimensions of the incident was the 'caste blind politics' of the PWG. They could not foresee the possibility of mobilisation on caste lines by the landlords. Not only could the landlords mobilise the Reddy families but also other OBC and Mala communities. Caste differences make collective mobilisation and hatred easy. Some Dalit writers have argued that Vempentta was always a 'communist village' but the reason behind the absence of such incidents was that the leadership of the communist organisations remained with the 'Reddy communists' who therefore enjoyed the close patronage of the Reddy landlords. The communist groups and the landlords entered into a conflicting situation because the leadership shifted into the hands of the dalits. It is interesting to observe that these leaders of the PWG belong to the Madiga community and which could very well be a reason why they had more following among the madigas³⁸.

Dalit writers have also recognised that there was a caste contradiction between the SCs and the OBCs. They have argued that it was because of this complex and graded situation that Ambedkar had believed violence had only a partial role in socio-cultural transformation. They also argued neither squad action nor individual annihilation could be a solution for any of the problems as they reflect an apolitical-militarist approach, which cannot handle caste contradictions. As a method of resolving caste conflicts dalit organisations suggested distribution of land and wealth in accordance with the 'population percentage of different castes' and making dalit bahujan group's part of the 'State power'³⁹. However, as ML parties were struggling to negotiate with their earlier 'caste blind' politics, the dalit movement also failed to evolve a clear perspective and would appear, therefore, to have been largely a 'sub-caste' blind movement.

The PWG in its reply to the accusations of leading a 'caste blind struggle' argued that there were not only Madiga men and women among those killed but also four men belonging to the BC community. It was also a fact that majority of those who took part in

the massacre were men of the OBC community who were the followers of the ex-sarpanch, other than a few Mala men who were traditionally with the landlord's faction. Moreover, they argued, land could not be distributed on the basis of caste but on the basis of landlessness. For instance, there were powerful landed factional leaders from the BC community. How does one characterise these bahujans? Replying to a phrase used by one of the dalit writers, they described the Vempentta massacre as 'Manu's justice' but implemented by an ex-sarpanch who was of the BC caste. ML organisations argued that it was only by recognising the 'classes within these caste groups'⁴⁰, a perspective very close to the sub-caste movement, could unity be achieved among the dalit bahujans.

As the dalit movement was experiencing 'internal' pressures vertically between the OBCs and the various constituents within the SCs that exposed the limitation of exclusive identity based struggles and the need for a more nuanced caste-class approach, naxalite movement also began to experience similar 'internal' dissent owing to its inadequate conceptualisation in integrating caste with class politics. Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, which worked for the rights of the ML activists and against state violence began to gradually expand its scope and bring in violations at the civil societal level. This is in effect, in the course of time, meant taking a more critical view of both the violence indulged in by the ML groups and also the denial of rights by these groups to individuals of various vulnerable social groups.

The Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) was formed in the early seventies as a mass organization of the various Marxist-Leninist groups. Except for a few individuals with a liberal disposition, most of its members either sympathized or belonged to some naxalite group. It was this nature of the composition of the organization, which decided the contours of the civil liberties movement in Andhra Pradesh. In its second state level convention, held in Warangal on 4th May, 1980, it adopted its manifesto wherein the purpose of the civil liberties organization was declared as struggling for the protection of democratic rights and strengthening the peoples' right to struggle, which primarily referred to the struggles by the naxalite groups. After 1985 with the Karamchedu massacre and the steady rise of various social movements such as that of women's, environment, etc, a large number of issues came to be included within the framework of civil liberties and human rights. APCLC now began to respond to various other issues outside its initial set parameters.

It began by investigating lock-up deaths of common people, atrocities on women, such as dowry deaths and domestic violence. It investigated atrocities on dalits, and brought out reports on Karamchedu and other massacres. It was also concerned with environmental issues such as the pollution of water tanks by industrial wastes as well as about famine conditions and hunger deaths in various districts. During this phase in the growth of civil liberties movement, it expanded by investigating various issues that were brought into relief by various autonomous social movements, outside the fold of the naxalite movement. With the beginning of the decade of 1990s, however, the issues of various social movements began to emerge in a more complex and inter-connected manner. The very essence and nature of the civil liberties movement now came under scrutiny. The

cardinal point for this movement was not in lending support to caste, class and gender movements and their issues independent of each other, but in recognizing the mutual conflicts that these movements entered into and the multiple contradictions, which unfolded simultaneously.

In many ways, the starting point for this could be traced to the Koyyur kidnap on January 30, 1993, when a tribal MLA was kidnapped from the Visakhapatnam district by the PWG. Here, the issues of dalit rights and use of anti-democratic means came into conflict with the revolutionary movement on the one hand and the expanding civil liberties perspective on the other. The APCLC intervened to resolve the crisis, demanding the release of the kidnapped. They however, emphasized on the necessity for the autonomy of the APCLC in order to be able to negotiate in such a situation in clearer terms. Thus the then president of the APCLC noted that “many people felt aggrieved that the principle of reservation was not extended to kidnap and abduction... the tribal in and around Koyyur felt that Balaraju is a good tribal leader as he was consistently working for the upliftment of the tribal”⁴¹. The democratic consciousness made starker by the autonomous dalit movement, made the leaders and members in APCLC struggling for human rights answerable.

Similarly, APCLC as an organization using various democratic and legal means had to oppose within the contours of a civil liberties perspective, such methods as kidnaps and abduction: “The practice of taking as hostages persons unconnected with the specific issue between the government and the PWG is a practice we in APCLC never approved of. We have been as human rights activists against this type of political practice. Whether the police hold people in illegal custody or the naxalites kidnap and take as hostages persons unconnected with the specific issue involved our stand has been the same”⁴². It argued that the means used for the attainment of an egalitarian society are as important as the end goal. This in many ways kicked off a serious debate on both the essence of these arguments and the limits of a civil liberties organization.

Many of the activists in APCLC argued that human rights should be comprehended dialectically, and in an unequal society there could not be equal rights. ‘The debate on the relationship between a distinct ‘human rights perspective’ and the ‘revolutionary perspective’ thus became more pronounced and significant. Anachronistically speaking, its against this background that that following comment of the then President assumes significance: “For human rights activists, Koyyuru (and earlier Gurthedu) raises issues regarding the concept of human rights itself; the advisability of expanding the concept and thereby enlarging the field of operation of human rights work. What should be its relations with radical and democratic movements? Has it any transforming role while operating the institutions available within a democratic set up? Should it merely confine itself to maintaining a crime audit of the state? All such and related questions need to be debated”⁴³.

Gradually, many common people who had been affected in various ways began to approach the APCLC for justice. Initially, it was argued that such issues (i.e. democratic

rights of individuals vis-à-vis democratic movements) fell beyond the purview of the APCLC. Pressure from autonomous dalit and women's organizations also increased on APCLC. For instance, there was the issue of SCs, STs and BCs being killed as police informers. It was argued most of the dalits who surrendered from the party had no social network through which they could return to 'mainstream' social life and settle in respectable positions, as most of the upper caste surrendered naxalites did. It was possible, therefore, for the police to pressurise these vulnerable people in its attempt to convert them into informers and pass on information⁴⁴. The question was, if the revolutionary movement was oblivious of this underlying logic of unequal social conditions and targeted dalits as police informers, was it correct for organizations such as the APCLC to ignore the issue of democratic rights of dalits? Various women activists within APCLC raised the issue of various forms of domination on women, within the naxalite groups, which was often undermined as the 'internal matter of the party', with no fact-finding committees being constituted. It was argued by these activists that the democratic consciousness that 'personal is political' needs to be incorporated into the civil liberties movement and it cannot turn a blind eye on such incidents⁴⁵.

The demand for protection of an independent 'democratic space' for APCLC now became imperative. APCLC negotiated not only conflicts over the issue of democratic rights of dalits and women vis-à-vis the ML movement but also about inter-group rivalry between various revolutionary groups. This was possible only due to an independent human rights perspective. During the APCLC's convention in Kurnool, in 1993, the issue of expansion of civil liberties movement with an independent perspective over various forms of violence in civil society was debated and remained inconclusive. Later, discussion papers were printed and circulated and all the units of the APCLC in most of the districts in Andhra Pradesh debated on these two emerging and contesting perspectives, for well over a year. Those activists sympathetic to the ML movement argued that violence cannot be understood in neutral terms and all forms of violence cannot be equated. They argued that 'State violence' has to be distinguished from that of transformatory or 'revolutionary violence' and the primary purpose of APCLC should be to fight for the rights of democratic (revolutionary) movements and expand the space available for them to struggle, so that an egalitarian society could be achieved. In essence there cannot be a 'human rights perspective' distinct from that of a 'revolutionary perspective'.

A National Convention on "Democratic Movements and Human Rights Perspectives" was organized in Hyderabad, to further discuss these issues and finally they went for voting over these contending perspectives at the Guntur Convention of APCLC towards the end of 1997. Those members with an alternative perspective split from the APCLC and formed the Human Rights forum (HRF), in October 1998. They argued that "the political structure of the State and the social-economic structures of caste, class and gender have received some recognition as oppressive structures, but are yet to assume equal importance in the eyes of the rights movement. The state-class framework continues to dominate, for no cogent reason. But both caste and gender are major sources of not only violent suppression but also routine and insidious denial of rights. There is no

scale on which their effect can be adjudged less serve than that of state and/or class”⁴⁶ (emphasis added). The second most important difference that the HRF sought from the APCLC was on a characterization of the State that was acceptable to all the three (caste, class and gender) movements. “In fact the state-class framework that unconsciously guides our thinking of rights has come from militant-leftist movements and the problems of suppression they have faced from the State and the exploiting classes... But if we are ready to learn equally from the dalit movement and the women’s movement and the politics of various minorities, religious, ethnic or linguistic ... These movements have mostly sought to empower themselves by making use of and enlarging the democratic political space and the political and civil rights available in the present state and the political system ...”⁴⁷. Finally, they argued, “we believe that unjust and unfair use of violence even by a popular movement must be openly condemned, not because it is violence but because it is unjust”⁴⁸. Thus an independent human rights group was formed out of the demands for autonomy that were ‘internal’ to the naxalite movement. The semblances of a unified dalit movement is increasingly threatened by the rise of conflicts with the OBCs or bahujans on the one hand and rise of an independent sub-caste movement on the other. These ‘internal’ protest movements are a result of gradual withdrawal of the dalit movement from its initial caste-class perspective, and consequent neglect of economic demands for land and wages, undermining agitational-militant strategies against the State and reluctance in arriving at combinatory ideological postures around Ambedkarism and Marxism. As for the naxalite movement, there is a rise of an ‘internal’ civil liberties movement, resulting in a split and increasing dissent from its dalit and women cadre against ‘internal’ caste and gender violations and thus demanding further reflection on party’s position on these issues. These ‘internal’ demands can be addressed only by adopting theory and practice ‘external’ to these movements.

Drawing on the ‘internal-external’ dialectic can not only re-unify the various segments of each of these movements but also open up radically new possibilities of substantive solidarity between the dalit and the naxalite movements, across and *material, discursive* and *strategic* dimensions. The ‘internal-external’ dialectics would increasingly push the movements and its various segments to address issues in economic, political, social and cultural domains, focusing on their manifold inter-linkages rather than ‘regionally separating’ them. As E. P. Thompson suggested, ‘productive base itself exists in the shape of social, juridical and political forms’. With the ‘internal-external’ dynamics movements increasingly realise that “the economic sphere has to be seen as re-embedded (or continuously embedded) in non-economic social processes; wider outlook requires us to conceptualise aspects of force and violence, ideological hegemony, community, culture and sexuality as central to economic process”⁴⁹. It is therefore that economic upliftment of dalits in Karamchedu leads to cultural assertion for self-respect and dignity, reflecting the purport of characterizing caste in a combinatory mould as both base and superstructure by various dalit writers.

However, these integrated social and material conditions are always mediated through various processes. They are not ‘given’ to translate naturally into solidarity between the movements in course of struggles; they need to be discursively articulated. As Althusser

argues, discourses do not reflect an already existing social reality but constitutes social reality for us. Theory/discourse cannot be regarded as an intellectual domain, while practice is seen to be rooted in a concrete terrain. 'Internal-external' dynamics against create the necessity or in fact get articulated through a new political discourse. While the PWG rearticulated the famous Marxist dictum to read 'all hitherto history of India of class and caste struggles'; the civil liberties movement pleaded for 'democratic space' referring to not only to the space between the state and the civil society but also between the various movements within the civil society. Again the dalit movement introduced novel combinatory language such as 'dalit communists struggling against a 'Hindu feudal order' for a 'new dalit democratic revolution'. These articulations are representative of the transformation of both traditional dalit and naxalite politics.

At the strategic level, 'intern-external' dialectics make it possible for the movements to rework the bifurcated strategies. The PWG not only organized separate anti-caste mass organisation but also fought for legal and socio-economic benefits such as implementing reservations in the private sector, yet carried ideological propaganda against privatization itself. Similarly, the dalit movement not only waged legal battles for welfare policies but also recognized the need for militant struggles to protect their self-respect the dignity of their women, against both the state and private 'armies' of the landlords. Unless militant struggles are not combined with making use of available democratic institutions, the process of social transformation might be distorted with either establishment of totalitarian regimes or localization of struggles. In other words, the emerging 'internal-external' dynamics seem to provide, yet another historical opportunity for the dalit and the naxalite movement to strengthen their mutual solidarity.

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Suicidal Divergence of the Left and Dalit Movements: Cause and Remedy

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(Draft for Discussion Only)

India is the land of paradoxes. The parallel streams of two movements claiming to work for the liberation of the oppressed and exploited people will certainly rank among its major paradoxes. The Left movement claiming allegiance to Marxism and Leninism and Dalit movement following Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar are the two movements. The former claims universal validity and conceives solution to the problems of exploitation in generic terms in the form of a revolution, whereas the latter is focused on the specific problems of dalits, attributable to the caste system, which is acknowledgedly unique to India. The communist movement in corollary takes a long term view of the solution whereas the dalit movement is anxious to find immediate relief for dalits from caste oppression. The universal and particular or long term and short term should not necessarily contradict, but in case of these two movements there has been an irreconcilable contradiction, so much so that instead of seeking common grounds to meet they have diverged from each other towards their respective degeneration. This trend has been most disheartening to all those who yearn for a radical change in this country.

This paper attempts to take a hard look at these movements in order to discern their inherent attributes that impel them to diverge from each other. It also traces the history of their birth and locus of their development so as to locate the point of divergence and the factors that contributed to sustain it. Since both of them tend to reach similar goal of establishing a society sans exploitation, their respective perspectives for achieving these goals are reviewed to mark the spaces for possible convergence. Finally, it attempts to work out a practical suggestion for these movements, which might change the course of their suicidal divergence and bring them to complement each other.

1. Communist and Dalit Movements: Salient Features

The early adherents of Communism had to come from educated youth from the relatively well to do class and caste background. They typically came from petty bourgeois class and belonged to Brahmin caste. Inspired by the anti-colonialist and nationalist ideas in vogue then, their romanticism easily leaped to see the world sans exploitation and there they found Marxism which had inspired similar people world over, being the revolutionary creed, the spread of its classical literature was severely restricted and hence what reached the masses, particularly in the colonial countries was its popular version. In popular version, its dialectical materialism became simple mechanical materialism or material reductionism; historical materialism became a unilineal sequence of development and scientific socialism an inevitable destiny or dogmatic automatism. As the ideology of anti-establishment revolutionists, Marxism moreover had to develop puritanical rigidity from safeguarding itself from ideological adulteration from enemy

sources. As a highly intricate philosophy, it practically became a preserve of the educated petty bourgeois; the masses being fed with still more stereotypical and simplistic tenets from the popular version they received. The circumstances of its advent in the country among a particular section of the society imparted it the following features:

- It came to be treated in place of the Hindu scriptures and not as a live science
- The doctrinaire approach tended to over simplification of reality and unreasonable
- It led to seeing the Indian reality in the image of the European setting in which Marxism was born, ignoring even Marx's own observations to the contrary
- It resulted in complete ignorance of specificity of Indian society
- The petty bourgeois intellectual arrogance and caste prejudice, in addition, further prevented the communists to see objective reality of dalit suffering

The dalit movement likewise has petty bourgeois beginning during the British colonial times. The imperatives of colonial expedition and later colonial strategies created unprecedented opportunities for dalits and produced a class in urban centres that intensely felt the caste system being a spoiler in the enjoyment of their economic success and more importantly a road block in achieving further progress. Besides opportunities for material advancements, the institutionalization of rule of law and establishment of western liberal ethos granted dalits power of expression. The dalit movement was the manifestation of this new found expression. They began voicing their woes against the upper castes on the one hand and asking for justice from the colonial state on the other. When the colonial state unleashed competition among various communities by announcing participation of the natives in governance, the dalit movement rushed in through the crevices resulting from the contention of the major communities to stake its claim for the share of the political pie. The dalit movement was anxious to achieve tolerable life for dalits under the protection of the colonial state. Paradoxically the Communist movement claiming to be materialist, was pursuing a dream of an ideal society – a communist utopia; whereas the dalit movement was largely idealist, in sense it saw its problem rooted not in the material aspects but in the socio-religious notions, pursued a very pragmatic objective.

The experience with inhuman oppression at the hands of the upper caste Hindus for centuries and opportunities brought in by the British colonial state to combat it, imparted the dalit movement the following features:

- It was focused on the visible and existential aspects of oppression
- It therefore identified their religio-social oppression as the main issue and Brahminism (practically Hinduism and Brahmins) as the main enemy to perpetuate it
- Lack of considerations of the material forces in making of history led to diagnosis which attributed their subjugation to Brahmin intrigues in history
- It led to a psyche of suspicion about the upper castes
- It considered colonial state as its protector and neutral arbiter in the contention between them and the orthodox elements

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- It led to a peculiar conception of state as an autonomous entity that can exercise its power in favour of the disprivileged.

2. The Historical Rift

Nowhere in the world would the movements of the proletariats be so clearly and hopelessly split as in India. The Marxist movement purportedly working for bringing about a revolution in the country to create a rule of the working class (proletariat state) chose not to notice the plight of the native proletariats, who numbered around one-fourth of the total population and ran after organizing a 'pure' proletariat, as the vanguard of revolution, where there was none. Paradoxically, while swearing by dialectical materialism, they kept on ignoring material reality of castes and followed a mechanical-doctrinaire approach in applying the European moulds to Indian society to obtain surreal classes. Classes, no doubt are to be defined in relation to the mode of production, but then it implies that the latter is to be properly analyzed and not assumed. If even Marx had noticed the specificity of the mode of production in non-European countries, it was certainly a folly of the Indian Marxists to have imagined the Indian mode of production confirming to that in Europe. Marx used the theoretical category of class but never defined it. Lenin who had to use it in practical revolutionary struggle had to define it for the Russian society. If even the Indian communists had learnt from Lenin they should have necessarily taken cognizance of castes. Ambedkar's statement that 'if Lenin had been born in India he would not have let the thought of revolution brush his mind before annihilating castes', bears significance in this context. (Ref)

While the new found consciousness and strength impelled the Shudras and Dalits to articulate their protest against caste exploitation, the early communists consistently denigrated them as spreading "bitterness between the Hindus of different castes" or simply wished them away as mere reformism or instigation by the colonialists.¹ For them, it was not the caste-based social discrimination but only economic deprivation, which determined in a major way the fate of a person in Indian society. India for them was already a capitalist country and castes therefore were just the inconsequential vestiges. M. N. Roy, the doyen of early Communism, in his *India in Transition*, the first Marxism study in the world of the changes in a colonial country under imperialist subjugation, had dogmatically asserted that India, like European societies, crossed the feudal stage. Interestingly, while this was being written the Bolsheviks considered that "the predominating social factor in contemporary India" was feudalism.²

Sripad Amrit Dange, another Marxist thinker and the long time leader of the Communist movement was particularly important because he represented Marxist in Maharashtra to the emerging Dalit movement under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. While the Dalit movement targeted Hindu scriptures as the enemy text, Dange was busy finding Marx in them. He had declared that "the *Geeta* supports Marx's Economic Determinism",³ Dange had no qualms in justifying his opinion that the caste system grew out of social necessity and that the *Geeta*-view on *Varnashram* system perfectly matched with Marx's theory of economic determination. When by the early 20s the Non-Brahmin Movement assumed a militant turn particularly in Maharashtra and Madras, and attacked Brahminism, Dange,

cutup with these attacks had stated that the civil war in Hindu society would affect the tactics of war on the common foreign enemy with which the Non-Brahmin Party sided, showing many times its unpatriotic and narrow-visioned outlook.⁴ Denying even their democratizing import, he found that the petty bourgeois elements in the Non-Brahmin classes were carrying on a selfish struggle. He even suspected the integrity of the non-Brahmin leaders. He wrote, “The rights of worship in temples, the monopoly of ceremonial rights, etc. of the Brahmins are questioned sometimes not from a spirit of democratizing, abolishing or communalizing those institutions, but from the petty non-Brahmin bourgeois to have a share in their gains.”⁵ Dange’s simplistic view of the caste problem represents the official viewpoint of the then communists when he said that the Brahmin versus Non-Brahmin struggle would vanish creating a situation for the struggle against God capital by the proletarians.⁶ Historically, speaking, he represented the first Marxist analysis of the Non-Brahmin movement. Unfortunately, it was suffused with a tone of condemnation for the non-Brahmin movement. Dange repeatedly dismissed the need for anti-caste struggle. Occasionally, his concern for his caste also spilled over his statements when, for instance, he accused the Non-Brahmin movement in Madras and Maharashtra stating that “it was directed against the chief political and intellectual leaders, who are Brahmins.”⁷

It took Dange four decades to realize that despite the levelling influences of capitalist production and particularly the factory and town life, “feudal ideology of caste and hierarchy are very strong among workers.”⁸ It is a different matter that he did not feel necessary to do something about it beyond acknowledging the fact. On the contrary, when he expressed such an opinion as the CPI and AITUC chief in December 1963, he still retained the earlier frame of seeing caste in the superstructure along. He never even considered the need for launching a simple campaign against caste ideology on the working class front. Besides reflecting the upper caste disdain for the lower castes, Dange kept on brahmanically chanted the Marxist *pothi* that the machines in the British period took away the technical base of the caste system and since then it was the caste ideology that alone continued to exist.

Despite the life long career of leadership of the communist movement, Dange displayed that he stayed a Brahmin at the core when he wrote an introduction” to the book *The Universe of Vedanta* written by Bani Deshpande, his son-in-law, favouring the Vedanta philosophy.⁹ It had raised a storm in the CPI circle but unrepentant Dange, stuck to his ground and defended Deshpande’s favourable view on Vedanta philosophy.¹⁰ Dange showed that the life long practice of Marxism and Leninism could not really erase the influence of Tilak, who represented Brahmanic conservatism in those days. Tilak, his political mentor in early life, wrote his famous *Gita Rahasya*. As Sharad Patil writes, *Geeta Rahasya* had “become the official philosophy of the Indian bourgeois who had reached ‘a historical compromise’ with landlordism right from the time of Phule and which continued even after independence”.¹¹ Dange just represented Marxists from upper caste background who carried political influence of Tilak that political reform should have priority over social reforms. In Marxist terms this dictum was translated to mean

that a proletarian revolution would solve the problem of untouchability and caste inequality and there was no need to struggle for them especially.

Such was the apathetic, at times antagonistic attitude of the communist movement that the Dalit movement confronted right from its inception. At the theoretical level the communist movement did not have anything to offer to the dalit movement except for the dogma that all its problems would vanish after the proletarian revolution. It implied that dalits should bear with their oppression until then. It spoke about the need to fight British imperialism but did not even utter a word against the Hindu imperialism that has been oppressing dalits for centuries; on the contrary, it dismissed it as a non-issue. In the perspective of the dalit movement, British imperialism though not benign, had catalyzed its birth and Hindu imperialism as the custodian of caste system was the targeted enemy. The entire theoretical cliché of the Indian Marxists therefore smacked of brahminist intrigue that had cheated them into enduring their suffering by dangling a carrot of better status in the next birth and now by projecting a utopia where all their woes would vanish. Indeed, the leaders of communist movement openly displayed their sympathies with the Hindu scriptures, which were considered by dalits as the source of their oppression. They did not appear any different from the brahminist conservative leaders who opposed their movement. Not only the communist movement did not sympathize with its cause but it also ridiculed its leaders and called them stooges of British imperialism. Whether, it was a separate electorate issue dear to dalit heart or the annihilation of castes, the communist stand cohered with the Congress party, particularly Gandhi, whom the dalit movement considered an adversary. Thus, the communist movement, far from befriending the dalit movement, had repelled it in every possible manner.

Even then, the Dalit movement under Ambedkar tried to make common cause and joined the historic strike of 1938 against the Industrial Dispute Bill introduced in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. Much is said about Ambedkar's anti-communism but what is forgotten is that the communist he opposed was not far different from Brahmanism and anti-dalit. While opposing the textile strike called by the communists in 1929, he is reported to have said that he was a confirmed enemy of the communists, who exploited the labourers for their political end.¹² Similarly, the stereotype that Ambedkar sided with British imperialism and opposed the nationalist forces represented by the Indian National Congress could be exploded by a single instance. Impressed by his role in the 1938-strike Swamy Sahajanand, the peasant leader from UP persuaded him to join the Congress to form a united front against imperialism, Ambedkar had replied that he would be glad to liquidate the ILP (Independent Labour Party) and join the Congress Party if the Congress decided to fight imperialism but he said that the Congress was using the constitutional machinery to advance the interests of the capitalists and other vested interests by sacrificing the interest of peasants and workers, and therefore he could not join such an organisation.¹³ One does not need to defend Ambedkar but one could still observe that if he turned hostile to communists, the latter were to be blamed more than he himself.

Historically speaking, the Indian communists took inspiration from the Russian revolution, supposedly led by the working class and therefore completely relied upon the

industrial workers. The Marxists never had any analysis of the Indian society identifying its specific features. The vast peasant masses in rural areas remained totally ignored in the early writings and practices of the Indian Marxists. This basic weakness of turning a blind eye to the peasants continued through the 1930s, and so Indian Marxists did not have to stumble over village India with caste and all its associated socio-economic and cultural features. In many of their documents one finds all kinds of problems are enumerated except that of cast.¹⁴ All the reports of various provincial peasant organizations, trade unions and the CPI CC carried nothing on caste question or on the problems of the untouchables in our society. In Merut conspiracy case, a detailed programme of communist movement was presented but even there was no mention of caste.¹⁵ Later, when such a mentioned began occurring, it was just to whip the leaders of the anti-caste movements. Not only did it not have any programme to combat caste, but also any organizational prescription to sensitize its own members about this social evil. It continued to reiterate the same mechanical understanding that caste was just a superstructural matter, which would automatically go away when the base is transformed through revolution. Even the Chinese Party had called upon the Indian communists to enter and take charge of all these democratic movements....and “struggle against the caste system....”¹⁶, but the Indian communists stuck to their dogma and did not pay any heed.

Many of the top ranking leaders of the communist movement particularly from South, such as E. M. S. Namboodripad, A. K. Gopalan, P. Sundaraya, Ravi Narayana Reddy had their socio-political upbringing in caste related activities. However, after coming to the communist movement they never uttered any concern about the caste issue. It is an irony of the Marxist practice in India that the vigour and initiative of these leaders against caste got completely submerged under the dogmatic adherence to the stereotype understanding of Marxism. Singaravelu in Tamilnadu was perhaps the only exception of this trend. He had earlier joined the Self-respect movement of Periyar and fought for abolition of the caste system, for a scientific temper among the masses and liberation of women from age-old slavery; and in 1932, was instrumental in floating a new political party called the Self-respect Socialist Party. He was far ahead of the then CPI theoreticians. In his ‘Socialism Explained’ he wrote, “In western countries, only economic disparity among people exists. However, in India three evils persist. They are economic, religious and caste distinctions. These three evils are very specific to India only. So, in India it is not enough to end only economic disparities. In India with the end of economic exploitation, religious and caste differences also have to go.” He also noted that “...most of the rich are high cast people and most of the poor are low caste people. So, even if economic differences are settled in a way caste and religious differences will not die. With the existence of those two evil social contradictions, unity among workers and victory over-capital will be impossible.”¹⁷ Singaravelu had also championed the question of reservation for the depressed classes; clearly dismissing the view that such reservations were against the spirit of nationalism.¹⁸ From the above one finds that as early as in the 1930s such a towering personality as he was, Singaravelu toyed with the idea of integrating the Marxian view with a definite anti-caste programme.

3. Classes among Dalits

The caste situation was not much complicated in class terms even at the time of independence. During the colonial times sections of dalits had significantly benefited from the entry into military service and education; job opportunities that opened up on account of infrastructure that had to be created for colonial exploitation and in the industries that came thereafter in many urban sectors; and myriad opportunities that arose along with increasing urbanization. Although, this section had transited from dalit masses in class terms in so far as they were detached from the rural economy, it was still a tiny section, still dependent socially upon the masses and hence could not come up as a class. As discussed before, these people became the harbingers and pioneers of the dalit movement which was hugely supported by dalit masses. Barring this tiny section of the upwardly mobile dalits, there was not much economic differentiation among Dalits. Occupationally, huge majority of them were landless labourers; some were marginal farmers and artisans engaged with their caste vocations in rural areas. In towns and cities, they constituted casual hands and lower rungs of workmen cadre in industrial units, providers of menial services such as scavenging and cleaning in municipalities and certain institutions; and many miscellaneous jobs. Most of them came under the lowly paid unorganised sector. While the urban and rural dalits differed in terms of the form and intensity of caste oppression, earnings and life style, they were still not separated from each other. The urban dalits were just an extension of the rural household and so was much of the urban setting at the lower levels. The caste structure in villages was actually reproduced in the urban areas to all possible extent.

The transfer of power in 1947 to the class alliance of bourgeoisie and feudal lords unleashed new political dynamics. In order to consolidate their hold on political power the ruling classes had incorporated a federal structure which was extendible to local self government in the Constitution that enabled them to build a lasting political nexus in an institutional manner. This arrangement expanded the political and bureaucratic class many fold, and with the mechanism of reservations in favour of dalits (and Adivasis), it resulted in similar expansion of these classes among the Dalits too. The bourgeoisie had also decided upon an economic model of mixed economy with the commanding role assigned to public sector in the capital intensive areas of infrastructure. It did not want to invest its own money in these long gestation, high risk and low return projects and instead wanted to piggyback the public investment to build their capitalist empire. The fallout of this policy has been in terms of huge expansion of the public sector and consequently significant employment coming to the share of dalits through reservations.

Initially most of these jobs, whether in governmental sector or in public sector were at the lowest rung, and hence it could not catapult their holders beyond the working class. However, with the spread of education, the dalits started slowly occupying upper rung jobs in Class B and even the senior Class A. These classes, by virtue of their detachment from their setting and production relations (supervisory job on behalf of the owner or administrative / quasi-administrative jobs on behalf of the state) do represent a transition in class. There has even emerged a section of dalit bourgeois, relatively small though, in the form of contractors, small scale industrialists, petrol pump owners, transporters, and

of late certain service vendors. This is a direct outgrowth of the expansion of political and petty bourgeoisie classes through whom the largess of state gets allocated. There also emerged a sizable class of professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. which further reinforced the dalit petty bourgeois class. Lately, there has been a significant output of the second and third generation of dalits (generation refers to the educated dalits who came out of rural economy), many of whom being trained in management or certain frontier technologies are employed in upcoming private sector companies or MNCs/TNCs and even abroad earning dollar salaries. They mark the emergence of a new age prototype of dalit petty bourgeois that reflects a weird combination of belief in neo-liberal ideology, faith in identity politics, and communitarian convictions.

This class reflects a new life style, new lingo, new modes of thinking and new obsessions. Many of the second and third generations of dalits do not have any interface with a typical village dalit. Their relationship is confined to those of their kith and kin, most of whom belong to their own class. The ones left behind in villages are naturally forgotten. It is the development dilemma which is difficult to avoid for any dalit. The process of development of community through advancement of individuals eventually emasculates the community. These individuals constitute a class that drifts away from the masses whose investment they represent. This class, the middle strata between the poor (proletariat) and wealthy (bourgeois) typically vacillates between the two and thus displays instability, unreliability and opportunism. In Marxian terminology it is referred to as petty bourgeois which by virtue of its numbers and inclination to ally with bourgeoisie, is considered as the main plank of bourgeois rule. While it could also be an ally of proletariat in certain circumstances, in normal times, it displays characteristics that are inimical to it. It is not surprising therefore that this class of dalit petty bourgeois is seen these days enamoured with the idealist persuasion represented by Vipashyana, which considers mind as the centre and preaches the need to discipline it. Notwithstanding the fact that Anbedkar had specifically rejected such idealist and occult notions that were associated with Buddhism and tried to project it as a better alternative than that of Marxism, and had never even mentioned Vipassyana in any of his writings and speeches including his gospel – *Buddha and His Dhamma*, they claim that it is the essence of Buddhism. Their class blinds them to see a simple reason that for the scores of dalits the mental discipline is not going to assuage their hunger. Vipashyaya pacifies the practitioner and teaches him to take world as it is or in other words, allow the exploiters to carry on unhindered; what is needed by dalits is just reverse.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this class or the process of its making. Contrary to commonplace impressions, it is always this class that has given the path breaking ideas and the most uncompromising revolutionaries. It prides on its success in uplifting itself from the state of nothingness and aspires to have more of it. This leads it to emulate bourgeoisie and be its ally. At any point, this class as the balancing force is relied upon by the rulers. It is therefore that Lenin had said that “Without winning over a significant section of the middle strata, or neutralizing it; without breaking its alliance with the big bourgeoisie, there can be no question of a victorious, communist revolution”¹⁹ (ref). In absence of such conscious efforts, it tends to follow the ruling class line and demonstrate

itself as its ally. Characteristically, it would adore ones who are successful and would not care to look back to those who failed. In the present context, it is this class, which is the biggest supporter of neoliberal globalizations, the creed that valorizes unbridled competition and celebrates success. It is this class, which believes that it is suicidal to oppose globalization; makes virtue of worshiping the powerful and denigrating weak and their struggle. However, this is not its enduring feature. If it sees that its interests are better served otherwise, it could easily turn around and behave entirely differently. It is the ideology and the temporal circumstances that decide which way this class would lean. Today the behaviour of this class is totally abominable; pro-ruling class and anti-dalit (although it would never acknowledge it). Its nuisance is amplified by the fact that it assumes on the non-economic issues in the oppression of dalits had reflected since beginning some amount of petty bourgeois orientation. However, it may have to be said to its credit that it had simultaneously taken up issues concerning the common masses such as their civil rights for accessing public amenities and even the redistribution of land. However, in course of time, perhaps in proportion to the strength of this class, its focus has completely shifted from the masses to the panacea of political power through electoral intrigues. It has successfully induced this electoral mania into masses and deviated into their politics away from their material concerns.

While class analysis is vital to comprehend various forces involved in societal dynamics, one needs to bear in mind that classes in India have not been able to completely cast off caste colours. While it is true that petty bourgeois and bourgeois-like classes have emerged among dalits, in terms of their relations of production and their social distance from the masses, these classes could not establish similar relations with their class peers across the castes. In India class operates within the caste cocoon which makes the plight of the upper classes among dalits somewhat pathetic. Howsoever highly placed a dalit may be he still stays a dalit in social context. He may be respected by virtue of his position but he is just tolerated in social intercourse. Howsoever, competent a dalit may be, he would always be met with a suspicion. He may even be admired for his intelligence, competence or any such attribute but it still does not gain him caste-neutrality in social matters. Social relationships across castes get tenuous in India; they tend to be very minimalist in the case of dalits. In sum, dalit petty bourgeois, unlike its classical counterpart does not become an integral part of petty bourgeois class in the country. It is therefore that dalit petty bourgeois has to recoil to his own community to seek social shelter for himself. One may argue that this happens across other castes and communities too and there is nothing special about dalits. Unfortunately, such an argument smacks of ignorance of how castes operate today. It is true that classes do not dissolve all identities and that people within a class naturally tend to flock according to these trans-class identities. However, this exercise of flocking together is by volition; there is no extraneous constraint to thwart it or make it happen otherwise. A bureaucrat from Bihar or Andhra may naturally seek Bihari or Telugu bureaucrat to relate with along their own caste identity, if they could help, but across most castes including the BCs. But, they will not easily accept a dalit bureaucrat even from their own region. The avoidance is mostly unconscious and its expression is subtle and nuanced. It may not be visible, it may defy narrative; but nevertheless dalits know it is all pervading.

This subtle exclusion has led dalit petty bourgeois to create its respective cocoons within their caste. The dalit bureaucrats and similarly placed people would have their get-togethers and other would have theirs. Of course, they are differentiated according to perceived statuses of people. The SC/ST associations in every PSU, professional associations of engineers, (like Babasaheb Ambedkar National Association of Engineers), doctors (like Dr. Ambedkar Medicos Association), and various cultural associations are the other manifestation of the same phenomenon. Each of these is based on the rationale that their general counterpart does not serve them well. Although these people have transited their class and are so perceived by their own community, they still find themselves nowhere. They continue to suffer discrimination in terms of placements – mostly unimportant postings at unwanted places coming to their share; promotions – at relatively higher levels there being no protection, the supersession of dalits is rampantly practiced in the name of merit; and in numerous other ways. Unless they toe the line of their superiors, they could be simply miserable in their organizations. Contrary to commonplace perceptions, the lives of the dalit petty bourgeois are no better than an average dalit in terms of caste oppression. Whereas a common dalit faces a crude form of it, the dalit petty bourgeois suffers it subtly and in a sophisticated manner. Whatever difference, it is due to their respective settings. The former swallows it because he just cannot resist and the latter does it because he cannot afford it. The dalit petty bourgeois thus faces an awkward situation; his aspirations drive him away from the community and closer to the upper classes but the caste reality tends to push him down from there to nowhere.

4. Communists and Castes

Over the eight decades after its identifiable lunch in the country, the communist movement appears no better than the dalit movement. It has undergone organizational fragmentation quite like the dalit movement; the major factions having taken to parliamentary path whereas the new fragments calling themselves as Marxists-Leninists or Maoists taking a ‘revolutionary path’. The parliamentary parties have inevitably got into the electoral vortex created by the ruling class parties and over the time lost their agenda of revolution. Soon after taking the parliamentary path, the communists were catapulted to power, forming the world’s first elected communist party government in the state of Kerala, which however could not survive for long in opposition to the bourgeois-landlord state at the center. Later, it captured power in its couple of bastions and created a distinction for itself as the longest living ruling party in one of the States (West Bengal). Obviously, the parliamentary communists have learnt a lesson to survive but in the bargain have lost their identity as a party for revolution. In the lure of power, they have ignored other lessons that experience held forth. The ideological degeneration it represented could be likened to the dalit parties, which compromised their goals running after the mirage of political power. The revolutionary parties that came up in reaction to achieve dialectical unity of theory and practice but others trying to stuff selective data into their preconceived frameworks and living in the world of make believe.

With regard to caste, there does not seem to be much clarity although there is a general recognition that the caste is an issue that needs to be consciously tackled. This has occasioned mainly by three factors: one, there is a tacit pressure exerted from the dalit cadres who constitute almost a majority to have a stand on caste, two, it is a result of the process of genuine reflection and learning from the past and three, there is a competitive pressure on these parties to distinguish themselves (particularly in Andhra Pradesh, the rise of a dalit outfit becoming a significant attraction to the ML cadre made the ML parties to take note of caste issue). However, this recognition smacks of reluctance to grant it due importance and a puritanical adherence to certain position held in the past. Caste therefore is projected as an issue among many, such as gender, nationality, communalism, and so on. It is still not recognized as the key issue in articulating successful class struggle. In any society there would be numerous issues representing as many contradictions but at a given stage only a single issue corresponding to principle contradiction dominates and needs to be resolved. Caste is such an issue but that realization is still not reflected in the understanding of any party.

On the positive side, the understanding can be said to be evolving. The ‘Strategy and Tactics’ document adopted by the All India Special Conference of the People’s War on 15-30 November, 1995 virtually announced that it was up against mighty odds encountering the prevalence of such a system. It articulated this situation saying that “caste is a peculiar problem in India; and appropriate forms of organisation and struggle should be evolved vigorously to fight out untouchability, caste-discrimination and to finally root out the caste system.”²⁰ A 52 page booklet entitled, “Caste question in India – our perspective” issued in the end of 1996, inter alia stated, “The caste system is one of the special problems of the Indian Democratic Revolution. Linked to the specific nature of the evolution of the Indian society, it has been one of the most important means of exploitation and oppression of the labouring masses, from the ancient to the modern period. For the ruling classes in India, the caste system serves both as an ideology as well as a social system that enables them to repress and exploit the majority of tillers....”²¹

This document undoubtedly signifies a qualitative milestone in the evolution of understanding on caste. It had noted the stark reality of the rural India that “The poor and landless who consist of 60% of the rural household have the greatest number of caste divisions, including a large number of small artisan and service castes and even Muslims. This class consists also of a large number of households from the Dalits and Adivasis, 37% of agricultural labour families are Dalits and 10% are Adivasis and the remaining half are drawn from the cultivating castes and artisan castes. Hence, caste divisions among the exploited are the **Maximum...**”²² [stress in original]. Recognition of this caste stratified village poor was, in a sense, a forthright critique of the decades-old Marxist understanding of the poorest sections in India as a homogenous class. Once it is accepted that caste divisions are maximum among them, it becomes imperative to launch a running battle against casteism, which hinders real unity of the vast exploited sections in India.

The analysis, when it deals with the dalit movement tends to become problematic insofar as it assesses it within its own framework and does not attempt to see it from dalit

perspective. As it observes, Ambedkar's ideology was 'opposed to Marxism', the march of the dalit movement along that ideology is bound to deviate from the one based on Marxism. While assessing the past, one should be concerned with the end result and not the processes with which they have been achieved. The ideologies therefore are like the means to an end; not an end themselves. The importance of ideology comes in terms of sustenance of those results. The wrong ideology could produce immediate results, seemingly positive, but in long term, they may either be unsustainable or may turn grossly counterproductive. The remedy lies in not blaming ideologies that worked at some historical moment but constantly reinventing them to be in tune with the facts we encounter. From such a perspective, whatever the dalit movement and the leadership of Ambedkar accomplished for dalits could be seen in positive light. The fact remains that for whatever reasons 'Marxism' could not work in those circumstances. It however does not mean that one should persist with the same ideological framework in the changed circumstances. Only in this context, the evaluation of ideologies becomes a fruitful exercise. There is an oft-repeated complaint from dalit circles against the communist parties that they make use of dalits as cannon fodder and do not give them leadership positions. The examples abound in the case of parliamentary parties in terms of lack of representations given to dalits in their power structure under the alibi that they do not follow castes. It is also repeated in the case of ML parties because in their case dalits constituting the cadre are really exposed to the enemy cannon in their mode of 'armed struggle'. This has normally been a casual subterfuge against communists by the petty bourgeois elements but it gained in seriousness when the one time general secretary of the central committee of a powerful ML party belonging to dalit community reiterated it. In one sense, there is nothing to deny or substantiate such accusations because they are mere manifestations of caste consciousness in the caste society on both sides – dalits as well as non-dalits. The validity of the complaint can only be assessed by the conduct of a complainant. If the complainant has persistent commitment to revolution, it automatically deserves attention; if not, it becomes suspect. Even though a revolutionary party cannot be expected to run on caste line, it could still incorporate measures to prepare dalit cadres for taking up leadership positions, not as a caste or class bias but to orient its politics along the interests of true proletariat.

5. Perspectives for Dalit Emancipation

Emancipation of dalits is spoken about in generic term but actually there are several perspectives for dalit emancipation among dalits themselves. Dalit emancipation however needs to be made clear. It must mean primarily liberation of dalit masses from the oppressive caste system and providing them access to all avenues for their overall development as human beings. With this minimalist meaning of dalit emancipation we can examine some familiar perspectives as below:

I. Religious Conversion

Dalits find that castes are the biggest hurdle and if they are annihilated, other things (economic, cultural, political, etc.) would follow. This perspective is based on a specific understanding of caste, as a religious institution, that could be isolated from all other aspects. It therefore envisaged quitting Hindu religion and embracing different faith. This is reflected as one of the main components of Ambedkar's diagnosis which is upheld by a

large number of his followers in exclusion of his ultimate vision of establishing a society based on ‘liberty, equality, and fraternity’. Those who uphold Ambedkarian aspiration that he would make entire India a Buddhist country, represented by Buddhist Society of India, share this perspective.

II. Be a Ruling Tribe

This perspective also picks up one of Ambedkar’s dictums issued in the later part of his life in order to emphasize the importance of political power. He left that early agitational programme directed to influence the Hindus to undertake reform in Hinduism so as to ensure civil rights to dalits. After realizing the futility of it, he plunged into the political fray unleashed by the announcement of colonial rulers to share political power with natives. Ambedkar’s exhortation in the context of his oft-repeatedly pronounced vision can only be equated with Marxist dictum of ‘proletariat state power’ but it was taken by a section of his followers in literal terms to mean ‘turn the tables against Brahmins’. BSP, Bamcef and all the bahujan based formations of their ilk share this perspective.

III. Emancipation through Individual Progress

It is based on the emancipatory measures brought about by the Ambedkarian movement to uplift the dalit community. They are basically represented by ‘reservations’. Though caste based they basically benefit individuals. They are premised on the assumption that if a dalit individual benefits, his family benefits and if many families benefit, it will lead to emancipation of the entire community. This has been the popular perspective of the increasing numbers of dalit petty bourgeois that has experienced the fruits of this process. In the era of neoliberalism, that has raised individualism to canonical levels, the dalit petty bourgeois is emboldened to proclaim his support to its manifestation – globalization. He justifies it under the plea that globalization opens up opportunity for dalits across the globe, which they should grab to accomplish their emancipation. They believe that globalisation will slowly annihilate castes.

IV. Minimalist Pragmatism

It is based on the pragmatic conviction that no radical change is possible in the Hindu society and hence instead of squandering energy over ideological issues, dalits should concentrate on making small gains so as to make their lives livable. It includes rejection of any big bang change advocated by the Marxists in their theories of revolution and embeds more cynical argument that even if such a revolution was possible why should dalits pay for it. It reflects missing strategy for tactics and includes most measures implemented with a view to better the lives of dalits. This perspective takes into account the existential aspects and tries to address them without any ideological aspirations. The measures proposed in the Bhopal Declaration may exemplify this perspective.

V. Revolutionary solution

It is based on the understanding that caste is an integral part of the base as well as superstructure and hence can only be annihilated through a democratic revolution. It is only through a revolution that the caste based production relations can be radically transformed and its associated ideological and cultural super structure can be destroyed.

No amount of piecemeal approach is going to emancipate dalits. This perspective may be identified with the Marxist Left but unfortunately none of the parties in practice fully shares it.

If one looks at these perspectives dispassionately, one would observe that none is feasible with the current mode of practice among dalits, which may be characterized as independent, autonomous, with 'caste for itself' – type of orientation. It is virtually detached from the rest of the society. It has created its own world which has extremely tenuous interface, if at all, with the world it is situated in, excepting of course, material aspects of the relations of production and consumption. It sells its labour to and buys the finished products from the other world; which means that it contends with the latter in material terms. However, this contention is not at all reflected in the world it has created for itself. In absence of this materiality, the world of dalits can only be called a virtual world. This world comprises the ideology, language, cultural artefacts and behavioural norms, etc., supposedly in protest against those of Brahmanic Hinduism identified as the oppressor-creed. Without correspondingly relating with the material aspects of this oppression, this virtual world could not really maintain its separate identity. Sadly, in absence of any alternative vision of the material reality and consequently an alternate model to fortify its conduct, his dalit rebellion could not be sustained; and it had inevitably to fall back on the very same reference model of Hinduism which it purportedly hated. The entire cultural paradigm that dalits sought to create not only as mere alternative to but also as an antagonistic force against Hinduism, sadly can be seen following the very same Hindu, or worst, Brahminic framework. Even Buddhism which is labouriously constructed by Ambedkar as a radical and modernist alternative to Hinduism, has lost its progressive sheen and appears practically patterned on the Hindu cultural norms, shockingly with a lag in time. The Pali mangal gathas in place of the Hindu mangalshtakas in marriages, long unintelligible prayers by monks or dhammacharyas rivaling the Sanskrit mantras by Brahmin priests, the Buddhist rituals for every occasion in place of old ones, the viharas in place of temples, vipashyana in place of yoga, Bhikkus in place of Hindu sadhus; practically everything appears to be confirming to Hindu cultural framework with superficial distinction.

Take for instance the perspective of dalit emancipation through religious conversion. It is supposed that castes are the product of Hindu religion and if one quits the Hindu fold and adopts different religion, one would get emancipated. It is surprising that despite the contrary evidence in the case of history's grandest conversion (Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism), this perspective is still considered seriously by dalits. The aftermath of dalits in Maharashtra and elsewhere converting to Buddhism shows that caste does not care for religion; it is part of the production relations and pervades culture. Whatever dalits have come out of the caste-based production relations, they have escaped caste oppression, irrespective of whether they were converted or not. Of course, they were still affected in the cultural realm; the conversion only helping to weaken it. Even if the entire dalit population had converted to Buddhism it would not have made much difference to caste operations except for the impact of dalit unity indicated by their collective resolve.

Notwithstanding the value premise of the proposition to turn the table against the Brahmins as understood by many dalits, the feasibility of dalits as a caste group becoming rulers is inconceivable because integration of castes, even though they all may belong to dalits, into a cohesive fighting force would essentially contradict the essence of caste. It is only as a class that they could come together. Ever since BSP captured the state power in UP, dalits do not doubt the feasibility of this dictum. The BSP formula indeed could catapult a dalit to the highest seat of state power but would it mean dalits capturing power or will such a state become therefore a dalit state. The answer to these questions will have to be in negative. The confusion about these issues crops up entirely because of the usage of the caste idiom. If we look at it from class viewpoint, we would clearly observe that there is nothing 'dalit' in the BSP's manoeuvre for power. Those who envisage dalit emancipation through individual progress distort the conceptual frame of emancipation itself. Individual progress can help immediate family, not even the extended family. Far from helping the community, individual program breaks the community. If all dalit individuals are capable of making progress on their own, which is envisaged in this proposition, indeed there is no need for a community. This perspective thus fundamentally contradicts the premise that dalits as community needs emancipation. Similarly, minimalist pragmatism, which rather underscores the approach followed by the dalit movement so far, may achieve certain results but there is no inherent assurance about consistent success that would lead to community emancipation. Pragmatism is prone to degenerate into unprincipled opportunism which is an anti-thesis of the very concept of community emancipation. The cynicism that there is no underlying logic in history is not only wrong but also anti-dalit and anti-Ambedkar. The conception of dalit emancipation relies on the logic in history; in absence of the latter there shall be no hope of any emancipation.

That brings us to the perspective that envisages a democratic revolution to smash the entire gamut of production relations and superstructure grown around them, which are homomorphous with castes. This revolution however cannot be brought about by dalits alone; least using the caste identity. They may have to pay attention to this stark reality and develop class consciousness to consolidate as well as to link themselves with other democratic forces. This however is easier said than done. The historical rift between the Left movement that aimed at such a revolution and the dalit movement that focused on their emancipation need to be overcome. If both these movements work with clear understanding, this divide can be dissolved.

6. Communist Perspective for Revolution

The dominant perspective among the revolutionary communists characterizes the country as semi-feudal and semi-colonial and therefore the current phase of revolution as neo-democratic revolution. The principle contradiction of this phase is considered to be feudalism and imperialism versus people. The task of democratic revolution is to resolve this contradiction and free the people from the yokes of feudalism and imperialism. Whatever the specific strategies, they essentially envisage broad alliance of working people comprising landless labourers, peasants, artisans, workers, national bourgeois, petty bourgeois, youth, and other patriotic sections of population under the leadership of

the working class. According to the communists, the new democratic revolution will have socialistic perspective which means that while freeing the country from imperialist domination and feudal oppression; it will largely usher in socializing the means of production. The democratic revolution will also demolish the caste structure of the society as a part of the feudal apparatus and lead to freeing dalits as free labour. The next stage of socialist revolution will be the extension of this revolution where the balance means of production will be socialized.

While typically various classes are enumerated in the broad class alliance against imperialism and feudalism in this formulation, the people who could constitute the core of this alliance are the ones who are in intense contradiction with these exploiting forces. A large part of them undoubtedly are dalits. In a dogmatic fixation, the communists considered industrial workers as proletariat and hoped they would be the vanguards of the revolution, oblivious of the fact that the industrial workers in the organized sector were not the proletariat but the envied lot not only by other poor people but even by the rural rich. Many of them did actually come from far well to do backgrounds. Moreover, they do not number even today equal to the industrial workers in Russia during the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. If one takes into account the amount of attention Lenin paid to the Russian peasantry, the ignorance of Indian peasantry by the Indian communists could only be said as criminal. Later, Chinese revolution showed the way how in an industrially backward country, the democratic revolution could be accomplished.

The relevant classes for the ensuing revolution of the communists in India shall thus largely comprise the landless labourers and the poor peasants. Dalits, constitute a large part of this rural mass of people. If one analyses in caste terms, the balance castes, although they belong to the same class as dalits, would find it difficult to delink from their caste fellows who may constitute different and even adversary class. In normal terms, caste consciousness is found to be far stronger and mutable than class consciousness. In order to transform them as a reliable ally in the revolution, it is imperative either to weaken their caste consciousness or strengthen the class consciousness. In any case unless the hold of castes is loosened, they will not easily ally with the dalits as fellow strugglers. Dalits too have castes among them but being on the same side of caste divide, they could be relatively easily overcome. Dalits, besides being natural proletariat, as Marx called them (?) are thus a reliable mass for any revolutionary project. Because of the historical rift created by the early communists between the dalit and communist movements, the dalits have not joined the revolutionary forces in large numbers. It certainly constitutes one of the major reasons for the weakness of the revolutionary forces in the country. The historical lesson is largely clear: until dalits come to shoulder revolution, the communist project will remain a distant dream in India.

7. Conclusion

It is the greatest irony of history that movements of proletariats inspired by similar goals offending their oppression and exploitation, have run parallel to each other, almost with an antagonistic attitude. As one finds through history, the early communists with such superior tools of societal analyses as Marxism had grossly erred in not using those for

analyzing Indian society and fantasizing reality to confirm to some preconceived model. The Communist movement has suffered this error dearly by missing glorious experience of revolution that befell the neighbouring Chinese party. Today it is struggling to overcome its past errors and coming to terms with the reality. One of the gravest errors of the communists has been their mishandling of the caste issue. It has come a long way from treating caste as a non-issue that would evaporate with the heat of revolution to recognizing that it is an issue that needs to be consciously tackled in course of the revolution itself. Although, it still does not reflect clarity about the critical importance caste constitutes in its revolutionary project, more so about how it would tackle it, one hopes it will soon achieve it. If the communists analyze the information available with them objectively they would certainly reach the conclusion that the dalits are a vital component of the revolutionary formation.

On the other hand, the dalit movement that sprouted and grew under the colonial regime, as an unintended consequence of the latter's strategy, was driven by petty bourgeois pragmatism to win maximum possible safeguards for dalits under the colonial arbiter. While it took favourable note of the vision of universal emancipation in Marxism, it did not find anything readily applicable to them in immediate term with which they were concerned. The practice of Marxism at the hand of contemporary communists further repelled them. Because, it did not care for their oppression and arrogantly dismissed their movement as exercise in futility and denigrated it as serving the interests of colonialists. Monopolized by Brahmin petty bourgeois, Marxism was often confronted by dalits as opposed to their interests; they took it as quasi Brahmanism. Not only they kept themselves away from it but in reaction they also drifted in opposite direction. The petty bourgeois class that arose among dalits as a result of various measures won by the dalit movement played up this historical rift and further alienated dalit masses from communism. The dalit movement, driven by these vested interests has been reduced to splinters, each seeking petty gain for itself from its class enemy. The opportunism is so deep drawn among dalits that it has completely distorted the idea of dalit emancipation. Today there are several perspectives implicit in the dalit movement, most masquerading the class interests of their proponents. Dalit emancipation, insofar as it envisages destruction of caste system ushering in a phase of economic independence of dalit masses, can never be achieved through persistence of the caste idiom. Castes can be destroyed through smashing of the feudal structure and economic independence of masses could result when the economy is unshackled from the imperialist control. The emancipation of dalits thus becomes an essential part of the democratic revolution warranting their alignment with other democratic forces.

Thus, both these movements ought to realize that their goals are entangled with each other; they cannot be accomplished by either of them on their own. Neither there can be a communist revolution without the dalits shouldering it nor there a dalit emancipation without other revolutionary forces supporting. Unfortunately, both these movements have failed to read this lesson embodied in their pathetic plight so far. It would be unrealistic to envisage them merging into one. Given their specific concerns and the historical contexts, they cannot and even should not do so. However, this perspective can help them

to correct their respective ideological positions and correspondingly reorient their practice so as to bend their parallel paths towards convergence.

What the communist movement needs to do is to take cognizance of castes, as a pervading reality across the base as well as superstructure; realize that without working for their annihilation, the requisite class consciousness could not be developed in people and work consciously towards it. The prerequisite for it however is to understand the essence of caste as it is today and to comprehend principle contradiction within its realm. The continuum of castes can only engender confused responses as they exist today all over the progressive world. One needs to see that this principal caste contradiction lies in the divide between dalit and non-dalit or savarna and avarna. If this contradiction is resolved, the rest of the caste structure will collapse on its own. It implies that the communist movement will have to reinforce dalit forces in their struggle against castes discriminations. This process alone could bring it closer to dalit movement, gain its confidence and help develop revolutionary class consciousness among people around. On the part of the dalit movement, it ought to be clear that caste can never be used as a category for emancipation project. Caste is intrinsically divisive; it tends to highlight differences among people to keep them away. Class, on the other hand tends to integrate people along their existential similarities. Even while pursuing their anti-caste agenda dalits must transcend castes so as to unite all dalits. This process can then easily extend to other democratic people who would come forward to reinforce the anti-caste struggle. The caste identity only serves to blur the identities of friends and foes. Both could come wearing the same caste label. Only the class perspective can bring in the requisite polarization of forces for effective struggle for dalit emancipation.

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Dalit Movement in Karnataka: A Historical Perspective

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Karnataka has occupied a unique place in the history of social movements of the country. In the 12th century Basaveshwara made a sincere attempt to reform the orthodox society. During his time such liberal attempts were not acceptable by the fundamentalists. But Basaveshwara's attempts were for the first time helped Dalits to go near social equality. His disciples like Madara Chenniah, Doara Kakkaiah, Holare Haralaiah could break the shackles of caste system because of Basaveshwara's initiative. However, such attempts failed to create a new movement which Basaveshwara had thought instead it created again the rigid society. Bhakti Movement in the 16th century saw some non-Brahmins particularly from Backward castes walking on the path of social reform. Bhakta Kanakadas like Basaveshwara preached his pupils through his Keerthanas which were simple but powerful weapon to reform the social system. Progressive kings like Sri. Krishnarajendra Wodiyar introduced various welfare measures to emancipate that exploited subjects. Wodiyar's rule in Karnataka produced far reaching changes by creating progressive leaders like Holiyar Gopalswamy Iyer and others. With the advent of Babasaheb on the National scene, social movements began to grow strong. Sr. Jayachamarajendra Wodiyar granted 5 acres of land at Bangalore⁺ to Babasaheb Ambedkar¹ spoke about the commitment of Wodiyars towards social justice. Encouragement given by the rulers towards Dalits in the field of education created a strong base for the emancipatory discourse. Babasaheb's visit to Dharwad and Bangalore further inspired the Dalits to seek entry into Bureaucracy and Political fields. Babasaheb's desire of separate electorate will produce real representatives of his community was nullified through Poona Pact. In Karnataka to some extent the real representatives of Dalit Community emerged within the system of Reserve Constituency. One such great leader was B. Basavalingappa who was instrumental to the raise of Dalit Movement in Karnataka.

Circumstances Leading to the Formation of Dalit Sangharsha Samiti

Babasaheb's gospel has created Dalit movements in various States. Inspired by his thoughts the Dalit movement in Karnataka began to take its shape with the formation of the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti. The venue was Mysore and the occasion was B. Basavalingappa's speech. He was a Minister in Devaraje Urs Government. This incident is popularly known as "BOOSA INCIDENCE". The Honourable Minister for Housing and Municipal Administration in the function at Mysore organized by Dr. Ambedkar Vichara Vedike and Backward Class Students forum of University of Mysore, on November 19, 1973 categorically remarked Kannada Literature as BOOSA.² To him that meant that Kannada Literature did not have proper stuff. His contention was that the students coming from exploited sections of the society should learn English. The then

Vice-Chancellor of University of Mysore- Prof. D. Javaregowda, Opposition Party leader Sri. H. D. Devegowda and others criticized the minister. But Rashtrakavi Kuvempu, Jnana Peeta Awardee Dr. U. R. Ananthamurthy former Chief Minister Sri. J. H. Patel and others supported Basavalingappa's remarks. This statement created a hue and cry throughout Karnataka in the Kannada Literary circle and Kannada activists. Schools and Colleges were indefinitely closed. Dalits started to organize bandhs in support of the minister. On December 13th, 1973 a State wide Bandh was observed. Ultimately the minister rendered his resignation on December 14th, 1973. It all happened because people failed to understand the substance of his words. Yellow brain as Kuvempu as sarcastically remarked has created Yellow journalism which took away the purpose of Basavalingappa in this incident.

The Boosa incident made some of the intellectuals rise against the monopolistic dominance of the knowledge. It created a new generation of intellectuals. Progressive mind became active giving raise to 'Bandaya Sahitya' in Kannada literature. During this period the stage was prepared to launch a powerful movement. In the beginning of 1970's some magazines like Dalita, Panchama, Andolana, Shudra and Sankramana gave a thrust to this movement. During 1974 Dalit Action Committee and Dalit Students Federation at Mysore and Kolar was started.³ Engulfed by the Basavalingappa episode a meeting was organized in the Siddhartha Students Hostel at Mysore in 1975 for giving shape to the movement. In this meeting it was decided to set up a committee to prepare a manifesto. Subsequently, a conference was arranged at Bhadravathi in December 1976. By merging various Dalit Organisations Karnataka Dalita Sangharsha Samiti came into existence in June 1977 though it was registered in the year 1974-75.* Sri. Devanoor Mahadeva, Prof. Siddalingaiah, Devaiah Harave, Prof. B. Krishnappa, K. Ramaiah Indudhara Honnapura, Manchaiah, Govindaiah and others played a very important role in this task. At the first meeting held in December 1978, Prof. B. Krishnappa was unanimously elected as the State Convener.⁴

Objectives of the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti

The Dalita Sangharsha Samiti which has taken birth predominantly with the help of intellectuals has the following objectives.

1. To believe in Constitutional Agitation and Non-violence
2. To establish casteless and classless society
3. To avoid concentration of wealth
4. Emancipation of Dalits from cultural, social and economic inequalities
5. To oppose communalism
6. To establish a just society based on liberty, equality and fraternity
7. To carry out self respect movement
8. To respect the dignity of women
9. To work for the cause of labour

Structure of Dalita Sangharsha Samiti

In order to fulfill its objectives the samiti has the following structure

1. STATE COMMITTEE

Convener Organising Conveners Treasurer

2. DIVISIONAL COMMITTEE

Convener Organising Conveners Treasurer

3. DISTRICT COMMITTEE

Convener Organising Conveners Treasurer

4. TOWN COMMITTEE

Convener Organising Conveners Treasurer

5. TALUK COMMITTEE

Convener Organising Conveners Treasurer

6. HOBLI COMMITTEE

Convener Organising Conveners Treasurer

7. GROUP PANCHAYAT COMMITTEE

Convener Organising Conveners Treasurer

8. VILLAGE COMMITTEE

Convener Organising Conveners Treasurer

Executive Committee at State Level controls the affairs of the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti.

Sister Organisations of the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti

To give a broad outlook, the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti has sister organizations. They are:

- a) Dalit Students Federation
- b) Dalit Women Federation
- c) Dalit Employees' Federation
- d) Dalit Kala Mandali
- e) Dalit Writers and Artists Federation
- f) Municipal and leather workers organization

Land Struggles of Dalita Sangharsha Samiti

Land is a prime factor for individuals particularly for the downtrodden. In this paper an attempt is made to study various land struggles carried out by Dalit Movement. Of all the struggles of the Samiti, I personally feel land struggle is one of the important struggles because it gives the economic strength to the voiceless people of the society who have been crushed under injustice for centuries. In this regard a brief note on the important struggles made by the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti are discussed here.

1. Sidlipura Land Struggle (1977)

Sidlipura Village is in Bhadravathi Taluk of Shimoga Dist. Mr. Bhopalam belonging to RSS group was keeping the 33 acres of irrigated land bearing survey No. 93⁵ allotted to the Dalits for himself. His contention was that he was the owner of the said land and so he could cultivate it. Dalita Sangharsha Samiti which started struggle in February 1977 and continued for one and half year until the Government issued an order to the Deputy Commissioner in June 1978 stating that “any person who acquired Inam land from the Scheduled Castes from 1975 shall restore that land to the Scheduled Castes”. Further this resulted in the passing of ‘Restrictions on Transfer of Lands Act’ by the Legislature. Under this legislation nearly 2 lakh 20 thousand acres of Inam lands were restored to the Dalits.

2. Chandagodu Land Struggle (1979)

Chandagodu is a small village in Mudigere Taluk of Chikkamagular District. In this village at survey No. 74 out of 600 acres of Bagar Hukkam Land nearly 300 acres of land was encroached by the local Dalit Community.⁶ The Dalita Sangharsha Samiti stepped into the scene and traveled to nearly 70 surrounding villages. Through ‘Janakala Mela’ it spread the message and motivated the people to get into this struggle. As a result of Dalita Sangharsha Samiti struggle, the Government sanctioned encroached land worth of Rs. 50 lakhs to 60 Dalit families at 5 acres per family. From this success one more land struggle was launched at “Kooduvalli” in the same district which was also successful.

3. Medakinala Land Struggle (1987)

Medakinala is a lingayat dominated village in Lingasagur Taluk of Raichur District. Since 1984 the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti organized the people to live in self respect. As a result the villagers encroached on the lake bed of the village. In continuation of the struggle Dalita Sangharsha Samiti conducted protest march, rally and picketing. Finally the Government sanctioned 67 acres of land to the Dalit community on July 17th, 1987.⁷ But this was not tolerated by the landlords who expelled the Dalit community from day to day social life. Dalita Sangharsha Samiti against has to come to the scene to redress such a boycott.

4. Nagasandra Land Struggle (1985)⁸

Nagasandra Village is situated in Gowribidanur Taluk of Kolar District. The dwellers of this village were poor. All the landless labourers of the neighbouring villages were motivated by the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti to encroach 600 acres of land where palm trees were cultivated for the purpose of toddy tapping. On the night of 14th August 1985 trees were chopped off. By the morning of the Independence Day of the nation the land was cleared from the palm trees. A slogan “Not toddy but food” was coined on this

occasion. This agitation was led by N. Muniswamy, Shivanna, Lakshmi pathi Kolara, Pichalli Srinivas and others. The disputed land was sanctioned to the villagers. Today the same land is converted as 'Shambuka Nagara'.

Innumerable land struggles* were carried out by Dalita Sangharsha Samiti from 1975 to 1985. Within a decade the Dalit Movement proved its success. During these struggles revolutionary songs were composed. Some of them are still popular even today. Attractive slogans were drafted. Each slogan created inspiration to the activists and posed a challenge to the authorities. Dalit Movement was successful in mobilizing the people. It acted as a pressure group and the government realized its importance. The Dalit representatives in the Legislature began to exercise their duties in a responsible manner. Non Dalits representatives were made to realize the importance of land reforms and while dealing with the problems of Dalits they were to be doubly cautious. In some cases the stay order from the court were brought by landlords. In such circumstances the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti had to work out the legal course of action and to put pressure on the government to enact proper legislation. The land struggles made by Dalita Sangharsha Samiti has brought one important truth i.e., land reforms were not properly implemented. This makes us to feel that government failed to implement the land reforms properly. Bureaucracy too should be blamed. The Dalita Sangharsha Samiti kept vigil on the district and taluka administrations. Public servants were afraid of the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti because of their powerful movement. The Dalita Sangharsha Samiti also intervened in the cases where a Dalit was exploiting the Dalits. The Dalita Sangharsha Samiti showed its strength whenever atrocities on Dalits occurred. It worked for the abolition of bonded labour, education for the poor, minimum wage, abolition of dowry, and other social evils. As a movement the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti was doing well in the first ten years. The Dalita Sangharsha Samiti was treated as a cultural organization to create socialistic awareness among the people. Training camps, cultural programmes, public meetings, seminars, workshops and symposium were arranged at village level to create awareness and to consolidate the opinion of its leaders. The Dalita Sangharsha Samiti was in a good position to react immediately wherever there was an event of exploitation and humiliation of the Dalits.

Stages of Dalit Movement

The Stages of Dalit Movement can be studied with the growth of the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti. This can be divided into three stages:

1. From 1975-85
2. From 1976-95
3. From 1996-2005

In the first stage the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti worked realistically with commitment. However during the last part of the first decade the organization witnessed the dissident activities. It may be submitted that the state conveners were divided on various issues. The organization failed to keep them united. The leaders at the fore neglected the founding fathers of this movement. The trouble started during the 1983 election. In the 1983 election a question was raised in the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti whether it has to take

a creative participation in the electoral process or whether it had to extend only external support to a political party. Much against the wishes of the District Conveners the State Committee decided to support Janata Dal. It is this decision which gave a jolt to the movement.

In the second stage the wound became deep with the expulsion of Mr. M. Venkataswamy who was the Bangalore District Convener. Mr. Venkataswamy formed his own organization in the name of 'Samatha Sainika Dala'. His expulsion was due to the misuse of Rs. 8,110/-. A one man committee was formed so as to enquire into the charges. This committee under the chairmanship of Rangaswamy Belladamadu found Venkataswamy guilty. This was when the first split occurred in 1986. A year later the second split occurred when Jiganishankar formed his Karnataka Janandolana Sanghataney followed by Nagaraju, Venkatesh and Aswath Antyaja of the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti Samyojaka, D. M. Timmarayappa of Dalita Kriya Samiti, Japet Shantappa and Manohar Prasad of Dalita Krista Okkuta, Mopanna Hadanoor and Shankrappa of Karnataka Madiga Dandora have contributed to the list of splits. Every leader wanted to keep his identity floated in his own groups, which turned to be tragic for the movement. But they argued that this number will increase and the strength of the Dalit Movement will also be increased.

In the third stage from 1996 onwards the D. G. Sagar group and the M. Jayanna group maintained their identity. This identity symbolizes the right and left categorization among Scheduled Castes. The D. G. Sagar faction had K. Narayana Swamy, N. Muniswamy, Devanur Mahadeva, Lakshminarayana and Devendra Hegade as prominent leaders. On the other hand the M. Jayanna's group had Mavalli Shankar, C. K. Mahesh, Shridhar Kaliveera, Devadas and Gurumurthy as leaders. In this stage D. G. Sagar failed to keep his group united. Lakshminarayana Nagavar, Indhudhar Honnapur, Harihara Anandaswamy, Guruprasad Keregoud came out of the Sagar faction in 2003-04. Today in Bangalore according to Indhudhar Honnapur 23 groups of Dalit Movement exist. Out of this 12 are in the name of Dalita Sangharsha Samiti. Honest leaders of the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti are under utter confusion. Political parties are hoping to bring about more splits in the movement.

The upper strata of the society wanted this to happen. The leaders were given some lucrative posts by the Janata Dal Government. It is here that the leaders became more selfish and started to sacrifice the interest of the community and the aims of the movement for lucrative posts. They should have realized what would happen to them after attaining the lucrative posts. The division of major groups into sub groups has made the District and Divisional Conveners fail to address the genuine problems. In some districts like for example in Shimoga, the District Convener Mr. Gurumurthy belonged to the Jayanna faction which is powerful. He mobilized Dalits to fight for their cause. Often the rival factions are engaged in fighting one against the other. It has reached the stage where the meetings or dharna are held with adequate police protection. The ideology of Dalita Sangharsha Samiti which is based on non-violence has to seek police protection because its leaders resort to brutal force. Today their leaders do not wish to stand face to face. Their morality and integrity has been questioned. A powerful dalit movement was

made to become weak. If a movement becomes weak, the interest of the Dalit will not be adequately safeguarded.

Recent Trends in Dalit Movement

In the age of Globalisation the interests of Dalits are to be well protected. This is possible only when the Dalit Movement becomes strong. Some leaders are of the opinion that the movement should become political movement by forging alliance with other progressive movements like Raitha Sangha. This would enable the movement to acquire political power and to make movement strong. Atleast in this direction noted literary person Sri. Devanur Mahadeva has become active. My apprehension is whether this model is workable or not. It cautions me with the words of Abraham Lincoln, "A house divided itself will not last long". The mind and heart are divided among the leaders of both Peasant and Dalit Movements. With this set of people how the political alternative of Dalit is workable? Both Dalit activists under Devanur Mahadeva and Indudhar Honnapura on one side and K. S. Puttannaiah on the other side are traveling in this model in a breakneck speed. They have announced the formation of 'Sarvodaya Karnataka Party'. To launch this party extensive tour programmes are being arranged in the month of March. This new party will take its birth on Buddha Poornima Day. The leaders are of the firm belief that this would help different factions to come together. As a first step two factions of Dalita Sangharsha Samiti and one faction of Raitha Sangha has prepared the ground work. It depends on how these leaders will be successful in organizing the Dalit Movement collectively and capture political power. BSP has already made inroads on Dalit Vote Banks. If one more addition to this vote bank is added it will give different results. It is very clear from this that the leaders of the Dalit Movement are very eager to capture political power. Some wanted to keep the movement as a cultural movement. But some are already in the citadel of power politics.

Observatory Remarks

The Dalit Movement in Karnataka created a new spirit in the minds of the exploited people. It broadened its base by supporting the Backward Classes and Minorities in their cause for justice. The Dalit Movement always upheld the dignity of women in the male dominated society. It always had the courage to voice against the injustice and was committed for the cause of humanity. It emerged strong in the districts of Bangalore, Kolar, Chitradurga, Shimoga, Hubli-Dharwad, Belgaum, Gulbarga, Mysore, Chamarajanagar and Mangalore. This movement became a weapon of social change by vigorously addressing the humiliations, indignities and atrocities heaped on Dalits. It became a vehicle of life and its spirit represented the spirit of the age. The greatness of this movement lays in its zeal and burning love for suffering humanity. This made the movement to have deep imprint in the emancipatory discourse. But in the gradual stages the leaders in the movement failed to keep the movement united and strong. It was Shri. Ramakrishna Hegde the then Chief Minister in 1983 and 1985 elections made the Dalit Movement leaders to enter power politics. The wind of Political Power polluted the movement. Hitherto the Socio cultural movement began to transform into a political movement. Some supported Janata Dal, some BSP and few Congress. By supporting different political parties the movement got divided. However, majority pulse is in favour of capturing political power. Few leaders wanted to keep Dalit Movement free from political movement. Some wanted that within the movement they have to have political

movement. They argue that they could fight for social, economic and cultural revolution side by side. In Indian polity the function of such movement is unseen. Politics is as series of compromise. The Dalit Movement has to keep this in the mind. The strength and support of the people will be different when it is transformed into political party. The main task of Dalit Movement is to bring social change by putting pressure on the state to fulfill its constitutional duties. We are living in the era of Globalisation and Coalition. It is the moral responsibility of the leaders to make the Dalit Movement capable of facing the new challenges in this era. Therefore, I personally appeal to the leaders, activists and sympathizers of Dalit Movement along with the scholars who are assembled here to debate on the following questions to make the movement strong. This would surely help this social minority to be well secured and to have a life of pleasantness.

1. Is the Dalita Sangharsha Samiti a cultural organization or a political organization?
2. If it is a political organization how do you build the Dalit Movement as a socio cultural movement?
3. If it is both a cultural and political organization, do you think that Dalit Movement can become strong?
4. What are the practical problems in bringing different factions together?
5. Don't you feel that if united the strength of the movement itself will fetch good results?

Performance of Social MemoryIn Search of Dalit Culture

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What my father has narrated

His father hand written

Narration has become untouchable

The Writing had established as a Royal King

– G. Kalyana Rao, Telugu Dalit Writer

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‘To speak is to assume culture’ – Frantz Fanon

In this paper I would like to argue that dalits have great democratic culture and their culture is not separate from their everyday life struggles. The roots of the so called cultural forms of elite groups are in dalit culture. In fact all the celebrated cultural forms of dominant castes originated from cultural forms of lower castes. They changed the method and content of the cultural forms of lower castes. Dalit culture is still alive among masses through the performance of social memory. It is not an orally recorded tradition. The grammar of these cultural forms are not written like classical art forms of Brahmanical classes, but still preserved in the collective cultural life of dalits. Though the culture of dalits is condemned or deliberately marginalized, it is asserted with the struggles of dalit liberation. In search of their culture dalits are interrogating the past. The project started with autonomous radical dalit movement. As a dalit writer Kalyana Rao pointed out, ‘we have to dig more and more to be buried’. In Telugu society this process is continuing in all the possible ways.

Introduction to culture

Culture is a useful tool in understanding social and political forms of life of any society. It is a lived social experience. Culture is neither dissociated from society nor wholly at one with it. It is always constructed from the past. Historically the term culture means many things and is a most complex word. The elite conception of culture is identified with ‘civilization’ and belongs to the spirit of enlightenment. It is a process of learning or cultivating morals and manners to be a ‘gentle man’. Culture in this sense is understood as the form of human civilization that is country to the state of ‘anarchy’ of the ‘raw and uncultivated masses’. It is generally called as ‘high culture’. Culture of this kind is identified as the high point of civilisation and the concern of the educated minority. In contrast to an aesthetic and elitist conception of culture, Raymond Williams developed an understanding that stresses the everyday lived character of culture as “a whole way of life’. For him culture is ‘arts’ and values, norms and symbolic goods of everyday life. Meanings are generated not by individuals but by collectives. The idea of culture refers to shared meanings. In this sense culture designates the entire way of life, activities, beliefs and customs of people, group or society. Raymond Williams was especially concerned

with working class experience and their active everyday life. The later studies on culture, as Foucault understood it as the signifying practices of representation and made an attempt to examine the relation of culture and power. Cultural Studies seeks to explore the forms of power, and to develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be utilized by the agents in the pursuit of change.

Culture is never static. It goes on changing with social conditions. At the same time it retains some elements of past. It is not an isolated phenomenon. It is always interrelated since different social groups are related to each other. The concept of culture internalized within itself the questions of 'freedom and determination', 'agency and endurance', 'change and identity', 'the given and created'. Mostly culture manifests through cultural forms. The cultural forms of people provide clues to understand life and struggles of social groups to which they are associated. The explanations of origin and transformation of a particular cultural form helps in understanding the changing relations of power.

In contemporary times, by pushing aside all cultural forms cinema emerged as a most popular and powerful cultural form. It is a culmination point of art and technology. It is in the hands of capitalist upper caste. It has never come out of the clutches of ruling class ideology. Cinema has helped in maintaining the cultural hegemony of dominant class/castes over dalits. It is surprising to see that there is no dalit hero who has emerged out of this cultural form though its consumers are mostly dalits. There is no authentic depiction of dalit life in this medium. Television and Radio too are functioning in a similar fashion. Apart from this, the culture of social elite is constructed as the Indian culture in a systematic way at the cost of marginalizing rich cultural traditions of dalits. The Brahmanical social elite have not considered any of the cultural forms of lower castes. The culture of dalits has not emerged as national hegemonic force as has their politics. However, history reveals that there are struggles of dalits in various forms to counter the hegemony of dominant exploiting castes/classes. Through their struggles they assert their culture and life styles.

In this given context, what is the place of dalit culture in third world nations like India which is the victim of globalization. Dalit culture is inseparable from the struggles of dalits. Dalit culture has to be understood in relation to this globalization phenomenon and in relation to the continuing hegemony of the dominant exploiting upper castes/classes of India over dalit masses. This paper focuses on dalit people's search for their own culture in changing cultural scenario as part of their democratic struggles against exploitation of dominant ruling castes. They are actively engaged in searching the roots of their cultural life. It is understood that without asserting their own cultural traditions and practices, their political struggles become either marginalized or negated. In other words, they are reconstructing their history and inaugurating their life style which does not have a dignified place in the discourse of social elite. Dalits are not only presenting their rich cultural traditions but also make a point about how their culture is robbed elite social groups over the period of time. Contrary to the artificial culture and its false values of ruling exploiting social groups, dalit culture reveals itself as a real and democratic culture emerging from collective social experience. It is much closer to the materialistic culture.

The question is how to understand dalit culture in contemporary times and its roots in past. Do dalits have any culture exclusively of their own? What is the significance of dalit culture in understanding Indian social reality? What kind of changes has it undergone over the period of time? How is their culture continuing to present? What are the means they adopted in withholding their tradition? Does it have any potential of liberating dalit masses from the clutches of oppression?

Contextualization of Dalit culture

In recent times dalit movement is one such struggle in upholding the culture, history and politics of lower castes. Dalit movement provided spectacle through which they could look at their own culture. There is a serious attempt of dalit intelligentsia to construct their culture from the past in response to the cultural hegemony of dominant castes. From late nineties in the back drop of dalit movement there is a considerable literature Telugu society in general and other alternative democratic movements in particular. Some of the works in search of dalit culture are: G. Kalyana Rao's novel *Antaranivasantham* explores the dalit culture. This novel is the construction of culture, history, philosophy, knowledge, struggle and life styles of the dalits of Coastal Andhra. It stretched over to the period of six generations. The character of Yellanna is a symbolic representation of dalit philosopher, artist and rebel against the dominant exploiting uppercastes. As a protest, he performed a street play against the rules of caste society. The same author had written an essay on *Telugu Nataka Mulalu*. In this he explained that the roots of modern theatre are in the cultural forms of lower castes. M. Laxmaiah's collected folk story *Jambhava Puranam*, is a popular folk story of dalits and traditionally performed by them in Telangana region of Andhra. Yendluri Sudhakar's *Malle Moggala Godugu* are autobiographical stories of dalit community. It is the dalit poet Sudhakar's search for his community roots where rich cultural tradition and indigenous knowledge systems were enlivened. To write these stories he went to his native village and recorded the social and cultural experiences of older generations. Vemula Yellai's novel **Kakka** is a dalit boy's struggle for *madignization*. He learns to play *Dappu* from the community's head as a symbol of pride of the community. *Pinjari* is the autobiography of Shaik Nazar, who is a great exponent of folk art form *Burra Katha* and who used this form to propagate the progressive ideology among masses. He too happened to be an artist came from lower caste background. Prior to all these Jana Natya Mandali (JNM), a cultural organization came in support of revolutionary politics of Andhra Pradesh and is known for effective use of cultural forms of working class people. To spread the political message of revolutionary party, it came with the slogan of 'from masses to masses'. For this it used the people's art forms like *Song*, *Oggukatha*, *Jamukula katha*, *Burrakatha* and *Veedhi Bhagavathalu*. JNM's *Karamchedu Oggukatha*, Andhra Praja Kala Mandali's *Kula Nirmulana (oggukatha)* are of this type. Jana Natya Mandalit not only performed people's art in people's language but also brings the booklets on the grammar of these cultural forms. J. N. M. publications Bhagat's *Street Play Notes* and Ramesh's *Dhim, Ku, Ta, Ka (Dappu Notes)*, Gaddar's *Voice of Liberation*, are worth mentioning in this regard. Gaddar's *Pata Pataki Oka Kathundi* and *Taragani Gani* are the explorations into the cultural traditions of people and how the JNM picked up the tunes from the people. It is an historical documentation of the cultural phenomenon in making. The history of JNM

explained by Venugopal in his essay *Three decades Jana Natya Mandali* in a theatre magazine *Yuvanika*. Nethi Parameswara Sharma's *Nurella Tenali Nataka Rangasthali* is the record of artists of Tenali region of coastal Andhra for a period of hundred years in which one finds the many names of the celebrated artists of different cultural forms who came from the lower castes. It has to be noted that writers search for dalit culture, writings of the grammar of people's art forms and recording of the history of cultural organizations came into light with the struggles of dalit movement.

Dalit culture: An historical interpretation

The culture of dalits has to be understood dialectically. On the one hand the Brahmanical forces and market forces pick up the elements of culture of lower castes for their own advantage. It is necessary for them to create a cultural hegemony over its subordinates. The ruling class gets the consent from its subordinates through this kind of exercise. The form and content of those cultural forms change accordingly. The original cultural form had the element of freedom of lower castes expressed through aesthetic forms. It is ingrained with life, joy, suffering and struggle of the communities. In place of it, the ruling Brahmanical and market forces presents the artificial culture with false values. They appropriate the cultural forms of dalits and ultimately use it to govern these communities by manipulating consciousness of dalits.

On the other hand, naturally the culture of dalits transmitted from one generation to other. The cultural forms too carried with their lives and struggles. These also may under go changes over a period of time. Some of the cultural forms may disappear. Some of the cultural forms are still survived with the conscious effort of dalits and their political struggles. The cultural forms are inaugurated with the struggles of freedom.

The culture of lower castes identified with different names on different occasions. 'Folk culture', 'Working class culture', 'Peoples culture' – are such kind of identifications. These terms are vague. One can not easily pinpoint who are the people involved in these culture. The term 'dalit culture' provides more clarity in this regard. It is an appropriate term to represent the culture of lower castes. In Indian society, culture and its cultural forms are associated with caste rather than class.

Historically there are certain turning points in the development of culture. Such as the invention of script, print technology, invention of photography that consequentially leads to production of mass culture. The script came much later than language. Roughly it took two thousand years after the language. In this interval human life was set in motion and she/he finds the ways to entertain himself/herself along with gathering of food. He/she narrated to others his/her heroic deeds. He narrated his fears and struggle to survive. This narration had become literature. He/she performed certain rituals either to please or gain control over natural forces. The performance had become dance. All these literature, art, dance were originated from their collective social labour. The culture lies very much in community life. The human creativity has connected with his/her engagement with social labor. This is rooted in natural phenomenon. The culture, art, literature of the common

people was transmitted orally along with their life experiences. The language was enriched with rich life experiences in a more naturalistic way.

The culture got feudal character with the emergence of feudalism. Everything was decided by feudal lords and pundits. The common man culture has become 'other worldly' and religious as against naturalistic and 'this worldly'. The culture of brahmins become god centred as against the human centred towards lower caste communities. Culture of the lower castes was taken up by Brahmanical class and changed its form and methods of worship. They locked up the culture in temples against the practice of performing in the public, in front of whole community. The cultural form has become standardized rather than interactive. They took shelter under feudal lords. It acquired the character of ruling class. The Brahmanical classes made an attempt to canonize the culture and its forms. They started writing rules for the cultural forms in the name of 'classical'. The song or play was meant for entertainment in case of lower caste. The culture got commodified in the hands of Brahmanical classes. In the name of classical culture, the culture of lower caste was not considered as culture at all as their lives. The human relationships of lower castes people are not considered as civilized as their culture and literature. 'The art, culture and literature outside the temple are treated as culture of the low people. The lifeless movements in temple projected itself as the 'art'.^{xxvi}

As the leader of Dalit Panthers of India, Thirumavalavan observed, 'Bharata Natyam is not some new dance form. Hindutva and casteism entered into our arts, into our culture and our arts and culture assumed different forms. They changed the methods of worship. The mother of all this is the culture of the Cheri people, the arts of the Cheri people. Only we live a life of community. Only we have a culture of equality.'^{xxvi}

This hold true in case of Telugu society too. All the celebrated forms of brahminical art forms had roots in the art forms of lower caste people. The classical dance, classical song, modern drama had originated from the folklore which predominantly belongs to dalits.

Veedhi Bhagotham is considered as a source of Telugu theatre. In later days Telugu cinema evolved from theatre. The cultural form Veedhi Bhagotham is exclusively lower caste phenomenon. Even till recent times there exists ***Madiga's chindubhagotham, Mala's vedhi bhagotham, Yanadhula veddhi bhagotham, Yerra gollala vedhi bhagotham.***

In nineteenth century modernity entered into India with British colonialism. Liberal English education, machines and consequently imperialistic culture entered into India. Modernity came with triumph of technology. Print culture has come with modernity. It created the pundit class. Brahmin intellectuals emerged out of this modernity. They started defining Indian culture in the back drop of British colonialism. The social elite happened to be Brahmins who projected their culture as the culture of India. The Modernity came with certain assumptions or rules. By and large it is reflecting the ideology of ruling class. In the name of modernity caste got negative identity and erased from public discourses. Added to this most of the dalits were illiterate and even a few

literate who can be counted on fingers are not entertained to write this account. The kind of rules of modernity, were not permitting them to write their social experience and their cultural forms. As a result of this, dalit culture and its art forms are not considered as culture and were not qualified to be called as culture according to the standards of Brahmanical intellectuals and colonial rulers. It doesn't have any place in print culture either in official records of British or in scholarly works of Brahmins. It is difficult to get evidence from written culture or print culture. It needs other tools to prove the historical truth in issues of dalits. Even in these conditions, dalit culture survived through oral tradition. The social memory played an important role either in invoking or constructing dalit culture. Here I would like to give two examples where social memory played a role in constructing dalit history and performing dalit culture. One is the successes of Gaddar, the revolutionary dalit cultural activist and the other G. Kalyana Rao, the novelist's construction of culture through the character of *Yellanna*, the cultural and political hero of the novel.

In Telugu society, cultural movements started with political movements. The communist party came with the commitment that art is not for the sake of art; art is for the sake of people. The communist party understood that to reach the political message to the masses and to mobilize the people, the formation of cultural organization is inevitable. It came with the main objective of mobilizing the peasants and preparing them for struggle. In the decade of 1940s, there are struggles against fascism in coastal Andhra and Telangana armed struggle of peasants against the Nizam and feudalism. The struggle gave birth to new cultural forms and rise of popular art formed. The suppression of struggle and the withdrawal of armed struggles led to further disintegration of progressive politics till Naxalbari movement. The cultural organization *Jananatyamandali* came into existence with Naxalbari struggle, the tribal armed struggles of Srikakulam of 1969. JNM got its organizational shape in 1973. JNM to reach the message of revolutionary politics started adopting the songs, visual art forms and oral traditions. In the realm of cultural movement, there is a shift from writing poetry to composing songs. The cultural activists are compelled in this way to reach the illiterate people. JNM is a successful cultural movement in 1970s and 1980s. The success is invariably associated with elevation of people's art forms. JNM followed the slogan of Mao, 'from masses to masses'. JNM had the policy of go to the people, collect from people, and after revolutionizing give back to the people. JNM right from its inception concentrated on folk forms in the name of people's culture. It considered expressiveness of folk form as the best mean to reach people. It took popular folk forms like *Jamukula katha*, *Burra katha*, *Oggukatha*, *Vedhi Bhagotham*. They are one type of vernacular ballets, a combination of song, dialogue and dance used for effective story narration. Through this JNM tried to maintain an organic link with culture of lower caste people and community in the name of class. In early cultural movement like Praja Natyamandali mostly the cultural artists came from upper caste progressive middle class. In JNM, cultural activists mostly came from the background of lower caste groups. The celebrated figures like Gaddar and Vangapandu are classic example of this.

Performance of social memory:

‘A living memory is a walking cultural encyclopaedia of one’s own community’. Re-enacting memory through performance implies way of perceiving history and time. The narratives of past are a re-vision and past experiences are transformed through the re-enactment of cultural forms, especially those invested in speech, gesture, customs, rites, ritual collectively known as orature. It provides potentially contestatory alternative mode of communication and perceptual orientation based on the preservation of aspects of community life.

The performance of social memory, possess the power to engage participants on the level of collective experience, to retell or revision historical narratives, to provoke emotional responses, and to generate socio-cultural change. It involves a moral struggle in terms of using social memory to revision and retells the narratives of the past. Social memory in performances of any cultural forms creates sense of belonging and self knowledge. It operates effectively on collective unconsciousness of the community. In this performance art, audiences participate rather than watch. It has the strong ‘power of presence’. The act of performance, either walking, dancing, playing on instrument, or singing helps in organizing identity and a sense of belongingness. The rediscovery of community identity involves the utilization of creative tactics which emerge from within the domain of performance. It has a significant impact on systems of knowledge, memory, and world view of society. The performance of social memory provides a sense of cultural intimacy and commonality across the community. This shared tradition of performance signifies in identity formation. It is in effect writing the history of present. The Afro-Caribbeans of British effectively used social memory through performance poetry in formation of black identity. One can see this kind of phenomenon in rediscovering the arts and life styles of dalits in the context of dalit movement. The dalit arts, literature and performances heavily invested on social memory in writing their history.

Gaddar, the JNM artist is household name in Telugu society. He is the living legend of Telugu folk art forms. He is the collective cultural representation of lower caste groups. He is the continuation of enriched cultural traditions of lower caste people. Through him song of people lives on. Gaddar meets the imagination of masses, touching all kinds of people in unique way. Lakhs of people are moved by his cultural performances and many of them joined the revolutionary politics. It is true that one can not see him separately from the politics he represented. His success can be assessed more than his revolutionary political party. The political party got popularity through performances of Gaddar and his JNM. In this section I would like to focus on the secret of his success as an artist.

First of all, Gaddar reduced the gap between two parallel cultural traditions, oral and written. He is the medium for oral tradition in a celebrated style. He presented folk forms in oral tradition. In all the folk forms, song played a vital role. In story telling folk forms like *Golla suddulu*, *Oggukatha*, *Burrakatha* and *Jamukula katha*, *Veedhibagotham* and in dance forms- the undercurrent is song. In oral tradition, song got prominence. He explained in his writings and interviews how he writes a song. First of all, to write a song on particular incident or problem, he collects the information relating to the song. Then he thinks about how to reach the people. He prefers to touch emotions of the people in a

delicate way. For this he puts the subject in order and mostly uses the simple words in colloquial Telugu. He uses proverbs and popular idioms to further strengthening it. Select the tune suitable to the idea. The tune he selects from the people is polished to reach the political message rather using as it is. In performance, the song undergoes many changes. It appears that while in collection it had the form of writing but at the stage of performance it takes the oral form.

Gaddar's performance is the culmination of all art forms of Telugu society – oral and written, literature and dance forms, song and story, poetry and prose, satire and sensitivity, dialogue and speech, folk and modern. He expresses his ideas through songs with dances and dances with songs. The political economy of Indian society is explained in simple and known cultural forms and in the language of the people. There is an internal coherence and order in his performances. He economizes his energies in the performance tactfully and holds the stage for a long time.

His cultural articulation came with assumption that culture of any creativity is produced from the collective social labour. Culture is understood as reflection of life struggles, politics and philosophy of a community that involved in the activity of labor. It had the potential of liberating toiling masses along with providing entertainment. By identifying this Gaddar and JNM tries to explore the cultural traditions of toiling masses to liberate them from exploitation. In comparison to the language of the political rhetoric of Marxists, Gaddar's cultural language comes close to the life styles of toiling masses. He too changed his language with identifying the people in terms of 'coolie', 'labourer' to 'malas', 'madigas'. One can see transformation of language with emergence of dalit movement. The significant transformation can be seen from his earlier songs calling it *coolanna* (Coolie brotherhood) to his songs to late eighties *Dalita Pululamma* (dalit tigers).^{xxvi} Though Gaddar staunch supporter of Maoist Naxalite struggle from the beginning of his career till today, he has emerged as a political icon of all the alternative political movements of Telugu society. In late eighties after Karamchedu massacre, caste question came to forefront. Dalits started consolidating and organizing struggles against caste. Serious question was posed by dalits, to Marxist theory and the way it is practiced in Indian society. Dalit movement emerged as an autonomous movement and keeping distance from Naxalite struggle. In late nineties dalits are divided on the issue of categorization of reservation, into Mala sub castes and Madiga sub castes. Though they maintain differences, but all of them own Gaddar. This identification with Gaddar is not simply because he is a cultural artist born in dalit community (Mala caste), but his commitment to the people's struggles. The celebration of Gaddar needs further explanation. Gaddar is a culmination point of all cultural and political struggles. He has internalized the essence of these struggles and, reach out through his performances. He consciously maintains the continuity with early alternative cultural and literary traditions of the lower castes. He sharpened the social memory of his audiences and spectators through his performance and as a result it generates the feeling of belongingness and self-knowledge of the community.

As the well known Telugu literary critic K. V. Ramana Reddy in a foreword to the songs of Gaddar said, 'Adding talk/words to song and dance, all these three forms are mingling

in an inseparable fashion and culminating in a poet or singer who presents a collective life of primitive man in the moments of modern times in a great way. It gets the appreciation from spectators and audiences.^{xxvi}

The performance of Gaddar is in typical language of masses. The physical movements, gesture, talking, walking, literature through orature identifies with masses. His performances become lively because the cultural past is connected to the present through performance. The performance triggers the emotions of the audiences by touching their life stories and consequently one finds himself/herself in social collectivity. The collective unconscious brings into the fields of a conscious realm. The audiences and spectators are not only identifying with the performances of Gaddar but also finding their culture. It leads in constructing their history in changing cultural times.

Dalit movement in Andhra helped in conceptualizing social reality from the view point of caste. With the emergent dalit middle class, dalit literature occupied the centre stage of Telugu society. Most of the literature is in the form of poetry. Within a short time it got exhausted. One of the reasons might be the dalit middle class lost the touch with their community life. Their urban life and acquired new habits keeps them away from the cultural roots. Nobody is there to inform their cultural past in changing modern times. Nothing is available about them in official and literary and cultural records. The older generation who knows the life before this modern technological world, are slowly disappearing. To construct the cultural past of dalits social memory and experiences of the people nearing eighties are valuable. In this peculiar historical juncture Kalyana Rao's *Antarani Vasantham* (Untouchable Spring) is path breaking literary and cultural work from dalit point of view.

Dalit life got its highest expression in folk songs and other performative arts. They never bothered about the print world. Most of their literature is in oral tradition. Dalit literature in print helped in negotiating about dalit life and struggle with others in civil society. But it is not suitable medium where many of the dalits are illiterate. But the song and other performative arts reached the dalit masses effectively. There is no point in competing with others in print culture.

Dalit literature came with a specific purpose of liberating dalits from exploitation. Literature is linked up with political struggle. To win the political battles one has to be armed culturally too. There are attempts that dalit literature emerged from the decade of nineties. This may be partially true in case of written culture that came with the emergence of dalit middle class. In fact culture and creativity of dalits rooted very much in their life. It goes along with the struggles of everyday life. Recently Gogula Shyamala brought an edited volume of dalit women literature from 1921 to 2002 in the name of *Nallapossu*.^{xxvi} One problem I find with this book is dalit women creativity confined to written culture and obviously it is not total representation of dalit women literature and culture. There are countless dalit women composed songs spontaneously and sang at the times of involvement of labor. All of them are in oral tradition. In case of dalit songs one can not name the author. It belongs to a collective and undergoes transformations with changing times with various people. This kind of creative cultural production is unique to

lower caste groups. To win the larger political struggles dalits has to consider their rich cultural traditions.

Though Kalyana Rao's novel *Antarani Vasantham* is in the form of written culture, it is important land mark in dalit literary and cultural history. The novel is a recorded collective social experiences and struggles of dalit community. The social memory of a community transmitted over generations has put in written form. The novel is a written social document of dalit culture, which is predominantly in oral tradition. The novel stretches for more than six generations. Historically, it explains the dalit struggles in various forms in a given social conditions. The novel takes back to the life and struggles of dalits, in pre colonial, colonial and post independent times. The novel depicts not only the sufferings of dalits but also joyful moments in their life. This novel is an attempt towards writing history, philosophy, politics and culture of dalits comprehensive form. The writer has succeeded in bringing all these aspects by depicting the concrete situation of dalits.

Antarani vasantham is a story of seven generations of dalits. This novel is of dalit history, culture and their living philosophies. In this novel the lead character named Rathu is a writer. The novel runs through the recollection of her memories. The author considered these memories are not simply of past, they are living afresh in present in dalit community. The memories are loaded with suffering, pain, agony, anguish and struggle. This is the case with every dalit life. Precisely because of this, author hints that memories are not of the past but they have continuity in present and also projected in future. The story of dalits narrated for a period of more than hundred years in the form of memories. The main character Ruth's memories go back to four generations before and two generations after her. In *Antarani Vasantham*, constraints to freedom of dalits, comes from an enemy who is an upper caste. The idea of freedoms itself indicates for Kalyana rao, a perpetual flow of resistance by dalit community to an upper caste community. Dalit community has been described as a focal point of creativity, resistance to oppression and a character of purity. This is effectively indicated through central character Yellanna who eloquently represents creative, upright and assertive individual. This is one way of expressing dalit freedom or a mode of being dalit.

This novel is an attempt to search a collective identity of dalit community. This novel is the chronicle of life of six generation of dalits. This novel may be considered as social context where lower caste people struggles, culture, philosophy, life styles and history is not considered by the elite scholars, this novel become the source book for culture, history, politics and philosophy of dalits. Kalyana Rao explained how the culture born from lower caste people involvement in labor. They spontaneously and naturally composed the songs from their life. Apart from the value of entertainment, symbolically dalits used cultural performances as a social protest against the dominance of hegemony of uppercaste social groups. The writer has inaugurated the culture of dalits through the character of Yellanna of Yennaladinne village. Yellanna is a great artist, singer, dancer and philosopher. He didn't write anything since he was illiterate. He narrated songs or dance ballads from social experiences.

The depiction of story of Yellana is presented by Ruthu. The story of Yellanna was told to her by her husband Rubenu. Yellanna is the ancestral father of Rubenu. Yellanna, the dalit boy was chased by the uppercaste villagers while he tried to see the Yerragollalu, the cultural troop at their tents. As a child he learns songs from her aunty Bhudevi. Later he learns Orumula Nruthyam from Naganna. The dance played by dalits at the occasion of Gangamma Jatara. Naganna knows the dance forms from Chandrappa, the caretaker of her mother. Chandrappa teaches the dance forms of orumula nrutyhyam in the name of revelation of 'purana rahasyalu' (secrets of puranas). Chandrappa has command over folk art forms (Janapadam) and veedhi Bhagotham. Chandrappa has anger against the pundits. Out of that anger he told many stories to Naganna. Naganna shared the same with Yellanna. Later Yellanna directed the Chenchu laxmi Veedhi bhagotham and performed at yennaladinne. He performed this play as a revolt against the upper caste. It is a general practice to invite village heads of uppercaste people as honour before to start the play. Against this practice, Yellanna invites the heads of Mala and Madiga community in place of village heads. The cultural form is used by dalits as a protest against the hegemony of dominant castes. The cultural form goes along with the struggles of their life. It shows how the culture transmitted from one generation to other through social memory.

Globalization and commodification of culture:

In contemporary times of globalization, culture is locked up in market. It has a capacity to accommodate / assimilate into its fold all kinds of celebrated cultural traditions in tune with its market. The culture and ideologies of the dominant nations become celebrated as a culture of the day, as a product of this globalization. Capitalist tendency of those nations are known for commodification of everything. It looks at the world and people from the consumer point of view. Generally culture identifies with social, economical and moral values along with customs and traditions. It is the shared meanings of life of a group of people. In the name of globalization, third world countries are exploited in large scale through cultural forms and media. The technology is facilitating this in an effective way. The life styles, values, collective symbols, personalities transformed according to the dominant ideologies of the nations of the world in a systematic way. The language of globalization is the new language that is facilitating the expansion of cultural hegemony all over the world. It functions both economically and politically. It operates economically by capturing the market for their cultural goods like TVs, VCRs, DVDs, computer, Tape recorders, Video games, electronic toys etc. Politically they get hegemony over third world nations by controlling or by systematically manipulating the information through these cultural goods. It makes a deliberate attempt to weaken the class and social solidarities of the people. On the other hand, in third world nations the lives of the people day by day has become miserable. Social and economic conditions are deteriorating and inequalities are increasing. As a response to this condition the struggles have weakened rather than getting strengthened. To convert the physical conditions into politics, cultural intervention is very much crucial. The exploiting forces foresighted the need of the cultural intervention much earlier than the oppressed. It advanced their hegemony in various forms in contemporary times. By propagating the consumerist culture hegemonic forces disturbs the very basic foundations of culture and brings the divisions in the collective life. It tries to bring the diverse groups desires, necessities and

aspirations in a uniform way. It makes deliberate attempts to cultivate a culture which make brains of people blunt. It proposes new language 'mobility', 'expression of freedom' in place of 'backward', 'oppressed'. In the name of modernity, it attacks the collective values of family and moral traditions. Some times it brings the local traditions and cultural forms in a new package of sophisticated technology. In place of social, the individual is projected. The social reality often distorted to suit their marketing interests. It provides an illusory wonderful world and promotes escapism as the solution to the real social problems. It represents democratic struggles in a negative way by branding them as terror, violence.

Towards living dalit culture:

In constructing the dalit culture, performance of social memory plays an important role. This is evident in the cultural performances of Gaddar and literary work of Kalyana Rao. Considering social memory as lived social experience shared by the community has a value of knowledge. Like any other written culture, this oral tradition too has to be considered as source material in constructing history. Especially in writing the history of dalits the lived social memory through oral tradition becomes significant since no other sources are informed about dalit lives and struggles. In the globalization times, there is an overall danger for the culture and collective life of third world nations like India. The culture of the imperialistic forces may establish as the culture of other nations of the world. The prime competitors of globalization involve in capturing the world market through cultural intervention in their field areas. Through the cultural intervention they control the consciousness of the people. On the other hand globalization appears to accommodate some of the cultural and art forms of dalits also. But it minuses the political spirit of the cultural forms of dalits and used to control dalits through their forms. Ultimately, the global players make an attempt to weaken the dalit solidarity and their political struggles. Dalits have to be conscious about this development and have to be more creative and assertive in constructing their culture from the past to serve the political struggles of the present.

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DALIT MOVEMENTS IN FRENCH INDIA SOME HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CASTE QUESTIONS IN PUDUCHERI (AD 1873 – 2005)

J. Mohan

The first monograph on the modern Dalit movement to appear in the early 1870s was the extensive study taken by Pandit Iyothedas in Madras Presidency. The mission launched by Pandit Iyothedas was his arduous research on the origin and development of Buddhists and Buddha Dhamma in India and the spread of Buddha Dhamma again in India. A large number of literary sources belonging to ancient and medieval Dalits were brought to the vision of modern historiography to reconstruct and revive Dalit history and Dalit intellectual movement, which originates from the pre-Harappan society. Iyothedas' contemporary Advocate Ponnuthambi Pillai of Puducherry did a widespread fieldwork for the liberation of Puducherry Dalits. Like Pandit Iyothedas, Ponnuthambi Pillai was a brave Dalit leader whose struggle upgraded the Dalits status to the level of Europeans in nineteenth century itself.

Puducherry a corrupted form of *Bouthacheri*, which is familiarly called as Pondicherry, is a microcosmic port-centre where a number of international and intercultural communities have their nexus for it was a French colony. As far the Roman records, the ancient and international maritime centre, Arikkamedu is the pride of the Puducheri; to explore the glory of *arhats* or *arhas*, the ancient Buddhists of this region. Very recent finding in the excavations at Arikkamedu, is the beautiful hefty size statue of ancient Buddha in a sitting posture, belonging to the post-Mauryan era, the period in which the Buddhist rulers, Kalaparayar were familiar in this region.

French relations started when Sher Khan Lodi of Bijapore Sultanate granted the French East Indian Company, a *fatwa* to stay in the outskirts of Puducheri, but the latter was unable to return the loan to the former. This made the French Company, not only the trading enterprise installed permanently, but also the tax collectors for Puducheri. Along with Puducheri, the French retained and occupied Karaikkal, Mahe and Yanam.

The present paper is divided into two parts; the first part attempts to discuss (i) the caste question in the French Colony and (ii) the uprising of social movements like *Renunciation* against the discrimination, based on caste system and colonial oppression, which has still been an unchanging compradorism of different castes and communal groups; and the second part briefs the contemporary Dalit movements available in Puducheri to do something with the welfare of Dalits.

Part – 1

As that in other areas, in Puducheri too, the common social disease during the colonial period was caste discrimination based on birth. French thinkers also described caste discrimination as worse than the racial apartheid from which one could liberate in accord

with his / her distillation of slave dirt and filth from the mindset, because racial apartheid did not have its origin in birth. But caste apartheid was and is birth oriented. French India also did never escape from what the rest of caste India suffered. Casteism dominated the social hierarchy.

As far as Puducheri is considered, the Brahmans were not the perpetrators of caste discriminations and atrocities against the outcastes. The non-brahman caste or the Sudra castes were more rigid in imbibing, imitating and following the dogmas of Hindu dharma, which was nothing, but caste dharma. There were no *chaturvarnic* social orders in Puducheri and Karikkal regions; everything was *sudraic* and *pan-sastraic*, meaning that there was Brahman existence which decided all socio-economic and political affairs of the state on par with the French rulers. The vital impact of colonial rule in Puducheri was that a number of sudras, so called *pillai*, *mudali* besides the traditional *chetti* and *komuttichetty* gained opportunities to be employed as interpreters, accounts and ambassadors of the French East India Company and engaged themselves in the trading ventures. This is also the fact that these Sudra castes played a predominant role in the economic life throughout the eastern coast of India. Even in the case of the agrarian sector, the so-called *reddys* were the owners of the big margin of agricultural land. *Reddys* owned big portions, had their lands cultivated by their *pannaiyals* or *padiyals* composed of outcastes, like Parayars and wage labourers from the *vanniya* caste were considered to be the lowest among sudras in French India. *Vanyas* represented a very important fraction of rural population, were often in quarrel with their labour – counterparts, Parayars who were referred in French and Tamil contemporary records as *valangas*, the right hand community. Had they owned small portions of land and had they been stronger labourers, *vanniyas* and *Parayars* would have cultivated their lands themselves.

French and Tamil records referred to the so-called caste-Hindus as “Thamizhar” in Pondicherry. Ananda Rangaar, the intermediary, the *dubashi* of French company, in his diaries has referred to ‘Tamil’ people as a distinct caste sect from Parayars. He says, “*Thamizhar veru; Parayar veru.*” The dictionary published by the Madras University in early twentieth century also supported this view that the Parayars were the outcastes outlawed by Tamil castes. However, the Tamils identified as caste Hindus or caste Christians, named their street after their caste names; still, the stigma of casteism is sticking at the cerebrum of these caste people in keeping the street names as *vellala* street, *mudaliyar* street, *komutti* street, *kuyavar* street, *idayar* street, *chetti* street and so on. Many are also conscious but not guilty of calling their villages and towns in the name of castes, such as *mudaliyar palayam*, *kosa palayam*, *kanakachetty kulam*, etc. Many of this territory may not know that except some streets in the names of Bharathi, Bharathidasan, Dr. Ambedkar and Subbaiah, the streets named after ‘*Nehru*’ and ‘*Gandhi*’ are also caste names, the *brahman* and *banya* respectively.

One of the vital attributes of social hierarchy in French India were the caste conflicts between the *valangas* and *idangas*, the caste-cultural legacy of the ‘great’ Cholas, continued to be a socio-political concern of the conflicting non-brahman middle caste groups for what they called the ‘caste ego’. Both *valangas* and *idangas* were of *sudraic*

cluster but they objected each other to using colour insignia. Particularly, the usage of white insignia was opposed by *valangas*. For instance, it turned out to be a caste conflict, resulting in bloodshed, when *idangas* used a white horse for a wedding gathering in 1848. This was also timely refuted and suppressed by Dumas, the Governor of Puducheri and he also objected to such privileges of using a white insignia by the *idangas*. It is also significant to know that it was Dumas who opened the public way to *idangas* who were previously prohibited by *valangas*. Tamil caste Hindus who engaged in agrarian employment as dominant castes, were called *valangas* and the non-agricultural castes were identified as *idangas*. As the position of *valangas* was little higher than the *idangas* due to the formers' dominance in numbers and in wealth, some of secular groups like *porkollars*, *chettiyars* and other artisan communities joined *valangas*' line and also called themselves *chandrakulam* or *suryakulam*. Records show that the Outcastes, the Dalits were not of these two origins, which were the products of *varnasamkara* experiments of Chola-Pallava administration based in *varnasramadharmam*. Bahur plates evidence *valangas* and *idangas* as the lowest orders of *sudravarna*. Interestingly, the caste design of *valangas* and *idangas* was also extended to christians and thus they became caste Christians, rigidly resisted the Dalits from approaching closely to them during the prayer and ceremonial gatherings; and there was no any matrimonial affairs between Dalits and caste Christians recorded during this period publicly. The church authorities also accepted closed endogamy and it enhanced the caste identity among the Christians.

There was a tradition that the Sacred Heart Church in Puducheri, belonged to the Dalits and so was looked down upon by the caste Christians as the church belonged to the Dalits, as these people were sometimes called as *valangai* people in the church surroundings. It is really prickling to a true believer of the Christ if he / she comes across the reality in a church where caste Hindu converts were admitted with their caste-culture of *status quo*. The caste Christians in most of the churches of Puducheri congregation came to the prayer hall with costly saris and jewellerys adorning all the parts of their body with prejudice that the outcastes / untouchables should not be identified equally with the caste Christians. In the beginning, the Parish priests objected to such identity, which Christ had strongly opposed, but later, on account of the need to increase the converts, the priests compromised with the entry of caste dharma into the hall of Christ. As a result, (i) the erection of wall was allowed between the Dalit Christians and caste Christians; (ii) the priest being persuaded by the caste Christians, offered the sacred 'appam' which is considered the Christ's flesh, not by his hands but by handling 'appam' tightly crushed with a metal instrument like *kidukki* and offered to the untouchables and a separate spoons were used to offer them sacred grape juice, which is the Christ's blood. This discrimination was questioned by the Dalit Christians, but it continued until 1971 in which the walls between the two groups was removed and it was again for sometimes filthy that the caste Christians arranged some chairs in the middle to separate the Dalits.

The real protest against all caste discriminations in French India began only after January 16, 1873, when a young Advocate called Ponnuthambipillai, was not allowed by a French magistrate, who was persuaded by the caste Hindu advocates for what Ponnuthambi wore the advocate's socks and shoes. In reality the caste Hindus opposed Ponnuthambi as he was the head of the Dalit Christians. The magistrate asked Ponnuthambi to remove the

shoes out of the court hall. Ponnuthambi refused the order of the magistrate and was punished for that. Ponnuthambi was not allowed to process his cases. He went to appeal in the '*Cour de Cassation*' in Paris. Jules Godin took his case and he got justice there. Godin and Ponnuthambi became friends and it resulted in making Godin as the Representative of French Indians to the *Assemblée Nationale* in 1876. In consultation and cooperation with Shanmuga Velayudam, a powerful man among Tamil caste Hindus, and Ponnuthambi, the French Indian advocate made one of the famous advocate in Paris, Godin as the Representative of French Indians in a very emancipatory idea that the caste discriminations, untouchability and gender oppression could be eliminated from caste-ridden society. Later, it was understood by Ponnuthambi that such alliance with the strong supporters of caste order would never help in emancipation of the oppressed.

Meanwhile, there were changes in the French administration in order to increase the European representatives for French India lest the natives would dominate the administration. Accordingly, the *Conseil General* was established in January 25, 1879 and the colonist's interests were heightened and the natives described it as hypocritical and undemocratic. In 1880, the local self-government resolution was implemented in Puducheri to divide French India into ten Communes. Following this, in 1882, Lord Rippon also introduced this system in British India in order to "set at work the municipal institutions of the country and begin the political education of the people". Only French aspirants were chosen to the posts of Mayor and the natives could aspire only to the post of the Deputy Mayor. This aspiration of the colonial people was unaccomplished by the native leaders. Shanmuga Velayudam could have sent a French Indian (native) to the *Assemblée Nationale* but he always opted for the Representatives who lived in Paris and never supported any European or French Indian who lived in French India, lest his familiarity among the people might get erased.

On the one hand, the French introduced modern schools and on the other they wanted to involve themselves in superstitious offerings and make sacrifices to Hindu deities and other exploitative practices that were culturally imposed on the Hindus. But they also wanted more Christians in their colonies. Their colonial expansion was not only political, but also religious. The Jesuits persuaded the French rulers to involve in the rituals of Hindus and their animal sacrifices to their deities. The Hindus rejected the colonists and described such entry as religious intolerance of the colonists. Thus, the French rulers feared that their trading business, revenue and politics would be damaged. It was clear in 1740, that the Hindu custom *sati* (self-immolation) at Villianoor was not stopped or condemned by the French. In fact, the French officers participated in the *sati*. There was a death of a child in fire-pit arranged for *Theemithi* (Fire-walk Ceremony) in front of the Dhroubathi Amman deity in Puducheri and such primitive custom was banned by Duran d'Ubraye, the Governor of Puducheri. But the Hindu leaders wanted the custom continued as it was their culture and carried out their politics that because of the impurity of the family of the child burnt alive; the Amman punished the family by killing their child. People were compromised in blind faith caused by the illiteracy and superstition.

Duplex supported conversion and missionary activities in French India. In the beginning, the Dalits and the fishermen communities were attracted towards converting to

Christianity and vanyas later took the conversion. The caste Hindus like *middalis*, *chettis* wanted to get into Christian faith for the kind of socio-economic and political benefits they aspired from the French rules. For this reason only, there was no record of protest from this dominant caste when Vedapureesvarur temple was destroyed in the war by English forces. Similarly, caste Hindus either destroyed or converted Buddha *vihars* and appropriated Buddhists cultural properties. This can be proved by the names of Hindu temples, such as *Buddha mariamman*, and *Bodhi mariamman* which still witnesses the Buddha *vihars*, monasteries and education centres in Puducheri. As mentioned by me earlier, recently, a beautiful Buddha's statue was excavated at Arikamedu that belonged to the post-Mauryan era. The priest calls the Buddha as Brahma Rishi and performed *pujas* and mantras as if it were a Hindu deity. This is how many Thara, Amman and other female deities and the *Poorva* Buddhists were or are not allowed to enter such temples.

The caste system attracted the French Indian rulers to it. Ananda Rangar in his accounts wrote about his worries that Hindu society was full of discrimination based on birth and this social stigma did not find any phase of annihilation even after the untouchables had adopted Christianity, which is a religion that is supposed to be emancipatory. One of the governors, wanted to cut the suffix 'cheri' in the place names such as Pondicheri, Puducheri and Kottucheri. This is the only French colonists' record state intervention in untouchability issues in Puducheri. But just by cutting the suffix from Pondicheri or Puducheri did not attract any emancipatory work in the caste society.

Understanding the degrading situation to the untouchables of Puducheri, Ponnuthambi Pillai wanted to renounce these caste identities and he collected his followers in the state and went on protests and procession against the caste atrocities and oppression on the Dalits. It resulted in the formation of *Renunciation Movement* in French India. Ponnuthambi presented a memorandum to the French authorities to call the Dalits who renounced caste system and Hinduism, probably converted into Christianity in protest against the socio-economic discriminations. As a result of the protest, Ponnuthambi's demand for calling his followers as 'Renuncants' was accepted and the amendment rule came into practice on September 21, 1881.

According to this new rule any person who completed 21 years, denying or denouncing his/her religion and caste or any one who is not standing but denouncing such divisions or personal laws, could get into French civil laws and involve him/her as *Renuncants*. This new amendment rule in French India brought the attention of hundreds of Dalits and they denounced Hinduism and caste identities and came under French civil laws became Renuncants, unattached to their previous identities.

This new Renuncants identity also provided the Dalits enlisted in State's citizenship list as a separate group. In the beginning the Renuncants wanted to get included in the European list which was at the top of the French India hierarchy. European and the priests of the *Missioonnaries des Estrangeres* (Foreign Missionaries) were afraid of such inclusion of Dalits in European list lest the Dalits would further their position higher. Ponnuthambi moved his appeal in the *Cour de Cassaation* in Paris and the French jurists

offered justice to the Renuncants, but they did not want to include them in the European list, because of the opposition from Europeans and thus a separate list for the Renuncants came into being by a law in February 26, 1884. There were:

- (i) The European list in the first place comprising only Europeans who stayed in French India;
- (ii) The *Brahmanique* list that comprised the Hindus of French India.

The Renuncants were included in the Second list and were a total of 2000 persons on the list. This made the *Brahmanique* that is the caste Hindus to be pushed down to the third place. This infuriated the jealous and irritation among caste Hindus, but French colonists had done what they called egalite (equality) of all citizens. Nevertheless, it was understood from the caste Hindu point of view that the French rulers wanted to follow assimilation policy in their colonies in order to divide the natives for colonial purposes. However, a part of the Dalit population realized their self-respect and renounced their personal laws, which oppressed them as untouchables in the caste-ridden Hinduism. The Renuncants felt liberated from such inhuman discrimination and they were also given priorities in education and employment both in French India and France.

The position of Renuncants in social hierarchy was a short-lived one. The Europeans could not come out of their racial prejudice and the priests in Christian churches were also not happy with the Renuncants' protest in church matters in relation to the eradication of the practice of untouchability on the church campus. The erection of walls in the middle of the prayer hall to separate and seclude the Dalits was a prime issue. Often, the priest had to encounter with the Renuncants as well as the caste Christians. This protest milieu frustrated the Europeans who did not like to see the Renoncants (Dalits) wearing European dress, shoes and the imitation of European customs. Even the food culture of Renuncants frustrated the Hindus. Thus both Europeans, the First social category, which were 572 in number and the *Brahmanique* (caste hindus), the Third social category, who were nearly 70,000 in number (including the Hindu Dalits) voting members, wanted to pull down the Renuncants, the Second social category, comprising more than 5000 voting members in 1898. They did it. Finally, a declaration of September 10, 1899, announced the dissolving of the Renuncants list and the Europeans also made the law rigid so as to uphold the European hegemony. We understand that the assimilation policy of French colonists never had any impact in the upliftment of Dalits and that the caste oppressions had never left the Dalits liberated from their clutches of untouchability and the discriminations. But Ponnuthambi's Renunciation movement reveals the history of Dalit struggle for social freedom in Pondicherry. Notably, he is the contemporary of Pandit Iyothedas of Buddhist movement in Tamil Nadu.

Part – II

Contemporary Dalit Movement

The 1980s and the 1990s were the two decades of construction and consolidation of the movement among the Dalits and was designed to challenge the caste Hindus by means of education, employment and special rights offered by Babasaheb Ambedkar. There are

two major groups associated with the members of Dalits that worked for the liberation operation; the employees through their SC/ST Buddhist Employees Welfare Associations formed in each company or government or private sector were able to identify and grab many of their brethren recruits into their associations in the anema and fame of Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar to work for their socio-economic developments; and the socio-political groups, who pulled the wheels of liberation ideology in urban and rural areas where caste untouchability is more intensive and social mobility for self-esteem and assertion is a growing phenomenon. In each and every village Babasaheb is the icon of liberation and the presiding deity to deserve them in all encounters with the perpetrators of caste atrocities and oppressions.

The strategy of Dalits against such atrocities, injustices and discriminations is designed to challenge all kinds of caste oppressors through education and employment and by means of becoming a strong political community is yet to come to the mind-set of the people. The Dalit movements are essentially formed in the following reasons:

- (i) The movement against socio-economic exploitations and numerous types of atrocities perpetrated on the Dalits;
- (ii) The movements for better access to the opportunities and for realization of goals of equality, liberty, fraternity and religiosity for socio-cultural consolidation;
- (iii) And the movements for gaining self-esteem and dignified social identity.

The Dalit movement is treated just as the anti-caste movement of broader non-Brahmin movements as Dalit movements are appropriated or broken by the non-Brahmin (sudraic) comprador movements in Tamil Nadu. It is not so and it cannot be so; because Dalits are not caste people and they are casteless outcastes, whose struggle is to fight against the social oppression perpetrated by the caste *jantus*. Many Dalit leaders who are victimized in so-called non-Brahmin broader politics and are swindled on account of negative understanding about the Dalit history and Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy of Outcastes politics that Dalits have to pass by lingo-ethnocentric identity. No, such linguistic identity in a country where hundreds of languages are spoken by hundreds of communities in which the Dalits are widely spread all over the country in different linguistic identity, will surely ruin their common Outcastes identity further and such activity will shatter the Dalits like broken glasses and the caste compradors will get advantage to divide and rule us.

Dalit Movements in Puducheri

From Republic Party of India (RPI) to Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) there are 36 Dalit movements identified in Puducheri. Very few are actively participate in Dalit issues and the rest are just letter-head activists.

Bavatu Subba Mangalang!
May All Beings Be Happy!

Sakya J. Mohan, Editor, *Dhamma*

Social Change and Mobility Through Protest: Dalit Movements in the Erstwhile Princely State of Travancore, Kerala

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In the history of *Dalit* Movements (DMs) in Kerala, as elsewhere in India, it was an attempt at mapping a new trajectory for an alternative human future. Born in the wake of the disorienting changes brought about by the advent of the British in the Kerala economy and society, the movements aimed at undermining the repulsive underbelly of the caste system and transforming the socio-political order from ordained status (ascriptive) to negotiated positions (achievable) of power. Viewed thus, the extent of liberatory transformation envisaged by them from the vantage point of the marginalised humanity was substantial.

This paper is an attempt at analysing the historical trajectory of three important *Dalit*¹ Movements – those organised by Poikayil Yohannan, Pampady John Joseph and Ayyankali – in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore- the southernmost part of Kerala. Travancore is focused due to its historical importance as it was the epicentre of *Dalit* Movements in Kerala, more than that of Cochin and Malabar, central and northern parts of the state respectively. The study falls into three broad perspective pieces: theoretical context of DMs; historical significance and implications of the Travancore movements; and a critical after thought.

I. Dalit Movements: A theoretical Formulation

In every society a minority of individuals have privileged access to wealth, education and social status, and hence to state power. The system gains in legitimacy in the public eye so long as this process of inclusion, especially in the matter of education, social status and public power, is rational and based on achievable criteria, say for instance competitiveness of the participants. This provides space for accommodating individuals belonging to various social groups in the structures of power and prevents monopolisation of the same by a group or a handful of individuals. If this process could be imaginatively combined with certain special care strategies for sharing political power and distributional criteria for sharing wealth in favour of the marginalised groups, the system may function relatively well. Reversely constructed, where all these are absent and, to compound the situation, where the process of inclusion/exclusion is rooted in primordial factors – for example caste system – social stratification gets fossilised rendering inter-strata mobility impossible.

In societies like this emancipation of the marginalised groups depends on the extent to which they could organise and struggle against the unjust socio-political order. But, since the exclusion is for the entire group(s) and, that too, on the basis of ascriptive factors, caste assumes centrality as a mobilisational category, often to the total rejection of class.

Further mobilisation itself depends on a number of factors such as : the extent of deprivation² felt by the people; the emergence of a powerful leadership within the groups concerned; its (leadership's) perception of the situation and the capacity to act accordingly [Aberle, 1066: 126]; the formation of a counter ideology [Lichtheim, 1967; Gramsci, 1972 and Lukacs, 1993]; changes in the material conditions of production; and, where the social group remains fragmented, construction of an identity to unite them [Prabhash, 2001, : 32-33]. These factors, when symbiotically related with deprivation in various permutations, produce sufficient condition for social protest and consequently for the emergence of social movements. In certain situations, interface with external forces – a colonial power – may accelerate or even inaugurate this process.

These movements, in most cases, state their demands in terms of rights – land rights, labour rights, educational rights and human rights – and struggle for the democratisation of the society and for inclusion within and the expansion of the political society [foworaker, 1995: 6, 21]. Of these, democratisation and expansion of political society is crucial from the vantage point of the marginalised as democratic politics alone is capable of empowering them i.e. because of their numerical strength they could capture political power which could then be used to ensure equality in society and economy. Rendering their demands, in the language of rights, on the other side, offer strength and legitimacy to their claim.

However, all the above attributes and factors *per se* won't account for the success of a social movement. Three further factors assume salience here: mobilisation of sufficient resources to maintain and expand itself [Ibid., 16]; creation of advantageous exchange relationship with other groups [Costain, 1992: XIV] and similarly situated movements³; and the emergence of a powerful middle class within the social group(s) organising the movement. Even if all these are fulfilled the social movements, particularly those based on relative deprivation, need not be, and in most case are not revolutionary in nature. At best they could be reformatory – partial changes in the value system and the consequential changes in the quality of relationships – or transformatory in nature – middle level structural changes in the traditional distribution of power and the system of differential allocation of resources, rights and privileges by attacking the monopoly of upper classes and/or castes in different areas of life including religion [Rao, 1979 : 255]. It is against this theoretical background that the *Dalit* Movements in Travancore have to be situated. And here British colonialism played an incremental role in preparing the background for this social renaissance.

II. Colonial Impact on Travancore Economy and Society

Travancore's contact with the British, whatever may be its negative consequences, triggered off far reaching changes which shook the very foundation of the traditional society. It unleashed the forces of production from feudal captivity and facilitated the state's interface with many of the beneficial aspects of colonial modernity viz. western administrative system, English education and a new value system based on democracy, rule of law and Christian ethics [Prabhash, 2001: 36-37]. Added to this, in order to extract

social surplus, the British forced the *Raja* to modernise the country's administration and change his policies pertaining to everything from caste system to agriculture.

The decade between 1855 to 1865, thus, marked tremendous changes in public policy in Travancore. Abolition of slavery (1855), Government monopoly on pepper (1860), tobacco (1863) and *Uliyam*⁴ services (1861); improvement in transport and communication; joining the British system of free trade adopting the British-Indian tariffs; and the *Pandarappattom* proclamation conferring full ownership rights on tenant cultivators of *sircar* land with unrestricted power of transfer (1865) were the most conspicuous of this policy shift [Varghese, 1970; Kooiman, 1989; and Tharakan, 1998].

All these brought about disorienting changes in the Travancore economy, state and society. For instance, both land and labour were liberated from the control of feudal lords and were made saleable commodities; and metropolitan capital was provided the opportunity to invest in trade and commerce, for the cultivation of cash crops and setting up of plantation of agro-processing industries [Kooiman, 1989: 19; Nair, 1991 and Jeffrey, 1976]. Economic activities from transportation to banking were encouraged. As far as we are concerned, this came to have two crucial by-products : caste lost its control over both men and materials; and marked the emergence of a small but powerful middle-class, particularly within the *Ezhava* community, who were very much agitated over the gap between their new found economic position and the traditional social status. [Prabash, 1987 : 100]. Added to this was the role played by the Christian Missionaries in the emancipation of the lower castes. Missionaries extended them education and developed in them a new self-respect and the faculty of critical enquiry, all of which ultimately emboldened them to interrogate the deviations of Travancore state and society [Prabhash, 2000: 84]. The protest movements organised by the backward castes and *Dalits* for social justice and mobility subsequently were the result of all these.

1. Dalit Movements in Travancore

Dalit Movements in Travancore, as elsewhere in India, had to confront a system of superior – subordinate relationship which was preordained and comprehensive to the extent of enveloping every walk of *Dalit* life, from public appearance to socio-religious status and economic and political power. Deflating such an authoritative structure naturally demanded a crusade against the hitherto unshakeable certainties of the caste system. Also needed was an ideological position that could justify the claims of the untouchables for a meaningful struggle for gaining whatever they considered legitimate and due [Roy and Singh, 1987: 108]. However given their meagre resource base, level of education, leadership potential, size of the elites and, more important, lack of a solid identity as they remained scattered among various castes, this meant building from scraps. It was here that the *Dalits* in Travancore differed substantially from other backward castes like *Ezhavas*. Not only that the *Ezhavas* were comparatively well off economically and advanced educationally but were also numerically powerful and united, with a sizeable middle class and a strong leadership. This also accounted for the achievements and the organisational success of the Sree Narayana Movement (SNM) organised by them.

A crucial point to note here was the absence of any linkage between the DMs and the SNM though they drew sustenance and strength from it [Prabhash, 2001: 53]. In this respect the backward castes movements in Kerala differed from similar movements elsewhere, for instance in Maharashtra where Jotirao Phuley attempted a political alliance of various groups including the *shudras* and *ati-Shudras* or untouchables against Brahmins (Auti and Chousalkar, 1986: 142; Suresh, 1996). Such an attempt was absent in Kerala partially because of the differential level of social development of these communities and partially also due to caste considerations. It was true that Sree Narayana Guru, the spiritual leader in whose name the *Ezhava* movement was organised, had at his heart the emancipation of all the lower castes and wanted Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, the caste organisation of the community to function as the vanguard to this liberation movement [Sasidharan, 1996: 161]. It was equally true that other founding leaders of the movement like Kumaran Asan and Sahodaran Ayyapan also stood for this [Rao, 1977: 122]. But this was more than what the aristocratic *Ezhavas* of that time could chew⁵. Hence the *Dalit* Movements had to chisel their own course and in the process they mapped a distinct strategy and tactics.

Unlike the Sree Narayana Movement, DMs did not attempt at challenging the caste orthodoxy through consecrating temples or establishing its own priesthood or manipulating religion to negate the inhuman social code that very religion was instrumental in establishing. In fact the attitude of these movements towards Hinduism seemed ambivalent. While Ayyankali tried to situate the *Dalit* community firmly within Hinduism, and wreck its inhuman core from within, Poikayil Yohannan and Pampady John Joseph flirted with Christianity, though both of them later became critical of the caste practices within that religion. Poikayil even turned hostile to Christianity and established his own religious order. Further while Sree Narayana Movement tried to make use of traditional knowledge to serve the cause of modernity, *Dalit* Movements fell back on colonial modernity [Sanal Mohan, n.d.: 34]. The philosophical content of the *Dalit* Movements was also not as fulsome as the SNM. Neither did they mint any powerful slogans capable of disorienting the tradition bound Travancore society [Prabhash, 2001:46]. Instead they concentrated on creating a new *Dalit* identity and a social praxis for subverting their marginality. Demands were for humane treatment, education, induction into the public sphere; land right, cultural rights and Government employment and legislative representation. Attempts were also afoot to create both caste and class consciousness, though the latter was often superseded by the former, naturally so.

Also the DMs never preached open hostility and violence against caste Hindus and the state. But at the same time they did not hesitate to use the 'Riot Method' (violence) in situations where pleadings and exhortations failed. Viewed thus they had all the trapping of a protest movement.

As stated elsewhere, there were three important *Dalit* movements in the pre-independence Travancore – those organised by Ayyankali, Poikayil Yohannan and

Pampady John Joseph. Among the three, while the latter two movements mainly attempted at constructing a *Dalit* identity, the record of the Ayyankali Movement lay in the development of a social praxis. Simultaneously, it also attempted at constructing a *Dalit* identity and provided an organisational base to the movement, though its success in this regard was peripheral.

2. Constructing Dalit Identity: Poikayil Yohannan and John Joseph

Poikayil Yohannan's and John Joseph's were two serious attempts – Yohannan's in particular – at constructing a *Dalit* identity. Recall here that the *Dalits* in the pre-independence Kerala as elsewhere in India were a highly differentiated lot. Conversion to Christianity further compounded the matter. Naturally therefore, one of the serious issues which *Dalit* Movements had to face at the outset itself pertained to identity.

In fact conversion itself was the product of such a search for identity outside Hinduism. They tried to flee their past and risk a new and liberated future away from centuries of caste and class oppressions [Clarke, 1998: 43]. As Duncan Forrester points out they were rejecting their negative identity and trying to erect a new one on its place [Forrester, 1977: 75]. But paradoxically identity still remained elusive. For, within the Church they remained the same Scheduled Castes of the yesteryears, despised and frowned upon by caste Hindu converts (Chentharassery, 1989; Alexander 1972; Jeffrey, 1976; and Oomen, 1985). This, therefore forced many to search elsewhere for this ever eluding identity, and the more enlightened among them even attempted to come out of the Christian order. Yohannan and John Joseph were clear instances in this regard.

Poikayil Yohannan was a *Paraya* convert who, after a brief flirtation with Christianity, deserted it due to caste-based discrimination with it. Once he went out of the congregation, he thought of propagating his own vision of religion which was prophetic and social in character [Sanal Mohan, n.d : 28]. His was not an attempt at establishing a different Church within the Christian fold but one of establishing a new *Dalit* religion of which he was the prophet and the preacher. Result was the establishment of the *Prathyaksha Reksha Daiva Sabha* (PRDS) in 1909.

Yohannan rejected Christianity and its commandments as alien and having nothing to do with the liberation of his people. He said:

In the new Testament are certain Epistles by St. Paul and others. For whom did St. Paul write the Epistles? For the Romans and Corinthians etc. There was not one written for the *Pulayas* of Travancore. Therefore, is no revelation in that for you, but only for the Romans, Corinthians etc. The revelation for you *Pulayas* of Travancore is through me [Sanal Mohan, n.d: 31].

The extent to which and the reason why he despised Christianity was further rendered clear in one of his poems:

This never ending pollution has ceased
Then if again addressed as *Pariya*
We would not come to such Churches

As baptized in the holy blood of Christ
Then, if again addressed as *Pulaya*
We would not come to such Churches [Ibid.]
His rejection of Christianity, thus, was comprehensive and complete.

Yohannan also tried to create a *Dalit* identity through constructing a history of his people, for he realized that a people could be made aware of their identity only if they knew their antiquity or their once glorious but now forgotten past. In other words, through the instrumentality of history, he tried to make his people feel the pinch of their current deprivation. He said:

I behold the histories of many races
Every history in Keralam was searched for the story of my race.
But there was none on the earth to write the story of my race [Ibid., 43]

He was also very much concerned about the fragmentation of *Dalits* on the basis of caste. That was also one of the reasons why he sought to establish a new religious order, for the community. Thus, he had a sense of history and had an idea about its utility in identity formation. However, his success in this regard remained limited. And it was Pampady John who had some degree of success in this area.

John Joseph was a *Pulaya* convert who sought to bring the *Pulayas* of all hues and shades under the banner of Travancore Cheramar Maha Sabha (1921), an organisation established by him. Like Yohannan, John Joseph also had a deep sense of history and realised its importance in identity formation. He, therefore, attempted at tracing the history of the *Pulayas*, and his association with Gnana Joshua – the then Chief Accounts Officer of Travancore State – proved crucial in this respect. Joshua had in his custody a rich collection of Government records and from them Joseph learned that the *Pulaya* lineage was linked with the ancient Chera Dynasty of Kerala. He even located a family called Aykara Yajmanans, then living in a village called Kunnathunadu in central Travancore, belonging to this LINEAGE [Chentharassery, 1989:34]. John Joseph described the *Pulayas* as land lords, poets and rulers of Kerala in antiquity. On this basis he even changed his caste's name from *Pulaya* to *Cheramar* so that his people could be filled with a sense pride about their ancient heritage.

Looking back it could be seen that neither Poikayil Yohannan nor Pampady John Joseph succeeded in forging ahead in the organisational front or in the construction of a *Dalit* identity. It was true that Yohannan established the branches of PRDS all over Travancore and succeeded in bringing under its flag about 14 *Dalit* groups and encouraged them to enter into wedlock among themselves overlooking sub-caste identities [Abhimanyu, 1990: 215]. Similar was the case with regard to the Cheramar Maha Sabha of John Joseph. In its hey-day it even threatened the existence of the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham of Ayyankali.

However both movements proved transient and did not succeed in giving a lasting contribution to the cause of the Scheduled Castes. When PRDS had a natural death,

Cheramar Maha Sabha gave way to Cheramar Daiva Sabha (1923), an exclusive organisation that catered to the interests of Christian *Pulayas* thus cutting a wedge between themselves and their Hindu counterparts [Chentharassery, 1989: 45]. Like PRDS, Daiva Sabha also came to an end very soon. One basic reason for this was that both Yohannan and John Joseph did not attempt at all in developing a social praxis. A protest movement should have an action plan for social transformation over and above stuffing up an identity for the deprived sections. The importance of social praxis lies in this and it was here that the Ayyankali Movement left its stamp compared to other movements.

III. Development of a Social Praxis: Ayyankali

Among the *Dalit* Movements in Travancore, the Ayyankali Movement, the one organised by the great leader of the Scheduled Castes in the whole of Kerala stands out in bold relief. Placing the movement in its historical context, it could be rightly stated that the changes it brought about in the socio-political terrain of Travancore and the magnitude of mass mobilisation it could achieve from the point of view of SCs were substantial. In this regard, perhaps it stands next only to the Sree Narayana Movement.

Ayyankali was an illiterate man, but one with a better grasp of social reality [Sanal Mohan, n.d: 34] and hence had a better social sense. Therefore the social praxis he developed was highly humanistic and democratic, though lacked in philosophical refinement, and the movement he launched was rich in action. Subtly and without any fuss, confining the use of violence to the most unavoidable of circumstances, he infringed many a caste law and entered the public sphere of Travancore with his caste men.

Looking at the mass mobilisations organised by Ayyankali it would be clear that they were more socio-cultural than economic in content. If at all the economic motive became part of any of his agitations – for instance wage increase demanded in connection with the agricultural workers strike, 1907 – it was more of a spill over from the agitations in the socio-cultural realms. This was based on his reading of the socio-historical specificities of Travancore, that economic deliverance of his people was possible only through the annihilation of caste system along with its social and cultural underpinnings. Hence he emphasised socio-cultural rights over economic rights.

From the sequence of the agitations organised by Ayyankali it seems that he had a better sense of priority. As the agitations progressed demands came changing. His initial concern was to establish the right of his people to use public roads and appear in public places, subsequently it drifted towards their right to education, and finally towards right to dress neatly [Prabhash, 2001 a: 120]. All these were essentially related to the development of a new *Dalit* self. That it was in these spheres he used the riot-method to attain the desired results shows the importance he had attached to them.

Using public roads and appearing in public places were crucial from the point of view of the Scheduled Castes because they were the stepping stones to the mainstream society. With this idea in mind Ayyankali organised a series of pedestrian marches and, in one

instance, he even dared to make a bullock cart ride (1893), then an exclusive privilege of the feudal elements. In the course of these events he had to face stiff resistance from caste Hindus and in some places even from *Ezhavas*. Riots spread far and wide and its geographical spread shows the extent of success attained by Ayyankali in making the issue a focal point of mass mobilisation eventually forcing governmental intervention in favour of SCs.

Education was another of his absorbing concern. That he had a very good grasp of the importance of education in social mobility was clear from the encouragement he had given in establishing libraries and night schools for the benefit of his people and his proposal to the Government that elementary education be made compulsory for them [Girijadmajan, 1982: 14]. This was no small thing when looked at from the context of the value system prevalent in this part of the country hundred years ago.

Ayyankali's first move in the area of education was to open schools exclusively for the Scheduled Castes and one such school was established in Vengannoor in 1904. However he gave up his plan later due to resistance from caste Hindus and thereafter directed his attention towards securing admission for the children of his community in Government schools along with the children of the *savarnas*. But when this was also opposed by the same conservative social forces he resorted to a new mode of action – strike by agricultural workers [Prabhash, 2001 a: 126].

The workers belonging to the Scheduled Castes, especially *Pulayas*, were forbidden from engaging in agricultural work for *savarna* landlords. Demands such as wage increase and six day week were also raised. The strike continued for one full year (1907-08) and was meticulously planned. A small bank of youth known as *Ayyankali Pada* was formed to offer protection to the strikers against criminal elements recruited by landlords. Those who tried to violate the ban were forcibly restrained, but at the same time steps were taken to ensure alternative sources of employment for the striking workers by entering into deals with the fisher folk of the coastal areas. In the end a tripartite agreement was reached between Ayyankali, caste Hindu landlords and the Government whereby SC children were granted permission to attend schools. The strike was certainly not the product of any class consciousness [Oommen, 1985: 62], but by inducing the *Dalits* to use it as a forceful political weapon, Ayyankali succeeded in creating in them a new consciousness [Sanal Mohan, n.d: 34]. He thus challenged the feudal relations in agriculture and showed his men that there was nothing sacrosanct in their relationship with *Jenmies* [Ibid., 35].

Subsequently efforts were also made to challenge caste restrictions on dressing. Recall here that in the caste hierarchy the mode of dressing and caste, as both were attached to the body, had an inverse relationship [Ibid., 36], dressing neatly and appropriately the prerogative of the superior castes and dressing shabbily and inappropriately the duty of the lower castes. Viewed thus, dress separated the lord from the serf. This was one of the basic reasons why almost all Backward Caste Movements in India reacted sharply to dress restrictions. Ayyankali had also asked his people to dress neatly and sufficiently

and exhorted women to give up the practice of wearing stone necklaces, a mark of subjugation. His advice was to achieve progress by faith in God, modern dressing and cleanliness, obedience and discipline [Ibid., 42]. In this sense Ayyankali Movement had a strong dose of Sankritization built into it as what Ayyankali advised his fellow men to emulate were the practices of caste Hindus. With the help of all these moves he successfully completed the first phase of his agitation and carved out a little social space for the *Dalits* in the conservative and caste-ridden social terrain of Travancore. To provide them their due in the political sphere became his next concern. Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS) was the result of such a project.

It was already stated that unlike Poikayil Yohannan and Pampady John Joseph, the greatest contribution of Ayyankali was the development of a social praxis for the mobilisation of his people. But in this process he also attempted at constructing a Dalit identity, though indirectly, by organising them into a community. The struggle for claiming public space and ending of other social indignities gradually brought together people of various *Dalit* groups and this later became the basis of identity formation.

Ayyankali had a faint idea about the need for this even before he started mass mobilisation programmes for in his youth itself he was seen organising people around cultural symbols. He collected a small band of youths belonging to his caste and encouraged them to perform folk arts, besides giving them training in martial arts. In their private theatre they performed *Pattukachery*, *Parijakali*, *Kolkali*, *Kurathiattom*, *Kakkarassi Drama* and *Valli Drama*, all of these the folk performances of *Dalits* in Kerala [Joseph, 1986: 109; Abhimanyu, 1990: 53–54]. This was his first lesson in identity construction and it got crystallized with subsequent mass mobilisations. Finally the organisation of Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham helped form the structural requirements of this transformation into a community with diverse constituting factors [Sanal Mohan, n. d: 38].

SJPS was established in 1907 to lend organisational support to his social programmes and to mobilise the entire Scheduled Castes and bring them under one flag. At its inception and for a substantial period thereafter, it drew strength from the entire SC fraternity. Hindus as well as Christians. Though he was opposed to conversion, ayyankali had no hesitation to bring the converts also into the fold of his organisation. His credential in this regard was proved beyond doubt by three crucial factors: the original byelaw of SJPS clearly revealed that the association was meant to cater to the interests of all SCs; at the leadership level of the organ there were *Dalits* of all hues and shades; and in the prayer recited in the Sunday meetings of the organisation one finds Lord Sree Krishna and Jesus Christ being referred to as one and the same {Abhimanyu, 1990: 159}.

The Sangham was also democratic in character and gender sensitive. According to its rules the office bearers were to be democratically elected and decisions were to be arrived at on the basis of the majoritarian principle. Further, every annual meeting of SJPS concluded with the participants posing for photograph with the then Dewan. Looking back at this simple act, it seems to be a clever strategy adopted by Ayyankali to bring his

people closer to the seats of authority (Dewan as the representative of state power), at least symbolically. This was definitely a great confidence building measure. Much more, women could also be spotted in those photographs. This meant that Ayyankali encouraged women to participate in the proceedings of the Sangham. In this respect SJPS made a drastic departure from all other pre-independence social organisations in Kerala. Before the Brahmins or for that matter castes above SCs brought their women from the interior of their homes to the public sphere, Ayyankali did it. This was indeed a revolutionary step when viewed against the social mores of 20th century Travancore.

Another novel feature of Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham was the establishment of Community Courts. Ayyankali established at the headquarters (Vengannoor) of the Sangham a court to try and settle disputes among his caste men. It had all the paraphernalia of a regular court with its lawyers, judges, bench clerks etc. One basic reason behind this experiment was to put an end to his people's dependence for justice on regular courts manned by caste Hindus in whom he had little faith. It was also expensive and time consuming, at the end of which justice was hardly dispersed as well. Further he also found in it a way to associate his people with the Sangham. The working of the court was coordinated by the units of the Sangham and this helped a great deal in making the community [Sanal Mohan, n. d.: 46].

As stated elsewhere, the primary purpose for which SJPS was established was to place the *Dalits* in the political realm of Travancore. The effort bore fruit soon. In 1911 P. K. Govinda Pillai was nominated as the representative of the Scheduled Castes to the Sri Moolam Praja Sabha – legislature – and on December 5, Ayyankali himself become its member, a position in which he continued until 1933⁶. Soon many others from the community found their way to the Sabha. Ayyankali and his colleagues raised many critical issues pertaining to land, housing, education, employment and agriculture in the House and in some areas – for instance education and land question – achieved moderate success as well [Oommen, 1985: 64].

IV. Assessing Dalit Movements

Any account of *Dalit* Movements in Travancore would be incomplete without taking stock of their inherent limitations as well. They definitely had many a silver lining, so also certain shortcomings the most important of which was their failure in rising above petty sub-caste differentials. It was a paradox that while it seemed that the *Dalit* Movements were consolidating themselves, a parallel process was also set in motion – fragmentation of the community in caste/religious terms. Surprisingly, the political representatives themselves began to argue the case of their respective sub-castes upsetting the process of identity building set in motion by the trio, Yohannan, John Joseph and Ayyankali. However, these leaders themselves contributed to the internal schism within the *Dalit* fraternity were the greatest paradox. Recall here the transformation of Pampady John Joseph from Cheramar Maha Sabha to Cheramar Daiva Sabha. Even a great leader like Ayyankali was heard arguing the cause of Hindu Scheduled Castes, *Pulayas* in particular, in the Assembly towards the end of his career. One of the speeches delivered by him in the Sri Moolam Praja Sabha is noteworthy in this regard. In it he argued:

More concessions may be given to *Pulayas* in matters of education and employment. For instance, it would be welcome if the Sirkar (Government) paid one *Chakram* and one *Kasu* per student for a period of seven years. Kindly recall that the *Pathiris* (Priests) are providing financial assistance to the *Pulaya* Christian students. Paradoxically these *Pulaya* Christian students are also making use of the Government aid thus cutting at the available finance of our *Pulaya* students [Malayala Manorama, 1930].

In 1937 Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham itself came to a virtual end with the formation of all Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha by T. T. Kesava Shashtri, son-in-law of Ayyankali.

Further, it is also noticed that since his induction to the legislature Ayyankali did not initiate any serious mass mobilisation programmes except the ones organised in connection with school admission (1914) and wearing of stone beads by the women folk (1915). Stranger still was his absence from the struggles for democratic governance in Travancore. It could be argued, as was done by many, that at that point of time Ayyankali could not afford to render a critique of Government as many of the items in his agenda were those which could be achieved only with the active support of the State. While this was definitely true, it also exposed the inherent weakness of his movement.

In comparison to Sree Narayana Movement, Ayyankali Movement did not have either the leadership potential or the social resource to fall back on. The SNM also had the backing of a strong educated and economically powerful middle class⁷. Ayyankali Movement lagged behind in this respect also. Without disrespect towards Yohannan and John Joseph, one could state that the *Dalits* in Travancore, perhaps in the whole of Kerala, had a great leader only in Ayyankali. Their movements could not produce a second level leadership. Moreover they did not have at their disposal at least a few educated men who were economically well off. Kathleen Gough subtly brings out this in her study of the Palakkara village. She says:

The Palakkara Harijans shook off feudal religious forms much later than the *Ezhavas* [and much less effectively]. This was probably because they were restricted to landless labour under high caste masters, because of the universal social discrimination against them, and because of their confinement within a small-scale rural setting, their illiteracy and their lack of an urban bourgeoisie [Gough, 1970: 160-61].

These objective historical conditions cast their shadow on the prospects of the *Dalit* Movement in Travancore. As a consequence, these movements were forced to operate within the framework of authority created by Royal power [Tharakan, 1996: 132]. And this in its turn had affected their internal solidarity, further weakening them and leading to their eventual decimation. As the movements began to depend on the Royal power for their sustenance, they soon came to be co-opted by the State inaugurating a process of competition among the movement's partners for its patronage. On the other side, the State was also found plotting against *Dalit* solidarity first by cutting a wedge between Hindu *Dalits* and their Christian counterparts and then by trying to close the rank among

the various sub-castes within the Hindu *Dalit* fraternity⁸. Thus the interface with the State itself became a factor which retarded the identity building process and the possible unity of *Dalits* cutting across caste and religion [Sanal Mohan, n. d: 44].

Under the cumulative impact of the above factors the *Dalit* Movements in Travancore failed to bring about any drastic changes in the socio-political plane of the State. They also failed in constructing a *Dalit* identity though they had made a brave attempt at it. Neither could they evolve a critique of the existing structure of the economy so as to salvage the *Dalits* from the margins of political economy [Ibid. 49]. However, this should not be taken to mean that they were gross failures. As stated earlier they had their definite silver linings and this consisted in giving the oppressed a face-life. They gave them self-respect and placed them in the social and political terra firma of Travancore. They obtained for them four basic rights: right to appear in public places decently dressed; right to education, cultural rights and the right to be represented in the Government, no mean achievement when viewed against the pre-independence feudal context of Travancore. This, in fact, was the greatest legacy of the *Dalit* Movements in Travancore.

Notes:

1. The word *Dalit* is used in this study to denote Scheduled Castes only.
2. It may be noted that the feeling of deprivation may not be absolute but relative. It exists either in the form of discrepancy between one's legitimate expectations and actuality or perceived capabilities or in collation of one's existential condition with others [Rao, 1979; Aberle, 1966; Gurr, 1970].
3. Having said this one should hasten to add that the creation of a broad based coalition in the case of castes is difficult to materialise or if materialised difficult to sustain since in terms of economic position and social development each caste varies from the other and, still more significant, is differentially situated in the purity – pollution line so much so that each one of them seeks to maintain scrupulously the ritual distance among themselves intact.
4. According to the then prevailing laws the lower castes were mandated to do certain voluntary service to the state. This was called *Uliyam Service*.
5. As a result of this Sree Narayana Guru expressed his intention to resign from the SNDP *Yogam*. 'He attributed 'caste pride' to leaders of the *Yogam* and declared that he belonged to no caste or religion' [Sasidharan, 1996: 161].
6. He resigned his membership in the Assembly on health grounds in February 1933.
7. There was among the *Ezhavas* three times as many merchants as among *Nairs*, the total amounting to 42,438 persons in 1931. Besides, they counted 2,326 Lawyers, Doctors and Professors, 346 Public Officials and 5201 English educated [Houtart and Lemercinier, 1978: 11-18; Oommen, 1985: 160-61].
8. For instance we find Sir. C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, himself, mediating between the leaders of various *Dalit* organisations and even encouraging them to unite under the banner of one umbrella association. It was true that he had his own vested interest in doing so as he wanted to swell the ranks of the Governmentarians vis-à-vis the *Ezhava*, Christian and Muslim communities who were struggling for civic rights.

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Manohar Yadav

Historical Account:

Given the sensitive turn that the Dalit movement in Karnataka has taken from the past one decade, one needs to be prudent enough in speaking about it. Once it was a vigorous march but now sadly gives an impression of being at a tangent. Indeed, as it emerged from long historical slumber, it gave rise to a stormy wave of protest against all sorts of oppressive tendencies inherent in the very basic social fabric of the society in Karnataka. It played a decisive role in awakening the Dalits in Karnataka. But also shook rigid, irresponsible Hindu conscience and spread like a wild fire burning every sluggish mind to transform it into a zealous flame. It gave a strong blow to the terrible hold that the Brahminic and the feudal Hindus had over the untouchable and other masses, on their mindset, culture and all life driving energies. Therefore, it will not be too much if said of it as having really hailed a new era of hope for Dalits in Karnataka. In response to its powerful emancipatory gestures, Dalits of every hamlet, village, town and the city, joined ***** masse to make it a common plank of pride, hope, struggle and liberation.

Actually it began its career with the launch of Bhim Sena, by Mr. Shyam Sunder, who is still respected and followed as a staunch Ambedkartire thinker and revolutionary in Karnataka. After him there was void for some time since there was none so good to fill up the gap he created with his death in ...practically, though there was not much visible achievement as such by the Bhim Sena, in terms of creating emotional and organizational fervour Bhim Sena and its founder niched a conspicuous place in the history of Dalit movement in Karnataka. But soon Karnataka produced another vigorous Ambedkarite in B Basavalingappa, who although was associated with congress for his political aims was in full measure for the cause of the Dalit masses. He was a brilliant lawyer and an academician par excellent. Also he was known for his outspokenness. That was how during his lifetime he had become a genuine voice for Dalits in Karnataka. However, very often, may be that it was his method of treating the enemies, he used to let loose his temperament with not so healthy diatribe he was ever known for. He was daring devil in hurling his sarcastic statements. Being a Congress man he used to quote Ambedkar to have said of it 'as a burning house' and was also bold enough to tell his followers that there should be no discussion on Ambedkar's thoughts. He was of the view that Ambedkar should be accepted as he is. Such as one, being a minister in the Congress government, in one of his public meetings criticised and likened entire Kannada literature to Bhusa (Cattle feed). This harsh lash of his tongue generated a bitter controversy. There was uproar in the state until he quit his job as minister. But it is this incident, which provided bedrock for founding the Karnataka Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS), an organisation that later on was to become most popular in the state. It created an environment where all enlightened Dalits were forced to pool together to form this

historic organisation. Thus Bhusa movement is also celebrated as most significant in the history of Dalit movement in Karnataka. The DSS 'went on to become organisationally the strongest and long lasting Dalit movement in the country' (Gail Omvedt, 'Dalits and Democratic Revolution in India' 1994:337).

New Beginning:

Indeed it was a revolutionary new beginning. DSS founded itself on the concept of attaining an entity of wholeness where art, culture, science and activism operate together, with the spirit of both reason and emotion, to wage a war on the established notions of exploitative relationships functioning in the various domains of the society in Karnataka. Accordingly, it had pulled power from every direction. All potential Dalit writers, poets, novelists, social scientists, artists and activists were drawn under its banner to form a unique combination of a front hitherto unknown. Poets, writers and thinkers acted as philosophers whereas activists were the commanders. The former inspired the latter. It was the most scientific attempt to organise people in the field with the help of discourses, cadre camps, workshops and cultural programmes. There were balladeers, singers, dramatists and artists performing their shows to educate the illiterate and ignorant masses. In less than a decade of its start the DSS had reached every man and woman and won their heart. That was how the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti posed a serious threat to the hegemonic order in Karnataka. In case of an event of an atrocity or injustice committed on Dalits, either by higher castes or state machinery itself, thousands of people thronged in protest against the culprits. They took on the whole lot of the regime responsible for the crime by shouting slogans, dancing and drum beating and singing songs. All these gestures were strange in so far as they demonstrated new forms and contents of protest. Sometimes scoffing shrills were also heard from the strong crowd. Yet such expressions appeared to be far meaningful and distinctive modes of disrupting the enemy's doings. These events were always used as instruments to illuminate victims about the kind of society and social system, which instead of shunning they wrongly revered. Centuries old anguish had found a great channel in DSS to flow out as forcefully as it could. It was an image of an alternative world if not utopia that had possessed people to free them from the age-old shackles.

Dalit Literature:

Dalit Literature grew as an inherent part of the Dalit movement in Karnataka. In fact this literary movement formed the fulcrum around which the entire movement was building up. In the process the DSS gave birth to many literary figures. The writers had developed rarest style of using a language whose rhetoric effect could successfully break peoples silence and at once instilled in them strength, courage and confidence. Many literary works won incontestable admiration and applaud from the readers. The inner essence of these literary works contained organised experience of the writers representing pain, hunger, humiliation and fall of the Dalit masses. Although they preferred coercive tactics in addressing the enemies, their intentions remained crystal clear as being sheared human. So both the enemy and the exploited were the objects of education, enlightenment and reform. Thus, Dalit literature created a great deal of awakening, enthusiasm, anxiety and ability to perform on the part of those who joined the DSS. It motivated people to

understand it and become one with it. Because of the sharp signifying qualities Dalit literature DSS reached such a height that every Dalit owned it and embraced it.

Important Protest Events:

Current Realities:

Till 1986 DSS functioned with full measure of its completeness. It was free from despairs or incongruence of whatever sort. The leadership was collective although conveners at the levels of the state, the district and the taluka were operating as the lead workers. There was perfect harmony, from top to the bottom level, between all the wings of DSS. But all of a sudden there arose a move to elect a leader on a democratic basis. It only means, of late, there had developed internal fissures, which were about to be delivered into various factions. Spontaneity had lost its strength to drive the movement further together. Of course though what was called as a democratic method a leader was elected. But slowly some lead persons started distancing from the main body of the DSS run under such leadership. Soon there came up one more parallel organisation in the state with the same heading. That spilt the organisation into two parts even at the level of the hamlet. Subsequently many such splinter groups took up their own ways. Now you cannot exactly identify how many groups are there in the state functioning as real DSS. The DSS while making up itself into a mighty force had long striven to overcome historical hurdles operating in the form of regional diversities and internal fissions among the various Dalit communities in Karnataka. Now these diversities were enlivened. Few in North Karnataka started their own organisation such as Machagar Mahasangh which got their life back. The huge band of unemployed youth having been earlier recruited in DSS slowly turned out to be lumpen elements not interested any more in real organisation but in their own survival devices. They got the opportunity for being distributed among various factions of DSS but they remained there as workers not to serve organisation but to serve their own ends. Today's each faction had developed nexus with one or the other political party and the police and the administrative echelons of power structure as well. At the level of hobli or taluk the operation of these nexus is rampant and open. The Dalit literature has also lost its fire. Its current is not so powerful as it used to be before.

In short the division among Dalit demagogues, lumpenisation of the Dalit youth, crisis in Dalit literature, political liaisons have all contributed to the downfall of DSS in Karnataka.

POST-AMBEDKAR SCHEDULED CASTES AGITATIONS IN ANDHRA PRADESH: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

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An Apology

The term 'agitations' is being used in this paper rather than the usual concept, movement. It is also our intention not to use the term 'dalit' in the context of fractured identities of subversive agitations within the ambit of the term first time in India in this state. The author vows an explanation for not using the traditional terminology, which is popular among dalit scholars and others working on dalits.

There is a growing literature on social movements with reference to dalits in India. But the theory of social movements takes into consideration those agitations which are sustained through institutional structures. In fact, there are several explanations in the use of the term social movement. It is said that is "an extra-institutionalized collective political action which strive for or resist social and political change". It is an illegal public protest, according to David Bailey. But a protest or agitation turns out to be a movement when it is sustained through collective action. Heberle defines movement as 'collective attempts to bring change or create new social order'. Viewing the scheduled castes agitations in Andhra Pradesh from this angle makes the problem difficult as the struggles in the state appear to be not qualified to call them as movements. They are sporadic, momentary and issue based. Therefore, we have refrained from using the term social movement to understand the dalit agitations in Andhra Pradesh. We have also not used the term dalit as a collective of all socially deprived groups. There is no social cohesion among the 59 identified scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh. Further, a separate agitation for the identity and share in the benefits has been spearheaded for the last one decade in the state. In fact the colonial identity of the scheduled castes or ex-untouchables is lost long back with protracted war against the indigenous culture of the native Indians. This has been done deliberately by the settlers both in the past and in recent times. Interestingly the native Indians themselves have played into the hands of their enemies by denying their own cultural identity once they are converted into a different faith. It is almost disappeared in the mainstream dalit consciousness in Andhra Pradesh except in a few pockets in Telangana and other under developed regions of the state.

Andhra Pradesh was formed as a separate state in 1956, the year in which Babasaheb Ambedkar passed away. Therefore, the scheduled castes agitations in the state need to be viewed as Post-Ambedkar agitations. Though Andhra Pradesh is administratively emerged as an independent entity, it is in fact consisted of four distinguished regions. Each region has its own socio-economic and geographical identity. But, in the

mainstream literature the dominant region of coastal Andhra is projected as Andhra Pradesh. This has inhibited the unique nature of scheduled caste problems in Telangana, Rayalaseema and North Andhra. The so-called social movements and protest movements of Andhra Pradesh as depicted and explained by scholars relate to coastal Andhra Pradesh only. In fact the region had a unique advantage of conversions by 1931. It was estimated by Forrester D.B. that 20 per cent of depressed classes in Godavari districts, 32 per cent in Krishna and 57 per cent in Guntur have been converted to Christianity by 1931. It was in this region Ambedkar movement originated. Except in the studies of Gail Omvedt who has studied Ambedkar movement separately for Telangana (Hyderabad) and coastal Andhra, none of the scholars paid any attention to the diversity in the problems of scheduled castes in different parts of the state. The social movements in Telangana region are absorbed in the left and radical left struggles from 1950, before the formation of the state. The Rayalaseema region has a unique problem of factionalism and the scheduled castes are the active players in this game.

The North Coastal Andhra is the most neglected and marginalised region and therefore the agitations and events have never been brought to the attention of the scholars except as a part of Srikakulam struggle. It is now clear that a study of the agitations of the scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh is expected to pay attention to the different aspects of the struggles unique to each region. A blanket generalization may not help the scholar to comprehend the problem.

Methodologies

There appears to be no unanimity in the use of a single method to study the agitations, struggles and movements of the scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh in particular and social movements in general. Several approaches have been followed by scholars to study the social movements. There are broadly three approaches that are popular in the study of dalit movements.

1. The Revised historical materialism where is the dialectical nature of the caste, identified as class caste is followed by Gail Omvedt in her study on Dalits and the Democratic Revolution analyzed the ideology and organisation of a movement as an anti-caste and class struggle with its inter actions with freedom struggle. She has used the Marxist categories of class, dialectics and ideology of base and super structure in her analysis.
2. The institutional process of M.S. Gore who has developed a theory of social context to place Ambedkar in an ideological perspective.
3. Relative Deprivation or social exclusion approach as a new theory of social development in the context of globalisation. This is a revised theory of capability approach developed by Amartya Sen mostly bringing economic categories for analysis rather than the social classes of castes in India. But it can be productively used to study the dalit situation in the global context.

Struggles in Andhra Pradesh

It is observed that the approaches used by scholars to study the social movements of dalits are not uniform. Further, most of the studies undertaken on scheduled castes or dalits in Andhra Pradesh are related to the Ambedkar period, prior to 1956 before the formation of the state. Therefore, the studies do not focus on the process of change and the issues that are generated from these struggles. Most of the studies concentrate on Ambedkar movement as an extended ideology of all India character without considering the specific nature of each state and region. As a result, they have failed to bring out the shortcomings of the movements to provide insights into the problems.

The following important events are identified here around which the scheduled castes agitations in Andhra Pradesh are concentrated.

1. 1962 Sanjivaiah became the first dalit Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh
2. 1969 Kanchikacherla Kotesu was burnt alive
3. 1983 Burning of 4 persons in Padiri Kuppam in Chittoor district
4. 1985 The Karamchedu massacre took place on July 17th in Prakasam district resulting in the formation of Dalit Mahasabha
5. 1990 Chundurur carnage took place on August 6th in Guntur district. The breaking of Dalit Mahasabha
6. 1992 A dalit writers, artists and intellectuals collective formed in Hyderabad
7. 1996 Madiga Dandora was formed in coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh
8. 2000 Vempenta Incident in Kurnool district where dalits were killed through the alleged involvement of Naxlite groups
9. 2001 Dalit human rights organisation as an NGO initiative formed to represent the dalit issue at WCAR at Durban
10. 2003 The Scheduled Castes reservations were categorized by the government as ABC and D.

The Context of the struggles

The ten important events identified in the history of scheduled castes struggles in Andhra Pradesh took place over a period of four decades. This covers the major part of the period after the formation of the state in 1956. In all the events, the significant factor of dispute appears to be social exploitation and the protest against caste discrimination. It is noticed that the first event in the beginning of the agitations in the state was an indication of the dalit upsurge, symbolically resulting in the capture of the post of chief minister of a state. The major content of the protest movements which are an extension of the anti-Brahmin struggles from the combined Madras Presidency appear to have social equality. This has facilitated the emergence of the leadership of Dr. Sanjivaiah, a scholar politician.

The Kanchikacharla Kotesu case became a landmark in the history of dalit struggles in Andhra Pradesh. This incident helped the ruling castes to become conscious of their hegemony over the dalits in the advanced districts of Andhra Pradesh. The Padiri Kuppam case is the beginning of a new political regime based on anti-Brahmin struggle and consolidation of caste power of a Sudra caste in Andhra Pradesh. Caste is always

seen in India in its practice, otherwise it has no meaning. Therefore, when a particular caste becomes strong, it tries to show its power in relation to another caste, mostly the deprived caste like scheduled castes. This is what has happened in Padiri Kuppam and in Karamchedu. The Karamchedu massacre was so brutal that two dalit minor girls were raped and their private parts mutilated. The brutal massacre gave a conscious development of an organisation to protest against the incident. The formation of the Dalitha Mahasabha was a long felt need of the dalits in the state, as the mainstream dalit struggles in the state were confined to job reservation by the organised few till the incident happened in Karamchedu. Within 5 years after the Karamchedu incident, the Chundururu incident took place in the neighbouring district of Guntur. But, the usual daliting i.e., breaking into pieces has taken place within the dalith mahasabha when the Chundururu issue came up for agitation. However, these two important events moved the intellectuals and writers belonging to the scheduled castes and some backward castes to form into an organisation to reflect on the woes of dalits in Andhra Pradesh.

The madigas of Andhra Pradesh, the victims of Kaamchedu became conscious of their conditions and rights. They perceived that injustice is done to them by malas within the dalit group and therefore wanted a separate identity for their group. This helped to form a separate organisation called 'Madiga Dandora'. The malas protested against this and formed a separate organisation called 'Mala Mahanadu'. The ghastly incident in Vempenta where about a half a dozen dalits were killed passed out without any significant attention in the melee of internal bickerings. Keeping the world conference against racism, the NGO sector reacted positively to take the dalit issue to the international forum through the formation of dalit human rights group. The government of Andhra Pradesh has passed a government order dividing the scheduled castes reservations into ABCD groups in 2003. The malas challenged it in the Supreme Court and it was struck down by Supreme Court as unconstitutional. Interestingly all the struggles in the state moved around the above issues and took place in the advanced districts of coastal Andhra Pradesh.

An Evaluation of the struggles

We have presented the incidents and data on the scheduled castes struggles, which are basically caste related issues in Andhra Pradesh. It is now difficult to evaluate the struggles in terms of any of the methodologies that have been used by scholars. We have not been able to develop a political economy of dalit movements in India. The Marxist scholars have used the European categories to study Indian caste and have not been totally succeeded in evaluating the struggles and movements. But, we can evaluate the struggles in terms of the empirical data in relation to other major events in the Andhra Society, so as to get some meaningful conclusions. We are trying to relate the incidents and events in the context of the overall change and a development in Andhra society here. If the events are not related to the overall development in the state, they become autonomous without any substantial meaning it. In fact, a situation has already set in Andhra Pradesh where the dalit struggles and agitations are viewed as independent and autonomous without any active participation or relation with other contemporary struggles. In a way it is an alienation of the dalits from the mainstream. Does it really

help the dalits? How are the dalits trying to build up their movements or agitations in an era of economic globalisation where events are inter-dependant?

An attempt is made here to evaluate the scheduled castes struggles in relation to other developments in Andhra Pradesh. It is very significant to find that all major events in the scheduled castes struggles took place in the developed coastal Andhra Pradesh. Social scientists have identified these districts as beneficiaries of green revolution with new inputs both from government and other institutional structures. This green revolution has brought in new social relations in these districts which the social scientists have recorded and analyzed as a part of general development model. No attention is paid by the scholars on the issues of caste relations in the process of agrarian change. Some scholars have analyzed the events as a part of class struggle or agrarian class conflicts with some attention on caste conflicts. But this may not help dalit activist to arrive at meaningful conclusions for the continuation of his work with people. It is our view that so far the scheduled castes struggles were burdened with social and psychological issues without paying much attention to the economic issues, which perhaps are responsible for the events that we have identified already. This does not mean there is a base – super structure relationship here. Gail Omvedt and others have employed those categories and are now disappointed. Therefore, without going into the methodological questions, we present here the three phases of the agitations / struggles in Andhra Pradesh after the formation of the state.

Self Respect Movement

The telugu speaking people of Andhra region have inherited the self respect movement of Madras Presidency when a separate state was formed in 1956. The Adi Dravida and Adi Andhra movement initiated in Hyderabad state by Bhagyareddy Varma had also toured the districts in the early 1940s and enthused the dalit masses. All these have culminated in the self-respect and anti-untouchability struggles in Andhra Pradesh. The scheduled castes were slowly consolidating themselves as a cohesive group. The leaders among the scheduled castes have started management hostels for the educational development of the scheduled castes with state aid. This has given opportunities to some of the ex-untouchables to enter higher educational institutions and civil service. A separate 'Harijan elite' started emerging in Andhra Pradesh.

Social Equality Struggles

The emergence of a few educated dalits in the civil society as a pressure group helped the educated dalits to enter public sector jobs the jobholders have started organising Scheduled Caste Welfare Organisations when they started facing discrimination, humiliation and punishment in their place of work. In order to protect their self-respect and constitutional rights in the area of promotion, transfer and appointments of their kin, these groups have slowly formed Ambedkar organisations to incorporate the support of the local dalits. The formation of the Ambedkar associations at the district head quarters along with the employees' organisation helped to form a network of dalits in the state. This helped the dalit organisations to put forward certain demands before the government. The government has to yield to these demands and allocate funds in the plan

budgets of social welfare departments. Most of the demand relate to the enhancement of scholarships, opening up of new residential schools and soon. By the end of the second term of NTR, the government seemed to have realised that it is expensive to meet the demands of the organised dalits. In fact, the poverty levels among the dalits in the 1970s was 65 per cent and has remained at 45 per cent even by 1990. They are much higher than OBCs and other castes. But, the demands of the dalit organisations have accordingly contained issues relating to the amelioration of poverty and economic support programmes. We have not made any content analysis of the demands here. But, a cursory look at the protest literature created during the period contain mostly social issues. And most of the issues are addressed to the government for solution.

The literacy levels of the people of Andhra Pradesh is one of the lowest in the country and that of the scheduled castes much lower than the national average. In the latest NSS Report (1999 – 2000), it is reported that out of every 1000 households in the age group of 15 years and above 522 among males and 772 among females are illiterate among scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh. Though the Ambedkar and dalit organisations are very active, the attention paid by these groups on the development of literacy among the dalits in rural areas is negligible.

It seems there is no relationship between the levels of literacy and crimes against dalits in India. It is found that Kerala comes as number four in rank in terms of atrocities on dalits per lakh of population in 1998 while Andhra comes sixth. We have made a study on the atrocities against scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh and developed a composite index of discrimination. The data are presented in Table – 1

Determination of Caste Discrimination

Caste system in India ascribes different values to different castes. This can be found across all castes. Some castes are discriminated in private sphere, some are in public life and dalits are discriminated everywhere. This is because of the low value attributed to the life of a dalit. This discrimination is practiced in several ways. But in a civilised society certain minimum human relations are expected to be exchanged between individuals who are equal in physical terms. But this is found to be not valid in India. The dalits are discriminated even in simple human justures such as giving drinking water, treating all human beings as equal before God, etc. In order to find out how the dalits are discriminated on the basis of their birth, a statistical estimate is made on the basis of the data culled out from Punnayya Commission report. As the number of cases in each item of discrimination is not uniform to another, we thought of estimating a composite index of discrimination. Out of the 4 events of discrimination reported in the Report, we have taken two important events, temple entry and two glasses system to represent discrimination across districts. These two events are reported in all the districts in the State. We have assigned 2/3 weight to temple entry and 1/3 weight to two glasses system to estimate the composite index. The indices are presented in Table – 1 along with the illiteracy rates and incidence of general poverty and agriculture labourers among dalits in each district. The value of composite index shows the magnitude of discrimination. It is found that the composite index is not uniform across the districts. It may be related to the

economic status of the people represented by their poverty and economic calling. Therefore, we have run the following regression to test the determinants of discrimination.

Table – 1: Composite Index of Caste Discrimination

Sr. No	District	Composite Index of Discrimination	SC Illiterate (%)	General Poverty (%)	SC Ag. Lab (%)
1	Adilabad	11.33	75.74	77.00	23.51
2	Anantapur	211.33	74.32	62.00	35.43
3	Chittoor	209.33	64.72	62.40	35.97
4	Cuddapah	23.33	67.65	54.00	37.87
5	East Godavari	23.67	60.11	51.00	35.44
6	Guntur	143.33	62.51	56.60	42.14
7	Karimnagar	6.33	75.1	53.00	36.17
8	Khamman	66.33	68.39	58.00	35.47
9	Krishna	5.00	59.84	47.00	40.43
10	Kurnool	290.67	71.92	50.50	37.23
11	Mahbubnagar	754.00	85.49	65.00	47.97
12	Medak	74.33	82.73	58.00	25.72
13	Nalgonda	165.00	75.4	58.50	37.65
14	Nellore	43.00	64.94	48.00	37.54
15	Nizamabad	15.67	80.46	42.00	32.98
16	Prakasam	81.33	68.61	53.00	43.36
17	Ranga Reddy	244.67	69.94	58.00	26.014
18	Srikakulam	65.33	68.99	60.00	34.85
19	Visakhapatnam	61.00	55.27	58.80	19.37
20	Vizianagaram	61.33	71.46	55.00	31.81
21	Warangal	41.00	72.74	48.50	25.85
22	West Godavari	15.33	59.26	46.90	42.57

Source: Chalam KS; "Offences and Atrocities against Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh: An Empirical Investigation" *Social Action*, Jan – March 2004

The determinants of Discrimination

$$CID = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ill} + \beta_2 \text{Pov} + \beta_3 \text{Aglab}$$

Where CID = Composite index of caste discrimination

lit = rate of illiteracy among SCs

Pov = % of population below poverty line

Aglab = % of Agriculture Labour among SCs

$\beta_1 \beta_2 \beta_3$ are coefficients to be estimated.

We have obtained the following results.

$$CID = \beta_0 + 0.331 \beta_1 + 0.440 \beta_2 + 0.445 \beta_3 \quad r^2 = 0.45$$

(1.82) (2.14) (2.46)

Figures in brackets are t values. They are statistically found significant

The above results show that the model is statistically significant as it is explaining 45 per cent of the variation. Out of the three variables, poverty among the people and incidence of agricultural labourers among dalits are found to explain strongly the prevalence of caste discrimination than illiteracy. They are also found to be statistically significant. It is interesting to observe from these results that economic factors are still contributing for the prevalence of caste discrimination in Andhra Pradesh. We have also estimated correlation coefficients between CID and the percentage of Christian population as a stimulant for discrimination. We found that there is no relation between the two. The correlation coefficient between CID and the percentage of SC population in a district is found to be 0.52. Therefore, we are of the opinion that the above model of regression is valid in explaining the determinants of caste discrimination.

Social Exclusion and Alienation

The data on land holdings, levels of poverty among the dalits clearly indicate that there is a relationship between the overall development of the state and the development of the dalits. The caste related development index developed by the author and presented in Table – 2 show the process achieved by the scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh. Though the rate of growth of the CDI among the Scheduled Castes is lower than the HDI between 1971 and 1991, it is found that it is increasing over the period of time. As pointed out earlier, the development of the scheduled castes is related to the overall development of the state. Interestingly, it is observed by several commentators that dalits are socially excluded in all developmental activities today. It is because of the economic globalisation process which is structurally exclusive in nature. Scholars like Amartya Sen are emphasizing the phenomenon of social exclusion as a dangerous trend that will lead to deprivation and capability failure.

The social exclusion as a new phenomenon is a part of the globalisation process. It consists of inequalities, labour market, gender, and market and food market exclusion. This exclusion will further accentuate the misery of the scheduled castes that are already structurally excluded from the mainstream society. The society does not care for these groups as long as they are raising issues of discrimination, without bringing issues with which others are equally interested. An interesting phenomenon of social exclusion of dalits has already taken place in Andhra Pradesh in terms of urbanisation.

It is found that the scheduled castes urban population is declining compared to the overall increase in the proportion of people who are living in urban areas. In Table – 3 the SC urban population for the year 1991 and 2001 is presented. It is clear that the population has declined from 17.30 per cent in 1991 to 17.18 per cent in 2001. except in the districts of Adilabad, Ranga Reddy, Vizianagaram, Anantapur and Chittoor where a marginal increase is found, in all the remaining districts scheduled castes urban population declined. It is generally believed that the opportunities of employment, income and power are concentrated in urban centres. But the data suggest that scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh are excluded from the trend. This is expected from the globalisation process where scheduled castes are not considered as a social category at all. The scheduled caste organisations have also failed to prepare the dalits for these opportunities or even to fight

against such discrimination and exclusion. Already the educated employees have formed into a separate group as a federation without considering serious economic issues of the dalits in general. The elite organisations are trying to perpetuate and bargain perks and power for the few families that they represent. This phenomenon is also responsible for social exclusion of the majority of the dalits who are poor, ignorant and unorganised.

Table – 2: Caste related development index for Andhra Pradesh

S. No		1971	1981	1991
1	Life Expectancy index	0.367	0.500	0.583
2	Education attainment index	0.177	0.341	0.521
3	Income index	0.046	0.108	0.145
	CDI	0.197	0.316	0.416
	AP HDI	--	0.466	0.592

Source: Andhra Pradesh HDI, Chalam KS, Human Development in South India, Anmol, 2002

Table – 3: Scheduled Castes Urban Population to total in Andhra Pradesh (%)

Districts	Year	
	1991	2001
Andhra Pradesh	17.31	17.18
Adilabad	19.20	23.45
Nizamabad	10.88	9.34
Karimnagar	13.11	12.87
Medak	8.25	8.2
Ranga Reddy	32.36	35.19
Mahabubnagar	5.51	4.84
Nalgonda	7.37	8.64
Warangal	14.74	14.55
Khammam	16.44	16.98
Srikakulam	12.03	10.47
Vizianagaram	18.46	20.54
Visakhapatnam	45.94	43.54
East Godavari	15.99	15.36
West Godavari	11.73	11.84
Krishna	18.90	15.72
Guntur	18.39	17.28
Prakasam	8.48	8.22
Nellore	13.0	12.31
Cuddapah	13.62	12.41
Kurnool	19.76	18.60
Anantapur	14.56	15.33
Chittoor	9.79	11.77

The unfinished Agenda

The scheduled castes of Andhra Pradesh were one of the earliest groups to participate in the Ambedkar movement. Though Ambedkar movement was confined to be awakened coastal districts due to mass conversions by 1931, it became a state level upsurge by the 1970s. Ambedkar movement was taken up in Andhra as a social upliftment and anti – untouchability struggle as a part of the missionary agenda. In fact, the ruling castes have been very sensitive to the demands of the organised scheduled castes and introduced several schemes and programmes such as IRDP, Food for work etc., as a part of the development agenda to coopt the dalits. Though Babasaheb Ambedkar realised the lacunae in his struggles after independence and brought the states and minorities as an economic agenda, majority of the dalit organisations have not taken up economic issues including privatisation seriously. Now dalits are excluded and alienated from the mainstream. Some critics say that there is only one movement which is permanent and strong, it is conversion as seen from the massive gatherings in all important towns and cities in Andhra Pradesh. But this process has alienated the dalits from the mainstream society which is now globally integrated. Unless the scheduled castes start organising for reform within each group through self-help and other means to strengthen their solidarity, the social exclusion with which they are suffering now will become permanent in future.

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Land and Dalit Movement in Andhra Pradesh: A Historical Perspective

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Land is not merely a geographical and / or physical category. It is prime source of Economy. Around 85% of the rural population of India, directly or indirectly, live on the land and its produce. Land plays a diabolical role in the life of rural people. Being the main source of subsistence, land is metamorphosed into a Socio-Economic reality. But, in India the land distribution has been skewed. Skewed distribution of land especially in India is important because of its association with the caste system. Among agrarian societies, differential distribution of land and prevalent norms, which lend legitimacy and accord sanction to such a distributive system, determine a specific mode of relationship among the various segment of people¹. This relationship tends to accentuate the super ordination of these people and segment of the agrarian social structure that have greater access to the land over those who have little or no access. In rural India land plays a crucial role in the achievement of power². In Andhra after 1956 the dominant castes such as Reddies, Kammas, Vclamas and Kshatriya emerged as most powerful elite because of their control over land. But even today, nearly 89% of Dalits are landless and agricultural labourers³. In this context an attempt has been made in this paper to examine the land relations in the historical perspective with special reference of Andhra Pradesh.

Let us see the socio and economic position of Dalits in Andhra Pradesh state level. About three-fourths of the SCs live in rural areas where the main source of income is either cultivation of agricultural land (as self-employed farmer), wage labour or some type of non-farm wage of self-employment. As per 1991 census scheduled castes constitute 15.93% of the total population and scheduled tribes constitute 6.31% of total population in Andhra Pradesh. 17.31% of SC population and 7.60% of ST population live in urban areas as against 26.9% percent of general population. That is more than 83% of SC population and about 93% of ST population live in rural areas as against 63% of general population. 25.89% of SC population and 13.66% of ST population are literates as against 44% of general population. That is more than 74% of SC population and about 86.4% of ST population are illiterates as against 56% of general population. The work participation rate of SCs, defined as the percentage of SC population participating in the work of total scheduled caste population is 51.08% and that of STs is 54.03% as against 45% among general population in 1991. this is due to the high participation rate among SC (46.7%) and ST (50.65%) women. It is also to be noted that as per 1991 census 85% of SC main workers and 83% of ST main workers depend on primary sector only 68% of general workers depend upon primary sector. More than 72% of SC main workers and about 44% ST main workers were reported as agricultural labour as against only 41 percent among general workers⁴. After the independence of 57 years also most of the Dalits are retained as land-less agricultural labourers and they totally depend upon their labour for their livelihood. In the light of above information, let us see the economic and social position of Dalits in colonial period as well as post-independence period.

Land and Castes in Colonial Andhra

During the colonial period through permanent settlement act the *zamindari*, *ryotwari* and *Inamdari systems* emerged strongly, Zamindars worked as dictators to collect land taxes for British rulers. The Zamindars in Andhra were basically rent receiving landlords who exercised ownership rights in land and other services without undertaking any care of land's supervision and cultivation of land. In terms of caste, the Zamindars in Andhra were mixed a lot. The landlord class in the coastal Andhra Pradesh primarily consisted of the Non-Brahmin upper castes i.e. the Kshatriya, the Velma, the Reddy, the Kamma. There are few Kshatriya Zamindars mainly found in Vishakapatnam District, the Maharaja of Vizianagaram and others. The important Velma Zamindars who cannot roll extensive areas include the kings of Panagala, Bobili, Venkatagiri, Pittapuram, Mirzapuram and Nuzvidu and estate holder of Challapalli, etc. were Kammas, while the Mungala Zamindar belonged to the Reddy Caste⁵.

Brahmins primly possessed the Inam lands also known as Aghrahams granted by the rulers. By and large, in many imams there had been a separation between ownership and cultivation. This is to say, because of the considerations of pollution, the Brahmin landowners did not till the land themselves, but leased-out to non-Brahmin landowners tenant cultivators. The Brahmins also shifted from rural areas to urban and also they entered into service sector. Broadly speaking the fusion and convergence of caste and class in the colonial context contributed to the emergence of two distinct groups of people namely, landlords (Zamindars) and peasants' tenants. Landlordism was closely associated with the permanent settlement. The land Lords of the Ryotwari region overwhelmingly belonged to the non-Brahmin upper Castes, Reddis in Rayalaseema and Kammas, Raju and Reddies in Coastal Andhra and Velmas in Telengana region⁶.

During the 1940s Strong anti-zamindari movement tended in Andhra. The rich tenants belonging to the upper non-Brahmin Castes were in the forefront of these struggles. Due to Urbanisation of the Brahmins to cities and entering into the service sector of Brahminism, they sold the inam lands to the tenant peasants. Some of micro level studies observed that due to shift of Brahmins from rural area to urban and entered into service sector, they sold their own land to upper caste communities in Andhra. A study on an Aghraharam Village in Krishna District observed the factors responsible for the decline of Brahmin dominance over land, (i) land legislation and tenancy problem (ii) increase urban employment opportunities (iii) conspicuous consumption and large number of dependants. It also observed that there was a significant shift of land ownership pattern during 1930 to 1982. The brahmins who held 77% of the total land in 1930, were left with only 3% by 1982⁷. Another village study in the Rayalaseem area shows that the ownership of land by Brahmins declined from 36% in 1891 to 3% in 1987⁸. Another village study made in Guntur district concluded that during 1960-61 to 1996-97, 65% of total land has been transferred from dominant non-cultivated communities (Brahmin and Vaysya) to dominate cultivated communities (Kamma). Village studies in some other districts of coastal Andhra i.e. Vishakapatnam, Guntur and west Godavari also confirm that land has been rapidly passing from Brahmins to other Upper Castes.

Dalits are socially, economically and politically suppressed people in Indian society and performed occupations like scavenging, leatherwork etc. Under colonial conditions, they constituted the bulk of agricultural labour force and worked as farm servants and casual labourers. Very few (less than 10%) dalit families possessed agricultural land. The main source of their livelihood was manual labour. They had no right to own land nor were they considered to be peasants or tillers of soil. The colonial land regulations never granted them the status of an occupancy tenant, though they might have cultivated land as tenants and sharecroppers. In the case of untouchables, therefore, there was a clear correspondence / correlation between social and economic status. Dalits were fighting for a long time, against the caste system and for their identity as well as for self-respect in the society. In the pre-independence period this anti-caste movement comprised strong non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra and Tamilnadu as well as Dalit movement Maharashtra, Punjab (the Ad-dharma movement), Western U.P (the Adi-Hindu movement), Bengal (Namasudhras), Kerala (Narayanaswami Guru's Movement), Tamilnadu (Adi-Dravida), Coastal Andhra (Adi-Andhra) and Hyderabad (Adi-Hindu). 1920s and 1930s militant Dalits were throughout rejecting both the Panchamas and harijans identity and were organising themselves as Adi-Andhras. The term Adi-Andhra arose in the post 1917 period when dalits all over the society influenced by the non-Aryan themes of the Dravidian movement, were identifying themselves as Adi-Dravidians, Adi-Andhras and Adi-Karnatakas, original sons of soil⁹. The Adi-andhra movement during 1917 – 47 focussed on the socio-economic upliftment of Dalit communities and the issue of movement in Andhra can be broadly divided into two phases; 1917 to 1932 and the second phase from 1932 to 1950. The first phase essentially represented the self-mobilisation of Dalits outside the organisational and ideological framework of the congress and the Communists, although in the initial stages positive response and sympathy was forthcoming from certain liberal caste-Hindu individuals¹⁰.

Dalits Movement in Colonial Andhra

Let us see the process and progress of Dalit movement the colonial period particularly the Adi-andhra movement, which had led in coastal Andhra and Adi-Hindu movement which had led in talangana region. The quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the non-Brahmin movement with the objective of “self-respect” that sought for the high status within the social ladder and attacked the Brahmanical hegemony in the Indian society. The Sudra communities like Kamma, Reddy and Velma, joined into these movements under the banner of the justice party. These people mainly questioned the scriptural and the Brahmanical authority and their monopoly over the society in the modern Andhra. However, these movements never tried to find any alternative solutions against the hierarchical and Caste society. They totally neglected the problems of the untouchables and sought to imitate the sanskritisation in the colonial India¹¹.

The first quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of “untouchables” movement; in which the lower caste people sought their own identity. The first quarter of the twentieth century could be noted as a significant transformation period of the untouchable communities in all over the south India and particularly in Andhra to

encounter the Aryan Hindu scriptural based social order. The “Non-Aryan Theory” had been developed to seek for a new place in the society, started applying the concept of “Adi” indicates as the “First” born or original inhabitants of the region or the original sons of the soil¹².

The concept of “Adi” as an ideology indicating that their assertion of equal rights of humanity and citizenship with the members of the superior castes and they demanded the Government to improve their conditions. This was followed by an agitation for a change of name. “As the matter of fact about 50,000 people from two districts renamed themselves as “Adi Dravidas” and the rest of the community continued to describe themselves either the Panchamas or by the traditional caste name in Krishna and Guntur districts where we had seen a great addition to the Christian population. Similarly there had been a marked fall in the number of malas in guntur and Kurnul where there had been an addition to the Christian community¹³. The only movement which denounced the scriptural authority and questioned the tradition in the Indian history and developed a counter ideology against the upper caste hegemony by claiming themselves as the first born or original inhabitants”. This period witnessed the growth of consciousness of untouchables communities.

The Scheduled Castes intellectual activities could be tracked back to 1906 that, when Madari Bhagya Reddy Varma (1888-1939) founded an organisation which was called as the Jaganmitra Mandali, Jagan Mitra Mandali too organised the Harikatha, Preethi Bojan, Bhajan Mandal Programs, etc. to mobilise the untouchables in reforming them. He was followed by many untouchables intellectuals like Arigay Remaswamy (1875). Madari Adhyya and others in the Telengana and the Hyderabad regions. They fought for the regeneration of untouchable community and stressed on education, service and denounced the Devadasi system and intoxicating Society. The 1917 was an important land mark, where the untouchables were given a special identity in the Hindu Society. The 1917 was an important land mark, where the untouchables were given a special identity in the colonial Andhra. In Bezavada, a social reformer (Hindu-caste), Guduru Rama Chandra Rao, called for “the first provincial panchama Maha Sabha” in November, 1917, at the dramatic hall of the Mylavaram Raja. Sundru Venkaiah acted as the chairman of the reception committee. In the first day of the meeting in the evening, its president who was an untouchables from Hyderabad, Bhagya Reddy Varma argued, “the term ‘Panchama’ was no where found the Puranas or the other Hindu scriptures. Moreover, the Panchamas were the original sons of this soil and were rules of the country¹⁴.

The growing consciousness of “Adi Andhra” had sought for a place in the political sphere of the national movement, which also attracted and tried to engulf these “Adi Andhras” to the national movement directed by the traditional leaders in the colonial Andhra. The internal reforms of “Adi Andhra” that reflected in the promotion of education, cleanliness and hygiene and gave up beef eating, liquor and aimed at the abolition of untouchability among them. However, it did not include a militant struggle by the Dalits. At the time of Adi-andhra movement, the Dalit leader established Schools for the Dalit children and

they were also maintain night schools to educate the olders. They also conducted provincial level conferences as well as district level conferences to create the consciousness among the Dalits. They also established Adi-Andhra credit society in 1922. These credit societies provided funds to Dalit, small farmers, and agricultural labourers during the off season. They also provided scholarships and other financial assistance to Dalit students out of interest earned from loans. Soon these credit societies spread throughout the region. By 1930s, the adi-hindu movement was divided into two groups due to development if rivals within the Dalit group. The differences were more due to personal competition than ideological and political differences. After this divisions none of the Dalit leaders could mobilise and organise mass movement, more over this the Adi-Hindu movement was established in only urban areas of Telangana region. Thus the Adi-Andhra movement and the Adi-Hindu movement worked against the untouchability, which is most severe problems to Dalits. They fought for “self-respect” and the social equality in the society. But much attention could not be paid on economic problems. More over they fought against the traditional caste hierarchy within the fold of Hinduism.

Land and Communist Movement in Colonial Andhra

Two types of movements were led in Andhra during the colonial period. One movement was lead by dalits, which fought against the social problems i.e. against the untouchability. Another movement was lead by communist, which fought for the economic equality and labour welfare i.e. anti-Zamindari movement, minimum wages for agricultural labourers. Dalits were engaged in their “self-respect” movement and fighting against the caste system even in the colonial period under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar. In other hand they were also actively participated anti-zamindari system in Andhra. But in Andhra the communist party built a concrete anti-zamindari movement during the colonial period, because most of the tenants were the upper caste non-Brahmins communities such as Kamma, Kapu, Reddy and Velama. But in this movement 50% of cadre was the Dalits, 40% of land was under zamindars, Mokhasadrs and Inamdars in Andhra during the pre-independence period. In Telangana region 30% of land was under Jageers, Paigalu, Panmukthas, Eenams and 10% of land under the control of Nizam (Nizams own land called as Surfecase¹⁵). They used to collect high land taxes and they also suppressed the farmers socially as well as economically forests, ponds and Banjara lands also under the control of Zamindars.

With the special interest of Achary N.G. *Ranga Andhra Rastra Raitu Sangam* was established in Andhra in 1928. Earlier than this Krishna district Raitu Sangam (1923). West Godavari and Guntur District Raitusangam (1923) was established in Andhra respectively. The main objectives of the Raitusangam was (i) Abolition of zamindar system without any compensation (ii) reforms in land tenancy system (iii) implementation of land ceiling (iv) to allow the chattels into graze lands without any taxes (v) abolition of *vetti* which was existed in the villages and (vi) distribution of surplus land to the landless poor¹⁶. During the colonial period post colonial period the communist party concentrated mostly on the anti-*Zamindari* system and the tenants’ rights and agricultural labour rights i.e. minimum wages. They slightly concentrated on the caste issue, which is very severe to the dalits. Their struggle is mostly with reference

to class struggle. The Andhra Rastra Raitusangam fought against the states such as Munagala, Venkatagiri, Bobbili, Kalepatnam, Gopalapuram, Chellapalli, Venkatagiri, Madasala. Meanwhile they also succeeded somehow to occupying the surplus land and distribution of these lands to poor.

Let us examine whether these communist struggles and Andhra Raitusangam movement, which had, took place in colonial Andhra and post independence help the landless Dalits to acquire the land. They were working since 1926 regarding the land issues in Andhra. Under the leadership of Kommireddy Satyanarayana Murthey president of west Godavari Raitusangam, subramanyam General Secretary and Pulam chelamaiah Dora the villages like Madapunam, Kodurukota, tallavaram, Vadapalli farmers fought against the oppression of tribals. In the same districts the Raitusangam mobilised the poor agricultural labourers from *Bondara, Kalvapudi, Velivenu, Moortha, Lingaboinacherla* and through the petitions they distributed to 3040 acres of land to poor agricultural labourers. In 1953-58 the Raitusangam fought for 40 acres of fertile land which was distributed to Dalits. During the same period in Yanaguntapalli 50 acres of *Banjar* land and in Pragadavaram 200 acres of *Banjar* land was distributed to poor agricultural labourers¹⁷. During 1938-1984 a historical Anti – *zamindari* movement took place in Andhra by communist party, i.e. chellapalli *zamindari* movement. This historical movement led by communist party in Andhra. The *Raitusangam* and communist party was opposing high revenue taxes and they also fought for the distribution of Chellapalli *Zamindari* surplus land to landless poor. This movement was occurred in various ways such as *Lanka Bhooporatam, mangalapuram mudiraj kooleleporatam, Batlapenumarru poratam, Atcampadu poratam, Yarlagadda poratam, Lakshmipuram Poratam, Ayyanki Poratam, Peddakalle Poratam* etc. Due to *Lanka Bhooporatam* (1969-73) in four villages the *Andhra Raitusangam* distributed 400 acres of land to the poor. With the strong agitation of *Andhra Raitusangam* and communist party, during the elite Chellapalli agitation in 13 villages, 11 thousand acres of land was distributed to the landless poor and each person got 25 cents of land. Among the total 11 thousands beneficiaries 50% of beneficiaries were dalits¹⁸. The Telangana Raitu movement was different than the costal Andhra, *Rayalaseem Raitu* movement. Because, up to 1948, the Telanga region was under the Nizam rule, even though the communist party also mobilized the farmers and agriculture labourers to fight against the existing land tax system. *Telangana Raitu Saidu Poratam* emerged in 1946 under the leader ship of Andhra Mahasabha and communist party against the Nizam government. During this period they handed over and distributed 12 lakh acres of land to tenants and poor peasants¹⁹. Moreover in 1969, August, September, October A.P. Communist party, *Vyavasayaka Karmika Sangam, Raitusangam* and other *Praja Sangalu* (People parties) occupied nearly 1,07,325 acres of land throughout Andhra Pradesh and distributed to landless poor²⁰. The communists also initiated some Anti-untouchability measures but did not succeed enough. The anti-caste measures did not go beyond preaching. They always suggested protest and revolt against the big landlords but not against caste. The communist could not create a leader from among the Dalits and they remained only at the level of cadres or at the most village level respectively, despite their educational qualifications to participate in state level and national level politics. Due to their inability to accommodate Dalits at the ideological

level, Dalit support weakened gradually. However, veteran Dalit communists accept the fact that due to communist intervention did effect a change in their lives, especially at the level of wages²¹. Anti-*Zamindari* movement and other agrarian struggles led by communists weakened the authorities of landlords in Andhra, and benefited the upper rung of the peasant proprietors. But the lower castes like Dalits could not benefit and did not possess land significantly in the colonial period through this movement.

At the end of colonial period, in Andhra the non-Brahmin upper castes such as *Kamma*, *Reddy* and *Velama* became the dominant in all ways i.e. politically and economically. The various village surveys conducted in post independence period in all over Andhra indicate that a significant section of landlords from these castes emerged as the dominant peasantry in Andhra. A village study made in Adilabad district analysed the land transfers during 1960-61 to 1990-91²². During the study period the *Kapus* gained huge chunk of land. Their average landholdings have been increased from 12.22 acres to 22.22 acres. It is also found that the relative share of Scheduled castes in the total land is very meagre and it has further deteriorated. They lost their control completely, over their land and joined the pool of landless agricultural labour. Another village study made in Guntur district concluded that during 1960-61 to 1996-97, 65% of total land has been transferred from dominant non-cultivated communities (Brahmin and Vaysya) to Dominant cultivated community (Kamma). On the other hand the Dalits could not gain any significant land from dominant non-cultivated communities and dominant cultivated communities. It also observed that 32.2% of Dalit population was operating 27% of total land and 65.5% of non-dalits were operating 71.3% of total land in 1997 and 75.4% of Dalits were recorded as Agricultural labourers and landless²³. Another village study made in Prakasam District during 1989-90 to 1998-99 concluded that during the study period the land has been transferred from Non-cultivated communities (Komati caste) to cultivated communities (*Kamma*, *Yadav* and *Chakali* castes). It also observed that 17% of BC households were controlling single cent of land. They are all landless labourers²⁴. An *Agraharam* village study conducted in Krishna district found that the scheduled castes, who constitute about 30% of total population held around 12% of the land in 1982. The percentage of landless among them was 76%²⁵. Another village survey in Chittoor district has observed that the Dalits who constitute around 23% of districts population, did not own land²⁶. The above analysis reveals that the communist party fought against the *Zamindari* system for tenant rights. They also paid little attention regarding the minimum wages of agricultural labourers. Through their movement only in few places the Dalits were benefited through distribution of surplus land to some extent but mostly they remained as agricultural labourers.

Table 1: caste and agrarian occupation, 1921

State	Actual Workers	Recorded principle occupation (%)			Female Workers			
		Income from rent of land	Cultivators	Field labourers	Percentage of female to male workers	Income from rent	Cultivators	Field labourers
Madras state (1911)	27,029	34.53	32.37	0.29	26.69	54.60	34.74	0.11
Brahman, telugu,	10,647	13.96	71.89	0.08	28.10	14.74	69.25	0.40
Brahman, canarese	29,696	--	3.29	75.46	37.73	--	2.45	84.43
Holeya	196,259	0.18	14.78	71.89	85.53	0.16	8.48	87.55
Mala	79,924	1.17	10.71	54.71	70.69	3.98	2.89	82.31
Madiga								
Hyderabad state (1921)	79,345	7.37	17.52	0.32	18.12	15.68	33.97	--
Brahmin	500,638	6.99	60.90	16.33	63.03	3.06	54.60	31.71
Maratha	170,508	3.50	9.01	1.30	52.49	6.44	16.73	1.92
Lingayat	291,130	1.60	51.56	26.15	50.95	1.21	70.07	19.75
Kapu	146,230	1.01	61.22	15.68	75.22	1.08	57.26	20.87
Telaga	130,008	3.79	8.40	8.25(65.3)	98.83	2.66	13.90	39.50(37.24)
Mala	203,492	0.65	10.28	10.16(83.5)	84.63	1.00	7.86	38.94(73.55)
Madiga	37,991	1.07	4.21	7.69	59.70	0.76	10.37	2.98
Chambhar								

Source: Omvedt. Gail (1994): *Dalits and the democratic revolution, Dr. Ambedkar and the dalit movement in colonial India, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Pp 77-79.*

After Independence also, Andhra Pradesh as well as in India land is concentrated mostly in the hands of the upper castes and the dominant peasant castes to the exclusion of scheduled castes. To reduce inequalities land reforms have been attempted in India. In the case of Andhra Pradesh several land legislations have been made to augment the production and to reduce the inequalities in the distribution of land. The following are the most important of them:

- i. Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Area) Estates Land (Reduction of Rent) Act, 1947: The major objective of this Act was to provide for reduction of rents payable to ryots in Estates approximately to the level of assessment levied of lands in ryotwari area in the neighbourhood.
- ii. The Madras Estate (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act, 1948: It provided for the repeal of the permanent settlement, the acquisition of the rights of land – holders in permanently settled and certain other estates in the province of Andhra and the introduction of the ryotwari settlement in such estates. “Estates” means a Jamindari or under-tenure or an Inam Estate. This act extends to the whole of the state of Andhra.
- iii. The Andhra Pradesh (Telangana Area) Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act, 1950. The major objectives of this Act are (1) to regulate the relations of landlords and tenants of agricultural lands (2) to regulate alienations (3) to prevent excessive sub-division of agricultural holdings (4) to provide for the legislation of

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- co-operative farm and (5) to empower Government to assume in certain circumstances management of agricultural lands.
- iv. Andhra Inams (abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act, 1956 to abolish and convert certain Inam lands into ryotwari lands. It extends to the whole of the state of Andhra but applies only to Inam lands.
 - v. Andhra Tenancy Act of 1956 provides for the payment of fair rent by cultivating tenants and for fixing the minimum period of agricultural leases in the state.
 - vi. The Andhra Pradesh ceiling on Agricultural Holdings Act, 1961 provides for the imposition of ceiling on agricultural holdings ranging from 27 acres to 324 acres depending upon the class of land.
 - vii. The Andhra Pradesh Land Reform (ceiling on Agricultural Holdings) Act, 1972, which provides for a ceiling areas of one standard holding ranging from 4.05 hectares (10 acres) to 10.93 hectares (about 27 hectares) in the case of wetland and from 14-16 hectares (35 acres) to 21-85 hectares (54 acres) in case of dry land.

With the aim of providing minimum source of income and promote social and economic status of the poor landless people, the government distributed the surplus land made available from land ceiling. As on September 30, 1996, about 52.12 lakh acres had been distributed at all India level. Of these, about 18.08 lakh acres of land was distributed to SCs, 7.31 lakh acres to STs and 26.74 lakh acres for non-SC / ST persons. A total 51.21 lakh beneficiaries have been so far covered of which 18.49 lakh were SCs, 7.19 lakh ST and 25.53 lakh non-SC / ST. The land distribution per beneficiary in the SC category household comes to 0.977 acres, which was less than corresponding 1.047 acres for non-SC / ST households²⁷. As on September 30, 1996 an area of about 5.90 lakh acres was distributed among 5.21 lakh beneficiaries in Andhra Pradesh. Out of which, 41.51% of SCs, 17.7% of STs, 32.9% of BCs and OCs 8.01%. Around 33,000 tenants with 2.02 lakh acres were protected in Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh alone. About 2.90 lakh acres were acquired under the *Bhoodan movement*, out of which surplus land was detected in only 64,911 cases covering an area of 16.63 lakh acres. Based on appeals, revisions, major sons, share etc., the net surplus land was reduced to about 8.21 lakh acres. Out of this surplus land, possession of only 5.91 lakh acres was taken over by the government, leaving a balance of 2.29 lakh acres yet to be taken over at Andhra Pradesh state alone²⁸.

Land reforms in India abolished all forms of intermediaries in terms of landholdings viz, *Zamindari*, *Inamdari* and *landlord* system. Those tilling the lands at the time of the abolition of intermediaries were conferred ownership rights and tenants were given protection. The protection and enlargement of control and command over land are crucial issue for the poor. It is estimated that all efforts taken together including *Bhoodan* and distribution of government wasteland accounted for less than 10 percent of the cultivated land²⁹. It may not be possible that all rural poor can be accommodated but there is scope for utilizing the wasteland for providing access to the poor and also eliminating the biases against the poor in land relations. The desire to possess land is strong among the poor as ownership of land denotes one's social status. The small magnitude of the declared surplus was mainly due to the poor legislation with large number of loopholes. Thus, the

opportunity for a more equitable distribution of land was missed. However, abolition of intermediaries and imposition of land ceiling on land-holdings had, over time, arrested concentration of land ownership³⁰. Although intermediate land tenure system could be effectively removed through *zamindari* abolition, equity in the agrarian structure could not be brought. Let us see the Dalits access to land.

Table II: Percentage distribution of operational holdings and operated area of different social groups in Andhra Pradesh

Category	1976-77		1980-81		1986-87		1990-91		1995-96	
	Nos	Area								
S.C.	13.4	6.9	12.6	6.9	12.2	6.8	12.73	7.48	12.12	7.42
S.T.	6.3	6.2	6.4	6.3	6.4	6.7	6.88	7.23	7.11	7.56
Others	80.3	86.9	81.0	86.8	81.4	86.5	80.39	85.29	80.77	85.02
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Various issues of Report on SC/ST Land Holdings

Table II explains that the operational holdings and area operated by different groups since 1976-77 to 1995-96 at Andhra Pradesh state level. It could be seen from the table in 1976-77 SC households constituted about 13.4% of total holdings but control only 6.9% of the area, while others constitute about 80.3% of total holdings but control 87% of total operated area in 1976-77. By 1995-96 the percentage of SC holdings declined to about 12% and their controlling area share slightly increased to 7.4%. While the percentage of others holdings retain same i.e. 80.7% and their operated area share slightly declined to 85% of total operated area. In 1976-77, ST operational holdings constitute 6.3% of total holdings and control 6.2% of total operated area. By 1995-96 their holdings increased to more than 7% while their share in area also increased to 7.5%. The position of ST households in terms of operational holdings is better than SC households at Andhra Pradesh state level as well as all India level.

It could be seen from the table II that, most of the Sc farmers are marginal and small. In 1976-77 marginal and smallholdings of SCs constituted 83% (control nearly 46% of total operated area of SCs) of total holdings and their percentage tremendously increased to about 91% (control nearly 67% of total operated area of SCs) in 1995-96, on the other hand medium and large holdings declined from 4.7% (control nearly 29% of total operated area of SC) to 1.4% (control nearly 10% of total operated area of SC) during the same period. Their average size of holdings also significantly decreased from 1.9 hectares to 0.83 hectares during the same period (table IV). Due to lack of irrigation facilities, high cost of cultivation, high cost of mechanization, these vulnerable sections were losing control on their lands. Most of the SCs and STs are selling their land to other caste people and becoming as agricultural labourers for their livelihood.

Table III: Percentage distribution of operational holdings and area operated by scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh

Size group	1976-77		1980-81		1986-87		1990-91		1995-96	
	Nos	Area	Nos	Area	Nos	Area	Nos	Area	Nos	Area
Marginal	64.8	22.3	67.7	27.6	70.1	30.4	70.67	31.98	73.46	37.
Small	19.0	23.1	18.9	26.2	18.0	26.4	18.43	28.28	17.75	15
										29.
										74
Semi-medium	11.5	26.0	10.2	25.2	9.1	24.5	8.70	24.40	7.39	22.
Medium	4.1	21.5	2.9	15.2	2.5	14.6	2.03	12.38	1.32	51
										8.8
										2
Large	0.6	7.1	0.3	5.5	0.3	4.1	0.17	2.96	0.08	1.7
										8
All groups	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	10
										0.0

Source: Various issues of Report on SC/ST Land Holdings

Table IV: Average size of the holdings operated by scheduled castes (in hectares)

Size groups	1976-77	1980-81	1986-87	1990-91	1995-96
Marginal	0.41	0.43	0.41	0.41	0.42
Small	1.45	1.46	1.40	1.40	1.39
Semi-medium	2.69	2.62	2.56	2.56	2.53
Medium	6.21	5.66	5.59	5.58	5.53
Large	14.65	16.48	14.41	16.00	19.00
All groups	1.19	1.06	0.95	0.91	0.83

Source: Various issues of Report on SC/ST Land Holdings

Occupational distribution among different Social Groups:

Table V: Occupational distributions at Andhra Pradesh State level.

Category	Percentage in total main workers of SCs			Percentage in total main workers of STs			Percentage in total main workers general population		
	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981	1991
Cultivators	14.66	17.41	12.77	37.05	43.21	41.19	32.45	32.73	1
									27.
									44
Ag. Labourers	73.04	68.24	72.05	50.40	43.72	46.52	38.24	36.78	40.
Non-farming workers	12.3	14.35	15.81	12.55	13.07	12.29	29.31	30.49	87
									31.
									69

Source: Statistical Abstract of Andhra Pradesh, 1971, 1981, 1991

The changes in the occupational distribution during 1971-1991 at Andhra Pradesh state level for different social groups could be seen from the table V., It is evident from the

table that during 1971 to 1981 there was an increase in the percentage of SC workers as cultivators from 14.66% to 17.41% while percentage of SC agricultural labourers declined from 73.04% to 68.24%. In case of general workers the percentage of cultivators declined from 34.43% to 32.73% of agricultural labourers also declined from 38.24% to 36.78% & during the same period. Regarding the non-farming workers it increased from 12.3% to 14.35% in case of SC workers while it increased from 27.3% to 30.49% in case of general workers. Thus there is some marginal improvement in the SC workers as cultivators and also non-farming workers. This indicates some upward mobility of SC workers also. This may be attributed to redistribution of wasteland and surplus land under 20-point programme in 1970s (reference). But during 1981-1991 the percentage of SC cultivators declined from 17.4% to 12.77% while there was an increase in the percentage of SC agricultural labourers from 68.24% to 72.05% in case of workers of general population also percentage of cultivators declined from 32.73% to 27.44% while the percentage of agricultural labour increased from 36.78% to 40.78%. Percentage of non-farming workers increased from 30.49% to 31.69% indicating occupational shift. In case of STs, there was significant increase of cultivators from 37.05% to 43.21% while the percentage of agricultural labour declined from 50.40% to 43.72% during 1971-1981 by 1981-91 the percentage of cultivators slightly declined from 43.21% to 41.19% while the percentage of agricultural labour increased from 43.72% to 46.52%. Anyhow during 1971 to 1981 their share in non-farming workers increased from 12.55% to 13.07% and again it declined to 12.29% in 1991. This shows that at Andhra Pradesh state level agricultural workers slowly shifting to non-farming activities.

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