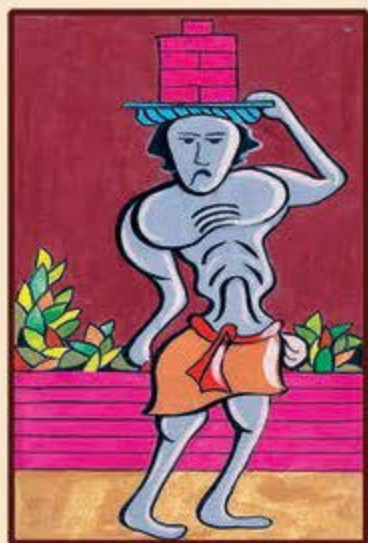


Class Caste Relations

Marxist approach



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Jyotiba Phule

(1827 - 1890)

DAFODWAM

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From Editor's Desk

From the very first day of formation (14th April, 1999) of DAFODWAM (Democratic Action Forum Of Dalits, Women And Minorities), we are in search of Marxist organization having a clear standpoint on caste question along with its commitment towards class struggle. In that effort we could find a good number of intellectuals, even with Marxist leaning who have written articles, books, dramas, songs, poems, even have made films on this subject. But DAFODWAM with its limited resources and knowledge could not get in touch with any such Marxist organization until we chanced upon an old copy of "JANASHAKTI", (Edited by K.Ramachandran) which is the central organ of CPI(ML). A nice article in that party organ clarified the origin and development of caste system and caste relations in India till today and present task of the Marxists and other democratic people. The exposure of wrong trends of dalit Marxists and post modernists of different varieties on caste question is also an important part of the article. We felt that such understanding would help to develop a deeper insight on caste questions in India and should be reproduced on a book for larger readership, especially activists who are fighting for caste annihilation. We are sorry that we could not get direct permission from K. RAMACHANDRAN, (Ex editor of JANASHAKTI) because he had died nearly two years ago. We will be happy if this book helps the activist groups which are trying to buildup a real democratic India free from caste discrimination and caste division. We are grateful to all who have assisted us for publication of this book, specially Khokon Majumder and Alok Mukherjee who are veteran Marxist Leninist leaders.

DOCUMENT ON THE CASTE QUESTION

The *jati*-caste system of India is a subject of enquiry of all sociologists and historians interested in development of Indian society because of its uniqueness, longevity and stability. For the Marxists, it is more so, since they do not limit themselves in explaining the world but want to change it. Without knowing the role of *jati*-caste system in the society and state in present India any attempt to change them is bound to fail.

There lies a difference between the study of academic sociologists or historians and that of Marxists. Here the study is structured basically to understand the relationship between the *jati*-caste structure and social, economic and political structures and super structures at different stages of development in India, and also brief study of the movement to change the *jati*-caste structure, instead of going through the historical details. So, the relationship between caste and class, and how the *jati*-caste system can be completely eradicated has become necessary and most important issue to be discussed. Because only a discussion on those matters can show us the light to find out the way how to change the existing society.

METHODOLOGY OF THE DISCUSSION

While studying any specific problem a scientific methodology is needed. By methodology we mean which particular method of looking at the problem and solving it

is being adopted in a concrete study. This has become particularly important because of late a serious debate has been launched against the Marxist method of looking at the *jati*-caste system in India. So, while depending on the Marxist method of study of this particular problem as Marxist-Leninist, we must also clarify why this particular method alone is the only scientific method to know and to solve this problem. We shall later on discuss how different methods differ in their final conclusions on the study, but here we shall only limit ourselves about the methodologies which are being resorted to by different schools, where they differ and why we prefer the Marxist method.

There are in general three different methodologies applied to study the problem. They are (1) Dalit or Dalit-democratic methodology, (2) Dalit-Marxist methodology, which is again divided into a number of different schools and (3) Marxist methodology.

The *dalit* or *dalit* democratic methodology looks at the problem as a system evolved by the brahminical lawgivers to exploit and oppress the *dalit* people. They look at the historical dynamics of Indian society on the basis of the law-codes that developed at different junctures of history. To them, *jati*-caste system is either the only institutional form or the principal institutional form of exploiting and oppressing the masses till at present. They not only failed but also consciously avoided to study the inter-relationship between caste and class at different stages of development of Indian society in general and the present Indian society

in particular. So in their analysis of the ideological superstructure and of its relation to the real basis of society, that is, mode of production and corresponding social relations, they put too much stress on ideological superstructure. This leads them to a position where they fail to grasp the problem in its entirety. Through such a methodology, one is bound to overlook the mechanism of imperialism in present day society and even may unconsciously fall prey to the hands of ruling classes.

Next come the *dalit*-Marxist methodologists of different hues. Most of them emerged of the failure of the Indian Marxists to formulate a concrete action programme for annihilation of *jati*-caste system in Indian society. In most cases as an overreaction to this failure, they come to conclusion that in Indian specifics, Marxism alone cannot be the method of study of the problem. They have a leaning towards Marxism, but have a mechanical understanding about what Marxism is all about. According to them Marxism is nothing more than economic determinism. This has developed because of the mechanical application of Marxism, especially on the question of *jati*-caste system in India for a long time. They do not understand that Marxism itself being a method, a thought-process which leads to concrete analysis of concrete situation. So, Marxism cannot be qualified as *dalit* as *dalit*-Marxism or Indian Marxism or any such way. Any attempt to do so leads one away from Marxism itself and leads to see the truth in a fragmented manner. This is more akin to post-modernism. Analysing society in fragmented manner leads to seeking fragmented solutions which in the final analysis leads to no solution. In many cases, such methodologists, in the eagerness to be unique, distort Marxism and openly

advocate pluralism which means denying the existence of a single determining principle of social development. As a result, for them, relationship between 'class' and 'jati-caste' becomes relationship between two parallels, so *Dalit-Marxists*, always fail to look at history and society in an objective way.

Marxist methodology, instead, is the only methodology which teaches us to see the part along with the whole, to look at all the contradictions present in the object, and to study things in motion. It is true in India in the name of historical materialism a mechanical method was applied and still now is being applied. About one such methodologists, known as Marxist, Marx himself had said, "He has to transform my sketch of the origins of capitalism in Western Europe into a historical-philosophical theory of a universal movement necessarily imposed upon all peoples, no matter what the historical circumstances in which they are placed, and which will lead, in the last resort, to an economic system in which the greatly increased productivity of social labour will make possible the harmonious development of man. But I must protest. He does me too much honour, and at the same time discredits me." (Quoted in, Karl Marx, *'Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy'*, ed. by T.B. Bottomore and Maxmillan Rubel, p.37). In India, too, the same was done by many so called Marxists. But that does not make a case to abandon Marxism as a methodology. We feel that Marxist methodology of concrete analysis of concrete situation is not only the best methodology but also the only scientific one.

THE *VARNA* SYSTEM AND *JATI*-CASTE SYSTEM

Before any discussion on *jati*-caste system in India, a clear understanding must be made on the distinction as well as interrelationship between the *varna* system and *jati*-caste system. While entering into the discussion we must first classify that *Varna* system divided the society into four broad divisions-Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. But by *jati*-caste system the society is divided into a large number of "mutually exclusive social-economic groups of people organised in a hierarchical order with immutable hereditary occupations, endogamy and commensality." (K.Damodaran, *New Age*, p.16, May 1960).

It is also necessary to note that from the beginning till now and later on we have used the term '*jati*-caste' which has in many other Marxist discussions has been referred as 'caste'. We feel the term 'caste' does not signify the uniqueness of the system present in India, because it is a system notably different from the caste system we found in other parts of the ancient world, such as Egypt. We would have preferred the term '*varna-jati*,' but that may confuse others who are more or less acquainted with the term 'caste'. To differentiate between *varna* system and *jati*-caste system and find their origins we must go down the history lane to the pre-vedic and vedic periods and developments thereafter. According to the archaeological findings between 2500 BC and 1500 BC there existed a civilisation in India which is known as Indus Valley or Harappan Civilisation. Nearly eight sites, big and small, have been discovered. Of them Mohenjodaro and Harappa, two towns situated at a distance of nearly 700 KM, from each other, are most extensively excavated sites. The

archaeological remains show that the people of that time knew agriculture, principal crops being wheat, barley and cotton. They did not know the use of iron or the device of shaft-hole for their axe. So it was not possible for them to clear the dense forests of Gangetic basin. They grew crops on lands irrigated by seasonal inundations of the rivers of Indus system. Whether they knew the use of plough is not known. But they built dams and township. Discovery of articles of foreign origin and articles of Indus origin in distant Mesopotamia show that they had developed trade. Excavation of Lothal has proved that they developed ports also. Moreover, without a steady supply of necessities towns could not have sustained themselves. That also needed a well-organised trade. It has also been found that towns were rebuilt many times, but main features of their plans remained unchanged for many centuries. The citadels and granaries proved the presence of political and economic authorities and their power. But nothing conclusive could be known about their social organisation. However the similarity between the material remains of Indus Valley civilisation and the civilisation of Mesopotamia suggests a similarity of these two civilisation. From this it may be concluded that there were slaves in the rural community. Moreover, in the towns the existence of rulers, merchants and artisans are clear. It is not clear who the rulers were whether they were 'priest-kings' or the merchants. But building of dams and township suggests huge amount of labour and existence of another class of people. Moreover the existence of small rooms in big houses and two rows of living quarters resembling barracks found in Mohenjodaro proves that a class of people served others. These servants could have been slaves and/or wage

earners. It is also not yet confirmed whether they originated from war-prisoners or debt-slaves or both or otherwise. There was a class society no-doubt, but neither *varna* system, nor *jati*-caste system could be traced.

How the Indus Valley civilisation was totally destroyed is not yet convincingly proved. But one reason, and the most important at that, was certainly the invasion by the pastoral tribes known as Aryans. The Aryans did not know much about agriculture. These pastoral nomadic or seminomadic tribes destroyed the towns, their immigration is supposed to have started around 1750 BC.

The Aryans had in the initial stages a simple social structure. They were divided among tribes (*janas*) and lived in villages (*gramas*). According to *Rigveda*, which is supposed to be composed at about 1500-1400 BC, the tribes were divided into three sets of people; the *rajanyas* or *kshatriyas* (warriors and rulers), *brahmins* (priests) and the *vis* (masses or ordinary clansmen). There were continuous wars amongst Aryan tribes as well as between Aryans and autochthonous tribes. According to the *Rigveda*, the final victor Aryan tribes fought against enemies like *dasas*, *dasyus*, *rakshasas* etc. Most of them were autochthonous tribes of black skin, some of them were described as nose-less some as bull lipped. Among these the *dasas* were often referred as to a sect within the later Aryan society. They along with horses and cattles were supposed to signify the wealth of other sects. The *vis* had to offer gift to the *rajanyas* and *brahmanas* as *bali*. Offerings could be houses, cattle as well as *dasas* and *dasis*. From these it can be concluded that vanquished tribes were often taken into the society as *dasas* who were

earlier people of a tribe started to signify a set of slaves. *Dasas* did not have to pay Bali. But there are instances of *dasas* acquiring horses and cattle.

So the first division between *rajanyas*, *brahmanas* and *vis* on one side and the *dasas* on the other side was along the colour of skin. But that too was not very rigid. One verse in the *Rigveda* says that by means of wealth a *dasa* can become an Aryan.

First reference to *sudra* as a *vama* is to be found in the Purusasukta of the *Rigveda*, which is most probably a later interpolation. However, during the *Rigveda* period, the *varnas* did not signify social differentiation as in the *jati-caste* system. Even members of the same family worked as poet, physician and grinder without being involved into any social differentiation.

But during the later-vedic period, when other three vedas, particularly the *Atharvaveda* and early Brahmanas, were composed certain new developments are found. This covers a period between 1000 BC to 600 BC. During this period, clear division among the *rajanyas*, *brahmanas*, *vaisya* and *sudra* emerged. *Varnashrama* and *Varnadharma* were introduced. Hierarchic ranks of the *varnas* were clearly stated. Duties of *sudras* were fixed to serve the other *varnas*. But from a passage found in both of *Yaju* collections two concrete conclusion may be arrived at. The passage runs as follows

yadecchudre yadarye Yalenasthakrima
vayam yedasya dhi dharmani tasyaderaya
janamasi

In asking lord for the explanation of the sin committed against the *sudra* and the *Arya*, shows firstly that *sudras* were different from the *Aryans*, and secondly, though *sudras* were to serve but their position was not just like the slaves of the European society. It seems that *sudras* also were a tribe.

But from this period the seeds of the *jati*-caste system were shown. Pastoral Aryans turned to agriculture. They started using iron and plough. Crafts were increasing in number. They were no longer practised by the members of the *vis*. "In the list of sacrificial victims members of four *varnas* were followed by those various occupations such as chariot-makers, carpenters, potter, smith, jeweller, shepherd, brewer, fisherman and hunter in addition to certain people such as *Nisada*, *Kirata*, *Pamaka*, *Paulkasa* and *Bainda*". (R.S. Sharma referring *Vajasanayi Samhita*, in *Sudras in Ancient India*, p.50). Certain historians presume that they were included in the broad term of the *sudra*. This is only a presumption, but one fact is evident, that certain members of the *vis* were being relegated from their positions on the basis of their callings. Till then endogamy was not enforced. So, during this period, Vyasa was born of a fisher woman, Vasistha of a prostitute, Kapinjalada of a *chandala* woman.

Thus we may conclude that *varna* system was the predecessor of the *jati*-caste system. But they are not one and the same. *Varna* system started division on the basis of social ranks and social ranks were decided on the basis of social division of labour as well as political subordination of one tribe by another. Subordinated and toiling people were in the lower rung of the social order. But a composite

society was in its process, so hierarchic occupational position and endogamy was not established.

Once this difference between *varna* system and *jati*-caste system is understood, the role of division of labour played in the development of *varna* system and the *jati*-caste system, how these systems were related to production system, productive labour and development of productive forces and how did the *varna* system was replaced by the *jati*-caste system could be discussed.

PRIMARY AIM OF THE *VARNA* DIVISION

So far it is found that during the Rigvedic period the *varna* division started and it took a definite shape in the later Vedic period. But the division was mutable, not so rigid.

During the Rigvedic period, the Aryans were still pastoral tribes. They could hardly produce little surplus. They came as conquerers. A difference between the victors and vanquished was present. All the vanquished could not be exterminated, sections of them were subordinated and taken into the tribe. This needed a social organisation. As tribes were always busy in wars, the warrior-leaders and the magic performing priests were of utmost importance within the tribal community. So the *rajanyas* and the *brahmanas* became the sets of people within the tribes having special privileges of receiving offerings. These offerings were made by the other ordinary members of the tribal clansmen, the *vis*. But conquering of other Aryan and non-Aryan tribes brought another set of people. They were the *dasas* and *dasis*. These *dasas* and *dasis* could not produce much surplus. So, possession

of *dasas* and *dasis* signified the social ranking and wealth of a person. They were more servants than slaves. Moreover social mobility of becoming full member of the tribal society was open. The *vis* and *dasas* were the people who worked as cattle raisers and whatsoever little agriculture they could perform.

So in this primitive stage, when tribal chieftains were running the society, the primary aim was to put the society which was continually expanding into an order, not so much on the basis of extraction of surplus, but on the basis of the needs of establishing social superiority of the leaders of the society over the fellow clansmen and the vanquished tribes. Though private property was developing and classes were in the process of making, it was still a tribal society. So, in the *varna* division of this period political authority got more importance over economic authority. So, the *rajanyas* as the military chiefs of that tribal society and the *brahmanas* their priestly supporters were in the privileged position.

In the later Vedic period the pastotral Aryan tribes took to agriculture. They established large-scale settlements. If the later vedic texts are chronologically examined, it is found that slowly the number of *sudras* were increasing. Moreover they were continually losing their rights. At the same time, a section of the *vis*, mainly artisans, were being thrown into the *sudra* cluster. The large scale settlements needed greater authority to the tribal chieftains. So, tribal chiefdoms were found. But still the tribal elements were present. So social ranking and division according to labour did not always signify loss of rights and stoppage of social mobility. The sections of *vis* who were being relegated

were mainly the artisans and *vaishyas* took the occupation of agriculture. Here we find that the *varna* division was taking a shape of dividing not only the ruling authority and their intellectual advisers but also divisions on the basis of mental and physical labour. Agriculture was prestigious among those occupation which needed physical labour. We also find that due to the needs of agriculture and large scale settlements, the *rathakaras* and *takshanas* (chariot makers and metal workers) among the *sudras* were having special status. The marginal surplus that was extracted went to the benefit of the *rajanyas* (*kshatriyas*) and *brahmanas*. The iron weapons made the *kshatriyas* stronger. The *kshatriyas* could rule over larger settlements. This is also another reason for the special status of *rathakaras* and *takshana*. They were closer to the power wielding *kshatriyas*.

During this period the rise of tribal military chiefs as the rulers of large settlements as tribal chieftains brought forth a contradiction between the two privileged *varna*. With the new privileged position, the *kshatriyas* started denying the *brahmanas* the highest position in the social ladder. Finally that contradiction was resolved. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* pulls the compromise formula as follows

“Verily in the beginning of the world was Brahman, one only. Being one he was not developed. He created still further a superior form, the kshatrahood, even those who are kshatras among gods: Indra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mrityu, Ishana. Therefore, there is nothing higher than kshatra. Therefore, at the Rajasuya ceremony the Brahmana sit

below the kshatriya. Upon kshatrahood, alone does he confer that honour. This something namely the Brahmanhood is the source of kshatrahood. Therefore, even if the king attains supremacy, he rests finally upon Brahmanhood as his own source. So who ever injures him (i.e the Brahmana) attacks his own source. He faces worse in proportion as he injures one who is better". (Quoted and translated in Indian Philosophy, D.P. Chattopadhyay, p.26).

Varnadharma became the first law code to demarcate the duties under this division of labour. The duty of the *sudras* was to serve the *varna*, during this period helped the first two *varnas* to extract meagre surplus labour. But that opened the road for a class-divided society that emerged. In this sense the *vaisyas* and *sudras* were the exploited classes in that period. But *varna* dharma regulated the division of labour in the community as if the "irresistible authority of a law of nature".

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCTION SYSTEM, PRODUCTIVE FORCES AND JATI-CASTE SYSTEM

The period between 600 BC upto 300 BC is a period of great importance in Indian social history. Large scale deforestation and expansion of tribal chiefdoms culminated in the *Mauryan* empire (322-184 BC)

The tribal chiefdoms took the shape of state with a centralised power. The *rajanyas* (*kshatriyas*) started granting lands or villages to the *kshatriyas*. The old tribal

community started disappearing. In the ruins of tribal societies rose ruthless state powers. The tribal equality yielded to "Base greed, brutal sensuality, sordid avarice, selfish plunder of common possessions". *Varna* system took its most ugly face. With prosperity of agriculture, trade and commerce also developed. *Vaisyas* who were earlier agriculturists took trade as their occupation. Agricultural producers came under the subjection of the landholders. During this period the artisans tended to live in villages of their own communities. *Sudras* became the agricultural producers. The gulf between *varnas* developed. Around 300 BC, Baudhayana declared that vedas and agriculture were destructive of each other. This meant that agricultural producers by then lost their right of knowledge and learning. Mining and iron smelting also started in large scale. The surplus production and their extraction made the emergence of sixteen great kingdoms possible. At this stage towns developed again. The kings were supported by the religious, political administrative and military functionaries. These kingdoms could no more sustain on gifts alone, taxes in cash and kind was introduced. Here the *varna* system acted as the machinery to extract surplus. To run the expense of the kingdoms the agricultural producers were subjected under the members of new set of officials, designated as *gahapatis* and *kutumbikas*. They controlled villages, also possessed land in their own right. Clearing of forests and large scale agriculture needed bringing greater number of people into the fold of the state. So the autochthonous tribes were losing their freedom and becoming labourers under the hierarchical system. Some of them were brought within the fold of *varna* system, some were not. So during this phase, *sudras* were divided

into two types, Aryans and non-Aryans. According to Panini, a *sudra* is an Arya, if he lives within the village (*aryanam anirvasitanam*). Earlier both the patriarchal 'Aryans' living in cattle-rearing and plough agriculture and matrilineal tribes engaged in hunting and cultivation could find a place in the *purushamedha*. That was the mechanism to bring all under one umbrella to assimilate them into the brahminical society. A clan was then collectively admitted within the society but with the development of agriculture untouchability came into existence. Although even in the earlier period *chandalas* were looked as impure people, the scope enlarged. *Antyevasin* became the term applied to untouchables.

Thus the *varna* system which first started social making based on a primitive social division of labour and political subordination of one group by another, took the concrete shape of social division based on social division of labour to extract surplus from the toiling people and division of labourers too originated. The *vaisyas* turned to trade and commerce. Admixture of *varna* still continued. Earlier *vratayas* were used to be the non-Aryan people to be brought within the Aryan fold. Now theory of mixed *varnas* through *anuloma* and *pratiloma*, i.e. miscegenation between men of higher *varnas* and women of lower *varnas* and vice versa was evolved. In a word, *varna* system took a concrete class shape. The word 'dasa' which originally started with a tribe of that name, than to define servants, who could be gifted, finally started meaning slaves who could be bought, sold or mortgaged.

This development in agriculture, mining, iron smelting, trade and even money circulation culminated in

establishment of the Mauryan empire, A full-fledged state with its detailed law codes and bureaucracy appeared. A vast expanse of land was brought under the control of king which was Sita land. State also supervised and controlled clearing of forest, irrigation and mining. This development in production system and productive forces needed huge amount of labour and that labourer too be socially organised. The *Arthashastra* by Kautilya gives a detailed account of political, economic and social structures of that period. According to Kautilya the society was divided firstly into two divisions Aryas and Mlechhas. Aryas were divided into four *varnas* Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Kautilya suggested of founding rural settlement villages consisting of a hundred to five hundred families each at the interval of two to four miles and to be inhabited mainly by *sudra karshakas*. The *sudras* had to derive their means of livelihood from their services to the twice-born (*dwija*). They could also support themselves by occupations such as artisans, dancers, actors etc. Those *sudra* labourers who did not have any land of their own occupation and could not pay taxes had to give labour services (*visti*) under an official *vistikadhyaksha*. Kautilya has spoken about the existence of nine types of *dasas*. They were to serve under the masters for the cultivation of their lands, under the state official to work in the Sita lands, mines, forest clearing, irrigation and other construction works. Mining was done by convicted persons also. These convicted persons were called *dandapranita dasa*. There was another kind of *dasas* called *dhvajacrita* (prisoners of war). About them Kautilya's law code was "(Persons or objects) brought from another territory by force (of arms) may be enjoyed

after securing permission of the king, except persons born free of goods belonging to gods, (e.g. temples), Brahmins and ascetics". (*Slavery in Ancient India*, Dev Raj Chanana, p.93) But this does not imply a slave society of Roman or Greek type. Moreover, even in case of *dasas*, Kautilya's law code did not allow minors to be sold as *dasas*. But this was not applicable to *mlechehhas*. Moreover punishment for selling minors of *sudras* was twelve panas whereas that for *vaisyas*, *kshatriyas* and *brahmanas* were twice, thrice and four times respectively.

During this period, elaborate arrangements of surplus extraction was also codified. Kautilya stated that a new settlement, which is mainly inhabited by *sudras* (*avaravarnapraya*), is capable of yielding sure results and bearing all burdens imposed on them by the state. *Sudras* were engaged not only in cultivation but also in carrying loads and building forts. The numerical strength of *sudra* settlements were used for clearing forest and mining. *Sitadhyaksha* used to supply the *sudra* agricultural labourers and slaves with agricultural implements and other necessary materials. And he could press the services of the artisans such as blacksmiths, carpenters etc. for this purpose. The owners of land would cultivate it by *sudra* agricultural labourers. If there was shortage of labour they could lease out for half the share of the produce. The *Karmakaras* (physical labourers) who did not possess agricultural inputs and implements could retain only fourth or one fifth of the produce.

In this period the rule of settlement of the *sudras* were also provided. The capital was the centre of higher *varnas*. But it needed labourers also. So, according to Kautilya,

they should be settled on the boundary of the capital to meet the requirements of field work and other necessary occupations.

Another important aspect of this period is that social mobility took a back seat. Rigidity of *varna* system appeared. Moreover, more and more *vaisyas* were relegated to the *sudra* position.

It may be concluded that in this period the *varna* system was utilised to develop the production system by the centralised state power. Rigid division of labour, means of surplus extraction presented a form under which without a division between citizens and slaves like Greece and Rome the higher *varnas* could extract surplus from the labouring masses. The labouring masses were *sudras* and *mlechehhas*. They were reduced to a situation of slavery with restrictive measures. The *sudras* and *mlechehhas* became numerically very large population. Codes were also formulated to keep them away from the settlements of the higher *varnas*. The embryo of the *jati*-caste system thus developed in the wards of the *varna* system.

Next eight hundred years moulded the *varna* system to *jati*-caste system.

The prosperity brought by the expansion of settled agriculture developed trade and commerce. During the first two centuries AD Indian crafts and commerce developed such that India's international trade thrived in a big way. The silk route was opened, new ports and inland towns were built. At the same time, different rulers of foreign origin also came to India. Settled agriculture was established in a large part of the country. But a large number of *sudras* took the occupations of artisans leaving

agricultural work. These two factors created a crisis. The foreign rulers were not much interested in the *varna* division and *sudras* turning to crafts brought down agricultural production to a critical point. Revolts against brahminical order and famines engulfed the country. To bring the agricultural production back to normal the social order was to be established, in the political field, a brahminical take over along with a new social order became imperative. In *Manu Samhita*, this social order could be traced. Manu clearly ordained that “the king should carefully compel the *vaisyas* and *sudras* to perform the tasks assigned to them” He also said that inter mixture of *varnas* would cause the perish of the state along with its inhabitants. In the *Gita* the same could be found. Stricter rules of endogamy, commensality and untouchability were laid down. To stop the upward social mobility of individual *sudras*, and downward mobility of the *brahmins* and *kshatriyas* strict lines of demarcation of their occupation were drawn. It was also a rule that in no circumstance the *sudras* should be allowed to be educated both in *sruti* (Veda) and in *smriti* (law codes). Around 300 BC, Baudhayan accorded that *vedas* and agricultural work were destructive of each other. In 200 AD, Manu declared that even in distress the *brahmins* and *kshatriyas* must not engage themselves in *vridhhi* i.e. productive activities”. Thus the *varna* division finally gave way to stricter and narrower *jati*-caste division. Basic aim of which was to allow the *brahmins* and *kshatriyas* to stay away from social productive activities and yet to appropriate the surplus produced by the toiling masses of *sudras*. *Vaisyas* were marginalised and were gradually disappearing.

Question may be raised as to how the surplus was

extracted. Firstly the state extracted surplus through taxes on agriculture and trade. Individuals extracted by using, *sudra* slaves and *karmakaras* (agricultural labourers) in agriculture and the artisans as wage earners. Moreover a study of Manu's approved ways of getting wealth also clarifies it. They are "(i) legacy, (ii) gain, (iii) purchase, (iv) conquest, (v) agriculture, (vi) trade and, (vii) acceptance of gift. Commentator Medhatithi explained that the first three were permissible for all *varnas* (we shall later find that this too was not true for the *sudras*), the fourth, i.e. getting wealth by means of conquest was exclusively for the *kshatriyas* and the last one, i.e. acceptance of gift was exclusively for the *brahmins*. But according to Manu.

*Shaktena api hi shudrena na karyah
dhanasanchayah shudrah hi dhanamasadya
Brahmanan eba Badhate.*

i.e. even if able, the *sudras* should not accumulate wealth. Accumulation of wealth by the *sudras* make the brahmin's suffer.

In this period the *varnasankara* theory was utilised to bring the tribes into the fold of brahminical order and the different groups of *jati*-castes were assigned different occupation. Manu once again reiterated that the *kshatriyas* could not prosper without the *brahmanas* and vice-versa. It is found that in this period number of slaves were reduced. It can be said that almost all slaves were *sudras* but all *sudras* were not slaves. Actually this is the period when the specific Indian form of feudalism based on *jati*-caste started functioning. Earliest slave owning mode of production was no more the principal mode.

One of the main reasons of such change was that after large tracts of land was brought under cultivation by the state, the Magadhian state could not control the production through its centralised systems. Decentralisation was necessary, so, land grants were started in a big scale. Moreover, to keep the *brahminical* order intact on the one hand and to bring the Buddhists under control on the other hand grants were made to the temples and sanghas.

But after the sixth century AD, the trade declined. The artisans lost their importance. The townships that developed were also in a declining situation. So, the artisans went back to the villages subsisting on working as subsidiary workers for the agricultural production. The self-sufficient villages came into existence. A society came into existence which lost its mobility. The *jati*-caste system then turned into a mechanism to keep the society in order. Artisans were no more paid in cash. The artisan guilds broke. They had to survive on being paid in kind and in some cases lands granted to them. As a mechanism to make this structure survive each craft was converted into a *jati*-caste and the *jajmani* system developed.

CHANGE AND REALITY

The *jati*-caste system thus developed an effective structure to build a production system as well as a state system to extract and appropriate surplus with a minimum of extra-economic coercion. *Jati*-caste system is both as a social structure and a superstructure based on religious legal sanction. All these together gave it the strength to remain stable. Whatever mobility society had in the earlier period

was lost, the stationary society needed a rigid structure unchangeable both from within and from without. The *jati*-caste system provided that rigidity and unchangeableness. There might still be necessity for further investigation on whether to call the production system as Asiatic mode of production or a specific form of feudalism particular to India, on the level of self-sufficiency, or on the presence of feudalism at different level-‘above’ and ‘below’, but it is clear that the brahminical order that was established acted as the most advantageous structure to run the huge monarchies, various small kingdoms, feudatories and the state bureaucratic machineries with least resistance from the masses. It is not that there were no revolts, social convulsions or protests, but the assimilation in the lowest rung of the brahminical order, changing law codes keeping the *varna* division in tact, and when required use of force kept the social structure basically unchanged. Through this method *varna* system changed into *jati*-caste system, more precisely *varna-jati* system. We have referred this *varna-jati*-system as *jati* caste system only for the sake of using a more commonly used term.

By the time the Muslim rulers came to India first in the 12th century *varna-jati* system (*jati*-caste system) took its final form. India was divided into a large number of feudatories. During the Satavahna empire South India also came under the brahminical order and by the Gupta period eastern part of India i.e. areas as far as Bengal and present day Tripura came under the brahminical order. While these areas came under the brahminical order, one interesting thing to be found is the mere absence of *kshatriyas* and *vaisya* in these areas. The reason behind this is that since the principal means of earning wealth of the *kshatriyas*

was plunder, the *kshatriyas* did not stay in these areas to rule, they allowed sub-rulers to administer the territories after bringing the regions under their rule. Moreover, Satavahana king Goutamiputra Satkarni tried to bring a compromise between the *brahmanas* and the *sudras* at a time when there were distinct protests against the brahminical order by the *sudras*. So, the erstwhile rulers of these areas when brought under the yoke of brahminical order were allowed to carry on their rule and we find a number of *sudra* rulers in these areas. These *sudra* rulers often tried to establish their *kshatrah*ood. But a *kshatriya* group did not develop.

Under such circumstance, the Turks came. The Turks, Pathans and Mughals who ruled afterwards were ignorant about the *jati*-caste system. But soon they realised the effectiveness of the brahminical social structure. They brought certain changes in the administrative level. Moreover, the Persian wheel brought a change in the agriculture also. Agricultural production developed. To govern the country they inducted officials from the upper *varnas*. Even rulers like Sher Shah, Akbar and Aurangzeb did not do anything to touch the rural society except choosing bureaucrats from the upper castes and the aristocrat Muslims who converted to Islam from the lower castes. But during this period, due to the reluctance of the *brahmanas* to work under the Muslims, certain groups of *sudras* were inducted into the administrative jobs. These groups though remained *sudras* for a long time were elevated in their social positions.

Though the Muslim rulers were not votaries of *jati*-caste system and the *brahmanas* often looked at them with disdain, but during this period *jati*-caste system

became more rigid. Firstly, during the expansion of the Muslim rule, to keep the society united behind the erstwhile rulers and to extract more surplus the *jati*-caste system became more rigid. Again the rigidity created a condition for the lower castes getting themselves proselytised to Islam to get rid of the oppression of feudal lords and the upper castes. This caused more rigidity in the *jati*-caste system. Now it has been historically admitted fact that the more rigid and oppressive the *jati*-caste system became the more the people from lower castes converted themselves to Islam. But a structure which was based on a definite production system and procedure to appropriate surplus could not undergo any deep rooted fundamental change through changes in super-structure such as proselytisation. Rather very soon, in India, Islam lost its principle of universal brotherhood and *jati*-casteism developed amongst the Muslims in India. Almost in the same line of the *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* the shekhs and saiyads were developed and ordinary Muslims were divided into different social status according to occupations like Ansaris, Maimals etc. just like the *jati*-caste division amongst the *sudras*. It was not just what Mr. Justice Ahmed said, "Revenge on behalf of the vanquished over the victors", but perpetuation of a system advantageous for appropriation of surplus as well as for the governance in the vast country in a specific form of feudal society in India.

True that in this period increase in commodity production, development of trade and commerce, increase in monetary system for exchange and direct representatives of *jati*-caste system as central rulers at certain times loosened the rigidity of the *jati*-caste structure. But since this

structure was most advantageous to maintain their rule, the Muslim rulers never tried to abolish this system. In fact, the Muslim replaced the *kshatriyas* as rulers, the *kshatriyas* either resisted or became military chieftains under the Muslim rulers and the brahminical order continued, except certain fringe changes like this or that *sudras jati*-group getting a higher position in the social hierarchy. Thus we see *kayasthas* who evolved in to a *jati*-caste by ninth century, rise in social hierarchy.

British advent to power brought an end to medieval period. Their first task was to suppress all erstwhile rulers brutally. Since not only at the centre, but also at provincial levels, Muslims were in power, they started resisting the British. The British needed their henchmen from amongst the officials and bureaucrats from the country itself. Moreover the British were surprised to find the structure of society in India. They wanted to get the hegemonistic section from the society as their mainstay of power. From both these counts, the upper castes of the brahminical society were the most suitable allies of the British. During this period, the most important change that was introduced by the British was a new form of feudalism instead of the old form through the Permanent Settlement, Rayatwari and Mahalwari. This was an admixture of European feudalism and the specific Indian form of feudalism. It was not something strange that mostly the upper caste persons became the new landlords. The educated section of the upper *jati*-castes was placed in the positions of high ranking officials under the British, During the Padsahi period also, this very section was in the posts of high ranking officials.

Certain other great changes broke the self-sufficient village economy to large extent. The artisans faced a steep competition from the British commodities. The ratio of exports of cottonthreads from Britain to India between 1818 and 1836 was 1:5200. In 1824 export of British muslin to India was not more than 10,00,000 yards but in 1937 that reached over 6,40,00,000 yards. And at the same time population of Dacca, one of the most well known centres of muslin production, came down from 1,50,000 to a meagre 20,000. Weavers were pauperised and migrated away from Dacca. The same was true for blacksmiths, potters, pallanquin bearers etc. The balance between agriculture and cottage industries that was present for several centuries was destroyed. A huge section of erstwhile artisans had to take up agriculture as their occupation or turned into agricultural labourers. Another section joined the huge reserve force of labourers to work in the construction works.

But this change of occupation did not alter the social structure. Contrary to what Marx believed "Due to the modern industry developed by railway system, the hereditary division of labour upon which the caste system in India is based, that absolute hindrance of India's progress and Indian power will break down". The British planfully kept the caste-system in force. The greatest advantage of it was that it supplied them a huge reserve army of labourers, who were taught for ages to look down upon themselves as inferior beings. The British used them just in the same manner they used the Irish workers in England. In English capitalist development did not bring the Irish workers and the English labourers at par, not only in social status but also in their conditions of work, wages and even specific

nature of work. That experience was utilised in India. Even when persons from upper castes were forced to undertake factory jobs, in social relationship as well as in conditions of work and in nature of work they differed from the workers from lower caste origins.

The lowest strata of *jati*-caste group who had to migrate away from the villages failing to get jobs even as agricultural labourers and the tribal people who lost their old world were used by the British as workers for construction works in the railways, road, docks and ports, factories and mills and in the most unhealthy jobs like plantation workers as cheap labourers. There they fell prey to super profit. Towards them the British policy was no way different from Manu:

*“Uchchistam annam databyan jirnani
basanani cha,
pulaka chaeba dyanyanam jirnaschaiba
parichhadah”.*

Meaning, they should be given table scraps as meal, torn cloths to wear, they should sleep on straw or torn mattresses.

On the other hand, utilising the hatred of the upper castes towards manual labour and towards lower castes, the British drew them close to state machinery. A small educated section was assimilated in the state system by employing them in administrative posts, the rest was absorbed as the huge number of clerks they needed. Only those who could not get a chance to work in such posts were distressed enough to do some job for livelihood were forced to work in the industries as skilled labourers or

supervisors. Thus even the old production system and occupational positions specified in the old *jati*-caste structure was retained in a new form. This was done systematically and planfully from the period of East India Company to that of British Raj. 1776, A Code of Gentoo Laws "was written and its introduction stated that" the importance of the commerce of India and advantages of a territorial establishment in Bengal could be maintained only by "an adoption of such original institutes of country, as do not intimately clash with the laws or interests of conquerors." This was further illustrated by William Jones in his preface to the translation of *Manu Smriti* in 1794. There he said that if that policy was pursued the well established industry of many millions of Hindu subjects "would largely add to the wealth of Britain". (Quoted from "*Shudras in Ancient India*". R.C. Sharma). The policy of maintaining the differences between *jati*-castes and religions was continued by the British Raj. In 1862, the Secretary of State, Wood wrote to the then Governor General of India, Elgin.. "We have maintained our power in India by playing one part against the other and we must continue to do so". One of the most outspoken advocacy of this policy can be found in 'The Dilemma in India' by Regional H.Cradock, an ICS officer who worked under nine Governor Generals in India for 39 Years. He Said:

"The thought of what would replace this important caste-system which has developed during the last thirty centuries or more, makes one surprise. Will all the long cherished traditions of Hindu society will go along with it ? We only look at the injustice and difficulties put on the downtrodden people through caste-system, but do

not feel the advantages that are present and inevitably to be present in exchange of it. Had there been not many compensatory characteristics present, such a rotten institution according to many Westerners, could not be overrun by external attack. Its wells will crash only when the army within stops repairing. The only real order that is safeguarding India is the order of caste-system. If real democracy is established in India, that will destroy caste-system. Destruction of castes will destroy Hinduism and if Hinduism is destroyed India will be destroyed. At least that India which is existing for a thousand years. Hinduism is the soul of India and the place of Srikrishna cannot be filled up by Jesus Christ. Even it is easily assumed that the vacuum will be filled by Bolshevik opposition of Christ. Lack of belief, hopelessness, lack of love and destituteness will engulf. It is much better to remain a good Hindu than to become a veritable atheist". (Retranslated).

Thus during the British rule, due to the changes in the production system, penetration of capitalist production system in feudal India, the old *jati*-caste system lost much of its efficacy, but since the capitalist system was brought under the supervision and control of imperialism, it retained the *jati*-caste system just as it retained feudalism in India. *Jati*-caste system was retained by the British for a number of reason. Firstly, this system allowed them an access to a huge reserve army of cheap labourers. Secondly, it provided them a society where need for extra-economic coercions is least. Thirdly, this system could even divide the working class which, if united, might have acted as its grave diggers. Fourthly, it allowed the state to function depending just on a few upper caste henchmen. Last and

the most important was, it could divide the national liberation struggle by utilising the *jati*-caste difference as and when needed.

After 15th August, 1947, the direct rule of the British came to an end. But the *jati*-caste structure did not change. Certain constitutional changes were introduced for affirmative actions to raise the economic and educational levels of scheduled downtrodden castes. But that did not change the actual situation. Another important change has taken place in the rural areas. Earlier the landlords were predominantly from the upper castes. But after the Zamindari Abolition Act, smaller landlords have grown up. These smaller landlords have grown up from those *jati*-castes of *sudras* who had during the British period or just before that could ensure an upward mobility. Moreover the process of industrialisation has increased the working class population. But in the industries, still now the old British policy of dividing the working class along the *jati*-caste lines is being pursued. Still now the menial jobs requiring hard manual work in unhygienic conditions are done by the lowest strata of the *jati*-caste ladder. The artisan and service castes have lost most of their ancestral occupation and have either become agricultural labourers or poor peasants or low grade workers in organised industries or workers in unorganised industries. But wherever old occupations are being carried on those are done by the respective *jati*-caste. So a situation is there where all *chamars* are not street cobblers, but all cobblers are *chamars*, or all *kumbhakers* are not potters but all potters are *kumbhakars*. As to the social positions, certain relaxations have come into existence, untouchability is not practised in the old crude way, but still continues. Mutual exclusiveness according to hierarchical order, endogamy and commensality still continues.

CLASS-JATI-CASTE RELATIONSHIP

While discussing the *jati*-caste system in India often it is said that this *jati*-caste relationship has nothing to do with class relationship. This at best is a simplistic way of looking at objects, at worst, it is peddling the ruling class ideology of utilising *jati*-caste division to continue the class exploitation.

To understand the relationship, let us start with the definition of class given by Lenin

“Classes are groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in ‘historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.

Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definitive system of social economy.” (Great Beginning, *Selected Works*, Vol.3,p-172).

If with this definition of class, we add that these social groups should also be mutually exclusive social divisions based on hereditarily determined occupation, endogamy and commensality, we shall reach the definition of *jati*-caste.

In a sense *jati*-castes are further divisions within class. Such complicated arrangements are nothing unique. In almost all earlier societies there were subordinate

gradations within classes. A look at the *Communist Manifesto* will give us such an example. "In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians and slaves, in the Middle Ages feudal lords, vassals, guildmasters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all classes again, subordinate gradations."

In this light it may easily be concluded that till the Muslims came to India, *jati*-caste and class divisions were one and the same. The *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* were the exploiting classes, the *vaisyas* were traders and agriculturists, but were constantly being marginalised by the upper two castes the *sudras* and *antyevasins* (*mlechchhas*) were the oppressed classes. With the Muslim rule a small change took place. The *vaisyas* became almost extinct and from within Muslims two different sections developed. But they also succumbed into the cauldron of *jati*-caste structure.

The old Indian feudalism was basically *jati*-caste based society. It is true that there are many instances of *sudra* kings exploiting *sudra* toiling masses. But almost without exception all those *sudra* rulers tried to establish their *kshatriya* origin. It is also to be noted after the *varna* system gave way to *jati*-caste system upward mobility was in groups. So, when the *kayastha jati*-caste group or Reddy or *kammas* or *lingayats* could develop even from within the *sudra* fold, their rank in the social position changed, so do their relations to the means of production and place they occupy in the social economy.

From the time of the British rule to the present India, certain changes have definitely taken place. But that too is not such that *jati*-caste divisions and class divisions lost their inter-relationship.

The ruling elite and exploitative classes are composed of upper *jati*-castes, or their votaries from other religious sects. The downtrodden castes are almost nowhere in the power structure or control of social economy. But it is true that large number of upper-caste people have been forced to become workers and wage earners. They are exploited and their labour is being appropriated. At the same time certain handpicked members of downtrodden *jati*-castes have been rewarded with prized posts and are being utilised to contain the dissent amongst the downtrodden *jati*-caste. So, classes have arisen within *jati*-caste groups. But it is to be noted that class division have developed more amongst the upper *jati*-castes. From them a section have joined in the toiling masses. But the situation of the downtrodden *jati*-castes have remained almost the same.

Moreover, in present day society, *jati*-caste, structure is being used for the benefit of the exploiting classes. It is a fact that even after a long history of the working class, still now *jati*-casteism is acting as an impediment for the development of working class to the consciousness of class-for-itself. Casteism, communalism and gender divisions are utilised as easy instruments to break the unity of working class by the ruling classes.

MOVEMENTS AGAINST *JATI*-CASTE SYSTEM

Discontent caused by the social division and exploitation dates back to the period when *varna* division was employed to tear as under the old tribal equalities and ruthless state powers rose on the ruins of the tribal societies. "Extermination and subjugation of the tribes formed the policy-objectives of the early states".

Buddhism and Jainism were the shape that those discontents took place in those early days. Buddha himself was born in the Shakya tribe. During the life time of Buddha, Vidhudava, the Prince of Kosala, conquered and carried on a brutal massacre of the Shakyas. So, Buddha said, "The princes who rule kingdoms rich in treasures and wealth, turn their greed against one another, pandering insatiableness to their desires. If these acts thus restlessly, swimming in the stream of impermanence, carried along by greed and carnal desires, who then can walk on earth in peace ?" (quoted by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy*, p.125). The Jatakas give illustrations of taxation, slavery, extortion, torture, mortgage, interest, usury, total dislike for manual work, and above all *varna* divisions as the new institutions to bring unheard of miseries in the life of people who lived in tribal equality. Seeing all these Buddha sought for the remedies. He understood that remedies do not lie in any vedic god, prayer or sacrifice, nor in ascetic self mortification. He also could not believe in salvation through metaphysical wisdom preached by the Upanishads. So he wanted to bring back the tribal collectives. The way he found was to go out of the actual society (*Prabajja*) and to aver at (*Upasampada*) sanghas, which were "modelled consciously on the tribal

collectives". This was an effort to reform the society. He could not find a path of radical change. It was historically impossible for Buddha to do so. But in his own order of monks no former *dasa* was to be called by his former name. He advised the brahmins instead of arranging fire sacrifice they should look after their sons, wives, slaves, messengers and servants.

But Buddha did not want the *dasas* to revolt. So he refused to accept any run away *dasa* into his order. Almost all the slaves who joined had to satisfy the order that they had obtained their manumission.

Here it will be relevant to quote Karl Marx On Religion. *"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusion"*.

Buddha and latter reformers who were opposed to *varna* or *jati*-caste divisions and oppressions and tried to reform society through religious means actually could not raise the demand to give up a condition which needs illusion, so they tried to create right type of illusion. Although here, too, we find two different types of protest forms.

Earlier Vaishnavism was the platform for protest, but soon Vaishnavism was assimilated within the brahmanical order. But that did not deter the forms of protest through religions. Bhakti movement and Sufi movement present such forms. Within Bhakti movement there were two

distinct sections, one predominantly religio-ideological and another socio-religious *RAMANUJA*, *CHAITANYA* etc. belongs to the former. They preached all men are equal before God, any person can pray and worship God without a *brahmana* as mediator. Guru Nanak, Kabir, Rabidas, Haridas, Nandal, Triruppan Basavanna etc. formed the latter section. They opposed *jati*-caste system and developed sects who did not abide by *jati*-caste codes. Third Guru Arjan Das was the most direct preacher against *jati*-caste system. Islamic Sufi saints were also against *jati*-caste oppression.

From ancient times other form of protests were also present. Even in Buddha's time, there were slave revolts. *Vinaya pitaka* refers to one such slave revolt in Buddha's own tribe after he renounced the world. The brahminical law codes were often challenged, *jati*-caste disciplines violated and logical arguments were placed. Manu in his law code stated that one should not even speak with the heretics, the transgressors of *varna*-discipline, the hypocrites and the logicians.

Another form was proselytization to other religion. Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Sikhism, Islam and more recently Christianity became the shelters for those who wanted to get rid of *varna* or *jati*-caste (*Varna-jati*) oppression.

But all these protest movements could not change the brahminical order. The brahminical order used a carrot and stick method to face these challenges. Moreover, these protest movements were at the superstructural level, without a corresponding movement to change the production system and production relations. The only

movement that challenged the state and social structure was the Kaibarta Revolt in the eleventh century. This Aneak Dharma Biplaba (Impure Religious Revolution) was finally brutally suppressed.

It is found that at certain times Buddhists and Vaishnavas were dealt with a brutal suppression. Even kings like Bimbisara of Magadha and Prasenjit of Kosala were not spared. But later on Buddha was accepted as the ninth Avatar of Vishnu and even his opposition to the Vedas was acknowledged. We find the tenth Avatar as Kalki, who is praised for his *mlechhanidhana* (massacre of mlechhas). Sikhism was given the honour of one of the sects without brahminical religion. Though Sikhism has never accepted the *jati*-caste division, but the plight of the Majhis is a proof that the effort of Guru Arjan Das failed. Same has happened to Islam and Christianity. *Jati*-caste divisions have made its ground within those religions in India. Even during the Muslim rule, persons converted from lower *jati*-caste to Islam were not given any important bureaucratic position in the state. And how the Christians converted from upper castes treat their brothers converted from the lower *jati*-castes and tribes was glaringly manifested during the Pope's visit to Calcutta.

MOVEMENTS DURING THE BRITISH RULE AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER IT

When the British rule was established in India, the social structure presented a picture of unchangeable self-

sufficient village with its rigid *jati*-caste system. Depending on the official report of the British, Marx has aptly described the situation in *Capital* (vol. I). *“Those small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on common ownership of land, on the association of agriculture and handicrafts, and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme ready cut and dried. Occupying areas from a hundred upto several thousand acres each forms a self-sufficient productive entity. The greater part of products is destined for direct use by the community itself, and does not take the form of commodities. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as whole, by means of exchange of commodities. It is only the surplus products which become commodities, to a large extent through the state, into whose hands from time immemorial a certain quantity of these products has found its way in the shape of rent in kind. The constitution of these communities varies in different parts of India. In those of the simplest form the land is tilled in common, and the produce divided among the members. At the same times, spinning and weaving are carried on in each family as subsidiary industries. Side by side with the masses thus occupied in the same kind of work, we find the Chief inhabitee, who is judge, policeman and tax gatherer in one; the book-keeper who keeps account of the village and registers everything related thereto; another official, who prosecutes criminals, protects strangers travelling through, and escorts them to the next village; the*

boundary man, who guards the boundaries against neighbouring communities, the water-overseer, who distributes the water from the common tanks for irrigation, who makes known the lucky or unlucky days for seed time and harvest, and for ever other kind of agricultural work; a smith and a carpenter, who make and repair all the agricultural implements; the potter who makes all the pottery of the village; the barber, the washerman, who washes clothes; the silversmith, here and there the poet, who in some communities replaces the silversmith, in others the school master. This dozen or so of individuals are maintained at the expense of the whole community. If the population increase, a new community is founded, on the pattern of the old one, on unoccupied land. The whole mechanism discloses a systematic division of labour, but a division like that to manufacturers is impossible, since the smith and carpenter etc. find an unchanging market, and at the most there may be, according to the size of the villages, two or three of each, instead of one. The law that regulates the division of labour in the community acts here with the irresistible authority of a law of nature, while each individual artisan, the smith, the carpenter and so on, conducts in his workshop all the operations of his handicraft in the traditional way, but independently, and without recognising authority over him. The simplicity of organisation of production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce in the same form, and if destroyed by chance, spring up again on the same spot and with same name. This simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic

Societies, an unchangeableness in striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic states, and the never ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm clouds of the political sky."

Notwithstanding the inaccuracy in finding out the most typical form due to inadequate materials about the society, certain observations and remarks by Marx are of great importance. He could point out, the law codes of *jati*-casteism as the law that regulates the division of labour in the community acts, with the irresistible authority of a law of nature. He also pointed out that this structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm clouds of the political sky. He could also see how the *jati*-caste system brought an inertia in the productive capacity and productive forces because the "*whole mechanism disclosed a systematic division of labour, but a division like that to manufacturers is impossible, since the smith and carpenter etc. find an unchanging market.*"

The British rule brought a change in the circumstances. Many of those artisans lost their occupations and had to take up agriculture or some other jobs. British had to introduce the western education system which again brought certain ideals about the society. By the second half of the nineteenth century that led to a number of social reforms movement. In Bengal Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar argued for the admission of the *sudra* students in Sanskrit College and for widow remarriage. He had to face steep opposition and even ostracisation from the leaders of the society. There were also certain other reformers. But a

strong movement against the brahminical order was developed by Jyotiba Phule who himself came of a sudra *jati*-caste called Mali. Jyotiba Phule led a movement which challenged the established brahminical order. He started schools for untouchables, for women. He developed a cultural movement by songs and dramas exposing the feudal exploitation by the upper castes. He formed the Satyashodhak Samaj to lead these movements. He also guided Narayan Lokhande to form the first trade union in the country, the Bombay Mill Hands Association.

In his time Phule was a social revolutionary, but notwithstanding his attempts to organise the workers and peasantry, his movement against the brahminical order lacked the class outlook as well as the anti imperialist outlook. As a result after his death the Satyasodhak Samaj movement got divided into two district sections. One section led by Ananda Swamy organised the peasant revolts in 1919-1922 at Satara and in the 1930s at Buldhana. That section finally joined the Communist Party of India. The other section led by the Maharaja of Kolhapur finally turned into a movement for getting recognition of a section of Marathas as *kshatriyas* and thus changed into movement just opposite of the idea with which it was launched.

Another movement of great importance developed in the erstwhile Madras Presidency where socially, economically and also politically the brahmins had concentrated power. Untouchability took its worst from. Economically the *brahmins* were the landlords and capitalists nurtured by the British. Politically they were in the bureaucracy of the British government. By the end of the nineteenth century a social reform movement developed

under the leadership of Madras Hindu Social Reform Association. From this movement developed the well known self-respect movement led by Periyar. E.V. Ramaswamy Periyar's movement mainly concentrated amongst the Tamils had a radical outlook. It organised the oppressed *jati*-castes against caste division and privileges of the higher castes, against superstition. It also had a class outlook. The working class, petty bourgeoisie and peasantry were organised.

It fought against the brahminical policy of 'Sanskritisation' up-holding the Tamil Languages. It challenged the social ethics preached by the *Ramayana*. It propagated for equality of all castes. It clearly distinguished itself from all other social reform movements by attempting to introduce a materialist outlook instead of trying to reform by new interpretation of religious texts. In the process the movement upheld socialism and the USSR. Finally Periyar formed the Dravida Kazhagam. DK movement finally took the shape of Tamil nationality movement.

Periyar's movement was the movement against *jati*-casteism with an all round perspective. But it was limited in the Tamil region. Periyar's strong Tamil nationalism finally took him away from the orientation with which he started the movement. Even its class outlook and class base changed into a movement of the developing Nadar Capitalists. Since it is a fact that after 1917, the Great November Revolution led by Comrade Lenin in the Soviet Union, it was impossible for the capitalists to lead a revolutionary movement, Periyarist movement with all its revolutionary possibilities turned into a movement of social reform through which a

section from the lower *jati*-castes gained its political and economic gains. It is no accident that DK movement was finally turned into a movement for governmental power by DMK and AIDMK. But still now a very small section of the present DK, is holding high the ideology with which the self-respect movement started.

One problem of all these movements were that they were limited in either a community or a territory or community in a territory. Another example of this is the movement of Ezhavas under the leadership of Sri Narayan Guru. It was a very strong movement in Kerala. The movement of Nama *sudras* in Bengal under the leadership of Jogen Mandal who joined hands with B.R. Ambedkar, but after 1947 opted for Pakistan.

The movement which was started in the same way based on Mahars of Bombay Presidency under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is an exception. It embraced a large section of other oppressed *jati*-caste communities and developed into and still has an all India base.

To all people who want to put an end to *jati*-caste oppression B. R. Ambedkar and the movement he led are of great importance and significance.

But often Ambedkar is either defied or totally rejected by certain sections. It has become more complex owing to the planned utilisation of the name of Ambedkar by the ruling classes of India to hoodwink the oppressed *jati*-castes.

Why such things could happen? Let us have very precise

discussion on certain important views of Ambedkar. One must remember this is not an overall review or evaluation of Ambedkar, but surely it helps to understand.

ON THE ORIGIN OF CASTE SYSTEM

Ambedkar was clear that caste system presents a structure of society to exploit the downtrodden masses. He was probably the first person to point out that caste system was not only system of division of labour, but also a division of the labourers. He said that the caste system is an hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no either country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers.

While discussing on untouchability, he observed, *“Most people believe that untouchability is a religious system. That is true. But it is a economic system which is worse than slavery. In slavery the master at any rate had the responsibility to feed, clothe and house the slave and keep him in good condition lest the market value of the slave should decrease.*

But in the system of untouchability the Hindu takes no responsibility for the maintenance of the untouchable. As an economic system. it permits exploitation without obligation. Untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation, but also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation.”

But as to the origin of caste system he did not deeply analyse how it developed in ancient India. Narendra Jadhav has aptly summed up his understanding *“Caste is the outcome of certain religious beliefs which have the sanction of shastras.”* Elsewhere Ambedkar said. *“The*

division of labour brought by the caste system is not a division based on choice. Individual sentiments, individual preference has no place in it. it is based on the dogma of predestination.”

Such understanding often relegates the struggle at the superstructural and cultural form. And the economic system remains untouched. Social reform becomes primary, economic reform loses importance.

It was found that Ambedkar himself while organising movement gave great importance to economic reform in those struggles for abolition of Khoti system, against Mahar Vatan. He did also propagate for developing collective forms in agriculture. But at the end he resorted to proselitization to Buddhism to get rid of caste system of Hindu religion.

But most of his present day disciples are not at all interested in the struggle for change in the economic basis of casteism. to be more exact they are only interested in reservation of jobs, but are not interested in the struggle against feudal land tenure or radical land reforms which may lead finally to collective farming.

AMBEDKAR'S POSITION VIS-A-VIS BRITISH IMPERIALISM

Ambedkar is often shown as a supporter of British imperialists. On this point he is mostly misunderstood. But there are certain reasons behind this misunderstanding.

In 1903 British Government attempted an amendment to the act on Khoti system to curtail the rights of *khots* who are landlords. Bal Gangadhar Tilak who himself was a *khot*, wrote a series of articles supporting the *khots* against the British to protect the rights of *khots*, all in the name of Swaraj.

Ambedkar rose against this Khoti system which treated all peasants and families as bonded labours of the *khots* generation after generation. While Tilak emphasized Swaraj, Ambedkar fought for Swaraj.

Ambedkar at one point also observed that history shows that where ethics and economics came in conflict victory is always with economics. Vested interests have never been known to have willingly divested themselves unless there was sufficient force to compel them. The untouchable cannot hope to generate compelling force. They are poor and they are scattered. They can be easily suppressed should they raise their heads. On this analysis Swaraj would make Hindus more powerful and untouchables more helpless and it is quite possible that having regard to the economic advantage which it gives to Hindus. instead of putting an end to untouchability, may extend its life.

Both of these show that the so called nationalist leaderships unabashed support to feudalism and *jati*-caste system sometimes forced Ambedkar away from the struggle against the British for safeguarding the interest of the downtrodden castes. Sometimes the British tried to take advantage of playing one against another.

But we find Ambedkar was aware of the British conspiracy. He clearly told.

I am afraid that the British chose to advocate unfortunate conditions not with the object of removing them, but only because such a concern serves well as an excuse for retarding the political progress of India. So far as you are concerned, the British government has accepted the arrangement as it found them and

has preserved them faithfully in the manner of the Chinese tailor who, when given an old coat as a pattern, produced with pride an exact replica, needlespatches and all. Nobody can remove your grievances as well as you can and you cannot remove them unless you get political power in your hands.

No share of this political power can come to you so long as the British government remains as it is. It is only in a Swaraj Constitution that you stand of getting any political power in to your own hands without which you cannot bring salvation to your people". (Quoted by B.T. Ranadive, Caste Class and Property Relations)

ON METHOD OF ABOLISHING JATI-CASTE SYSTEM

Ambedkar had clear idea that "vested interests have never been known to have willingly divested themselves unless there was sufficient force to compel them". What was that force which compels the vested interests to divest unwillingly? Can that be done by peaceful means? Here again the contradictory nature of Ambedkar's thinking can be found out.

Ambedkar's recipe to abolish *jati*-caste system was to establish constitutional democracy and state socialism by peaceful means. Let us quote a few relevant passages to illustrate Ambedkar's thinking on this. *"It seems to me that there lies on us a very important duty to see that democracy, does not vanish from the earth as governing principles of human relationship. If we believed in it, we must both be true and loyal to it. We must resolve to*

see that in whatever we do, we do not help the enemies of democracy to uproot the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.” (All India Depressed Classes Conference, Third Session 1942).

“Democracy is a form and method of government whereby, revolutionary change in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed if democracy can enable those who are running it to bring about fundamental changes in the social and economic life of the people and the people accept those changes without resorting to bloodshed, then I say that there is democracy. That is the real test. It is perhaps the severest test. But when you are judging the quality of a material, you must put in to the severest test” (Thus spoke Ambedkar).

“State ownership in agriculture with a collectivised method of cultivation and a modified form of state socialism in the field of industry. It place squarely on the shoulders of the state the obligation to supply capital necessary for agriculture and industry consolidation of holdings and tenancy legislation are worse than useless. They cannot bring about prosperity to agriculture. Neither consolidation nor tenancy legislation can be of any help to 60 million untouchables who are just landless labourersOnly collective farms on the lines set out in the proposal can help them” (Memorandum to the Constituent Assembly).

To Ambedkar it was clear that abolition of *Jati-Caste* system was impossible with only social, economic and political reforms. There must be revolutionary change. But

the influence of Gandhism, which he denounced openly restricted him to find the solution only through non-violent means. His constitutional democratic ideas bound him within the limits of bourgeois democracy.

This limit also put him strongly against abolition of private property. Speaking against communism he said, "Can the communist say that achieving their valuable end (i.e. establishing communism) they have not destroyed other valuable ends? They have destroyed private property."

So Ambedkar's state socialism meant :-

- (a) to convert agriculture into state industry and develop collective farming.
- (b) key industries and basic industries to be owned and run by the state.
- (c) an obligation on the state to plan the economic life of the people on lines which would lead to highest point of productivity without closing every avenue to private enterprise and provide for the equitable distribution of wealth.

This is nothing but the plan of a bourgeois democrat seeing an end to feudalism. As to industrial planning, it is close to Nehruvian planning.

His democratic ideas brought him at loggerheads with Gandhism and his bourgeois ideas took him away from the communists. As a result a great personality like Ambedkar had to be satisfied with authorising the Constitution for India about which his own opinion expressed at the time of adoption of the constitution was : "On the 26th January,

1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradiction. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principles of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one vote”.

Actually Ambedkar failed to understand the neo-colonial policies of imperialism and took the so called political democracy at face value. But he was very much afraid where the contradictions would lead to. So he continued.

“How long shall we continue to live this life of contradiction? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy.”

It will not be out of context to point out that the Periyarists of Madras Presidency, anti-brahminical organisation of the downtrodden, felt that the Constitution was totally undemocratic. Even to this day the DK (Dravida Kazhagam) holds that view, although the DMK and the AIDMK have changed their earlier positions.

That contradiction finally took its toll on Ambedkar. Finding that the Constitution, which the ruling cliques of India started propagating the creation of Ambedkar, was being hurled against the oppressed and depressed people to perpetuate the social, economic as well as political

inequality, as the sigh of the oppressed creature he turned into, the heart of heartless world he faced and as the spirit of spiritless situation that prevailed he embraced and propagated Buddhism. Instead of real equality he opted for an illusory equality. Because without a change in social and economic structure of the society and the political form that perpetuates that structure any attempt to achieve quality by embracing a religion is nothing but illusion. In India itself people had earlier embraced Islam to achieve such aim, but that proved to be totally ineffective.

WEAKNESS OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST

JATI-CASTE SYSTEM

. With all the above experiences before us, to develop the struggle against *jati*-caste system we will have to find out the weaknesses of the struggle and rectify them.

Very often the brahminical order is looked upon as a device born out of the brainstorm of a few *brahmans* like Manu, instead of realising that these *brahmans* as the ideologues of the then existing society codified a structure which developed from the exigencies of running the state and society at particular level of development of production system in the concrete conditions of India. It is true for all societies. Everywhere the law codes do not develop the structure of the society, rather law codes are developed and framed with a view to perpetuate the structure already born from a given production relation characteristic to a definite production system.

Marx in his *Poverty of Philosophy* has explained it in the following manner :

“Under the patriarchal system, under the caste system, and under the guild system, there was division of labour in society as a whole according to fixed rules. Were these rules established by a legislator? No, they were born, originally, from the conditions of material production and only much later were they established as laws”.

Once a clear understanding on this is arrived at, it will be clear that without a basic change in the structure of the state, society and, above all, the conditions of material production, no superstructural change can abolish the *jati-caste* system.

Second important weakness is a gross misunderstanding on the relationship between struggles against *jati-caste* system and class structure, we have also discussed the complexities that have developed in this interrelationship during the British rule and after.

Earlier there was little difference between oppressed *jati-castes* and oppressed classes. At the same time oppressed castes and oppressed classes were almost the same. But during the British rule and afterwards, classes have developed within castes. Moreover, the British rulers were the expropriators from this *jati-caste* system, but they themselves remained out of the *jati-castes* system. Moreover, a large section of the oppressor castes has now turned into oppressed class. It is a situation when the class struggles lose its strength if it is not related to the struggle against *jati-casteism*, and at the same time struggles against *jati-casteism* miss the target when it is not related to the class struggles.

Any attempt to compartmentalise, to see them as parallels, or to place them as opposed to each other is grossly wrong. The struggles for abolition of *jati*-casteism and class struggles are not one and the same. but neither are they opposed to nor parallel to each other, rather they are linked to and complimentary to each other.

Darkest and brightest examples of how a wrong and correct establishment of this relationship respectively had its effect on the movement of the people can be traced in the Bombay workers movement in 1929 and 1938.

In 1929, the Girni Kamgar Union led by the communists called a strike in Bombay. "Ambedkar initiated extensive counter-campaigns against Girni Kamgar Union in 1929". His main concern was worsening of the conditions of *dalit* workers in the previous strikes. Communists branded him as anti-worker. The strike failed to get expected results. What actually happened was that both the sides were stressing on partial truths. Ambedkar stressed the conditions of *dalits* which the communists overlooked. Communists stressed the need of unity of the working class as a whole which Ambedkar overlooked. Sufferers were workers both *dalits* and non-*dalits*.

In 1938, Ambedkar fought hand in hand with the communists to make successful the general strike against the Industrial Disputes Bill which was aimed at restricting the right of the workers to strike and making the strikes illegal, it was a successful, historic strike.

If Ambedkar was to be blamed for creating a division amongst the workers, the communists should also be

blamed for not raising the voice against and not organising the workers as a whole against the prohibitive barriers that kept *dalit* workers away from “the lucrative jobs in the mills”.

What was lacking in both the sides was the understanding on the relationship between *jati*-casteism and class struggle.

Another shortcoming that developed due to lack of understanding this relationship is the failure to mobilise the democratic masses of the upper *jati*-castes in the struggle for abolition of *jati*-casteism. The organisers of these struggles limit their efforts in organising oppressed *jati*-castes only, and do not pay attention to mobilise the oppressed classes and democratic masses of the upper caste in the struggles which are basically democratic in character. The communists could have done it but they also neglected it. Moreover, often the struggle of the oppressed *jati*-castes are limited to certain particular oppressed *jati*-caste and that too of a particular region. Thus we find anti-brahminical struggles were at first confined to Marathas and then to Mahars only in Maharashtra, to Namashudras in Bengal, to Jadavs in UP, while other oppressed *jati*-castes remained unorganised. Of late, a general awareness of these struggles willingness to participate in these struggles are developing in all the oppressed *jati*-castes.

One more weakness which spontaneously generates from the fact that the struggle against the brahminical order naturally tends to struggle against the brahmans and other upper *jati*-castes. One of the main reasons is that they still wield immense power both economically and politically.

But this possess a danger also. This spontaneous trend obfuscates the target of the struggle. The organisation of economic production, the state machinery that perpetrates it remains untouched. Moreover, the oppressed class within the upper *jati*-castes also become targets. Thus possible allies turn into enemies. At the same time, opportunism of becoming part of the system also develops. It will not be out of place to refer to Ambedkar's observation that the Marathas were more oppressive to the untouchables than the *brahmans*. Almost same has happened in case of Nadars in Tamilnadu, Nayars of Kerala, Reddy and Kammass of Andhra Pradesh, and of late, Yadavs and to some extent Kurmis of Bihar.

For a correct development of struggle against *jati*-caste system, these weakness must be rectified. And the slogan for organising the movement should be—unite the *dalits* and unite with the *dalits*. By *dalit* we must not mean a section of the oppressed castes. *Dalit* means oppressed people of all oppressed *jati*-castes and communities. Here the communities should also be added, because we have already pointed out that due to the oppression of the brahminical *jati*-caste system a large section of oppressed *jati*-castes converted themselves to other religions such as Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. Their situation is no way better than the oppressed *jati*-castes under so-called Hinduism. Moreover, the tribal people should also be united in this struggle. So, unite the dalits would be the slogan for uniting all the oppressed castes and communities. unite with the dalits will be the call to the oppressed classes of the higher *jati*-castes and democratic people. If they do not unite with the *dalits* they also cannot liberate themselves

from the yoke of imperialism, comprador bureaucratic capital and feudalism that is the essence of the present day organisation of economic production system and the ruling power, who perpetuate *jati*-caste system for their interests.

WEAKNESS OF UNDERSTANDING OF EARLIER MARXISTS

It is true that in India the Marxists have consistently been advocating for the abolition of *jati*-caste system.

As early as 1930, the 'Platform of Action' of the CPI said :

"Due to the British rule in our country there still exist lakhs of slaves, crores of socially outcaste working pariahs who are deprived of all rights. The British rule, Zamindari system, reactionary caste-system, religious dogmatism and all age old traditions of slavery and serfdom has throttled the Indian people, are impediments in their path of liberation. Because of it, even in this twentieth century India, there are pariah's who do not have the right to mix with others, to draw water from the same well or to study in the same school.

Instead of abolishing this disgrace of Indian people Gandhi and other Congress leaders are working to retain caste-system which is again acting as the basis of existence of Untouchability. Only ruthless abolition of caste-system in its reformed, Gandhist variety, only agrarian revolution and violent overthrow of British rule can open the path of social, economic and legal liberation of all these untouchable toiling masses. So the Communist Party of India is calling upon all the

pariahs and slaves to join hands with all the workers in a united revolutionary front against the British rule and zamindari system.

The Communist Party of India is calling upon them not to give in to the tricks of the British and reactionary agents, who try to split and set one against the other toilers of the country.

The Communist Party of India is fighting for abolition of all form of slavery, caste-system and caste inequality (social, cultural etc.), Communist Party is struggling for total and absolute equality of working pariahs and all toilers of our country."

The 1951 Programme of the CPI stated:

"Equal rights for all citizens irrespective of religion, caste, sex, race or nationality.

Social and economic oppression of one caste by another or social and personal bans and prohibitions imposed by the so-called upper castes on the lower castes, especially the scheduled castes, in the name of custom, tradition or religion shall be abolished and made punishable by law".

The 1969 programme of the CPI(ML) said:

"Abolish the caste system remove all social inequalities and all discriminations on the religious ground and guarantee equality of status to women".

But these declarations of policy did not take concrete shape into movement. One reason could be traced from the statement in the Platform of Action. From the inception the Marxists adopted a mechanical approach and tried to

their communal basis, and thus produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the social revolution ever heard of in Asia”.

Taking this as scripture, as the Vedas to Manu, most Marxists thought that casteism had ceased to exist as a means of feudal exploitation and whatever remained was on the superstructural level, which could be destroyed just by overthrow of imperialist rule and zamindari system would strike the structure of *jati*-casteism to a great extent, if *jati*-casteism itself was not removed through a concrete struggle feudal exploitation on its basis would continue.

Total democratisation of society is possible by waging struggles against imperialism and zamindari system. One glaring example of this wrong understanding could be found in an article by K. Damodaran in the organ of the CPI, *New Age*, (January, 1960). In that article titled *Specific Features of Feudalism in India*, after discussing on the caste system in India, he writes . *“Yet this social order continued in fact till the nineteenth century when it was undermined by the British rules”.*

Most of the old Marxists did not patiently follow even Marx. Marx’s remarks on the break down of caste system did not end in what have been quoted. He has written elsewhere, *“In modern industry, emerging from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary division of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments of Indian progress and Indian power.*

All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social

mechanically transplant the experience of other successful revolutions to India. They tried to follow the writing of great leaders Marx, Engels, Lenin and later of Stalin and Mao without reasoning and without any effort to concretely analyse the concrete situation of India. They took Marxist texts like scriptures, as if each and every line of those books are absolute.

But Marxism teaches us in a different way. Marxism is not a dogma, but a guide to action. It teaches us the process of concretely analysing concrete situation and of finding out task accordingly.

Since early teachers of Marxism belonged to Europe and China, which did not have *jati*-caste system at all, the caste-systems that were known to them were not the same as in India, none of them except Marx, dealt with the problem. Only Marx made some remarks on the basis of the official reports of the British available at his time. While writing on the effect of the railways system introduced in India by the British rulers, Marx remarked

“These small stereotyped forms of social organisation have been to the greater part dissolved, and are disappearing, not so much through the brutal interference of the British tax-gatherer and the British soldier, as to the working of English steam and English free trade. Those family communities were based on domestic industry, in that peculiar combination of hand-weaving, hand spinning and hand tilling agriculture which gave them self-supporting power. English interference having placed the spinner in Lancashire and the weaver, dissolved these small-barbarian semi-civilised communities, by blowing up

conditions of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of productive powers, but not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both. Has the bourgeoisie ever done more?....

The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society so long in Britain itself the present ruling class is overthrown by the industrial proletariat or the Hindus (here Marx meant the Indians) themselves become enough powerful to forsake the yoke of British completely”.

Those few who were not misled the earlier comment, misconstrued this part. The idea prevailed amongst them was that a revolution like the USSR or China would automatically break down the *jati*-caste system. So, time and again they admitted that this is a specific feature of Indian revolution but did not try to come out with a concrete task to solve this concrete problem. So, at best they called upon the “untouchables” to join hand with the workers in united revolutionary front against the British rule and zamindari system. Efforts of the oppressed castes to get themselves organised against the brahminical order were dubbed as efforts to divide the toiling masses. So, instead of reaching out to join hand with them branding them as traitors or reactionary agents started.

Even when attention was paid the same mistake was continued.

One of the eminent leaders of the communist revolutionary movement Com. D. V. Rao, who had the insight that this problem must be addressed for the successful completion of the people’s democratic revolution,

seemingly burdened by the earlier Marxist standpoint on this issue, wrote in his 'Foreword' to the (Second) Telugu Edition of 1981 of his book 'People's Democratic Revolution in India.'

"What is the solution to the caste problem? It will be resolved to an extent by the revolutionary movement and permanently by the revolution, when the people are organised into a movement for higher ideals, they lessen and forget caste differences and unite. If people are mobilised with the slogan of unity of the rural poor so as to abolish landlordism and revolutionary mass movement is thus buildup, they lessen and for the time being, forget their caste differences. If the revolution succeeds, the newly formed revolutionary government will (if necessary) exercise its state power and completely abolish the caste"

He goes on: *"If the objective of agrarian revolution is placed before the people and they are prepared to realise it, the caste differences will be disappearing as we build the revolutionary movement. The people will be united in course of the struggle against casteism, which forms a part of the agrarian revolutionary programmes. All this is not easy to accomplish, but it is not impossible either."*

Here Com. D.V. Rao has very clearly pointed out that struggle against casteism forms a part of the agrarian revolutionary programmes, but failed to formulate the tasks to enhance that struggle. So even after posing the problem in a correct fashion, he had to remain content with the remark that *"the caste differences will be disappearing*

as we build the revolutionary movement” and as to him if the differences still remain after the revolution that can be removed by the ‘exercise of state power’ by the revolutionary government. Thus he leaves the solution to the ideological development of the people as a whole during the revolutionary movement and to the exercise of state power. without clearly formulating any concrete task.

It is true that without a revolutionary movement any hope of eliminating *jati*-caste system is a day dream. But if a concrete programme of annihilation of *jati*-caste system is not taken the fruits of revolution may not be achieved. The task of new democratic revolution is to enhance the process of eliminating the difference between mental and physical labour. In the socialist stage that task becomes a must for moving forward to communism. But the *jati*-caste system provides a structure of perpetuating difference between mental and physical labour and thus acts as an impediment before the new democratic revolution to move forward. Moreover, it is based on such an organisation of social labour that is advantageous for feudal extraction. So, in Indian concrete unless the *jati*-caste system is eliminated the social divide which perpetuates feudalism will remain even if landlordism is eliminated through agrarian revolution. Com. D.V. Rao was correct to point out that struggle against casteism forms a part of agrarian revolutionary programme; but could not concretise the tasks that come out of it.

From the late seventies Marxists Leninists in India started deeper thinking in this problem. Serious efforts have been made to understand the problem and to formulate concrete policies on this important question.

PRESENT DAY *DALIT* PARTIES AND ORGANISATIONS

A colossal personality as he was, Ambedkar's influence did not die with his death, Still the *dalit* masses all over India draw inspiration from him. But drawbacks of most of the *dalit* parties and organisations today are the class characters of most of their leaders and their constant refusal to sum up the experiences of the *dalit* movements in a scientific manner to move forward. Only very few of them try emulate the positive experiences and to analyse the present day situation in a scientific manner.

Why is the summing up of the experiences of movements led by *dalit* leaders like Phule, EVR Periyar, and Ambedkar needed? It is for taking the positive lessons and learning from the mistakes of the past. Ambedkar, being a bourgeois democrat and fighting for the rights of the downtrodden depressed communities from that class angle, always stressed on establishing bourgeois democracy in the country through constitutional means. His programme of state socialism meant abolition of feudalism through nationalisation of landed properties and control of imperialism and proletarian revolution such attempt has failed everywhere. He has only two options left either to build up united front with the representatives of working class i.e. the Communist Party or to compromise with the imperialists and their puppets and compradors. We have already discussed that owing to the mistakes of both on the part of the then Communist Party and also on the part of Ambedkar himself such united front did not come about. So Ambedkar had to compromise with the imperialists and later on with ruling classes of semi-colonial semi-feudal India with an effort to keep his own independence. But

we have earlier shown that to rope in Ambedkar with the authority of the Constitution of India was the worst conspiracy of the ruling clique against Ambedkar and the *dalit* movement. In this manner they killed two birds at one shot. They could channelise the *dalit* movement led by Ambedkar within the limits of constitution on the one hand. On the other hand EVR Periyar opposed the constitution tooth and nail and the movement got divided.

Now, with an illusion about the Indian constitution, most of the *dalits* carry on their struggles within its ambit. Ambedkar's programme for annihilation of caste system has thus way laid by the ruling class. Most of *dalits*, quite unaware of the lamentation of Ambedkar, feel that by adopting the constitutional provisions as their guide to action they are paying homage to Ambedkar.

But the more "*the suffering from inequalities due to political economic crisis*", the more and more *dalits* are joining in struggles. But there comes the problem of leadership. Since most of the leaders are coming from the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, big gap is there between the aspiration of ordinary *dalits* who are oppressed day in and day out, and those petty bourgeois intellectuals who aspire to gain some foothold in the existing political and economic structure. Moreover, their class character makes them vacillating. The Indian ruling class is taking full advantage of this situation. They are sophisticated enough to assimilate a section of such leaders within the ruling structure for the smooth running of their rule and the leaders lured by the loaves and fishes, pelf and power of the existing structure betray the cause.

The BSP is a glaring example of this phenomenon. The BSP was organised basing on the *dalit* white collared employees and led by certain erstwhile bureaucrats. Naturally the party had a petty bourgeois character at the beginning. So it started with the ambiguity inherent the petty bourgeois character. On the one hand, it started certain militant movements and on the other hand, propagated an illusion of capturing power by constitutional means, that too, through a simple arithmetic. But very soon the power hankering leaderships threw away all the positive and started acting as power brokers, going to the extent of branding the party itself "opportunistic".

Another party of *dalits*, the Republican Party, also bears the same character of the BSP. The leaders always eager to get some share in the governmental power in Maharashtra align with this or that ruling class party which they feel most likely to come to power. But till now they opposed the communalist, with whom the BSP aligned to form a government in UP. Moreover, the Republican Party was divided into a number of groups but recently they have united. But still their compromising attitude is continuing. But the influence of the Republican Party is in Maharashtra only.

Now when the wave that the BSP had created has waned, and most of the communist revolutionaries taking a positive approach towards *dalit* movement, it has become imperative for ruling classes to keep the *dalits* away from the communist revolutionaries. So they are hatching new conspiracies. Handpicked *dalit* intellectuals and certain erstwhile Marxists are being utilised to fight against Marxism-Leninism raising the banner of *dalit* struggles.

sufficient enough identification of individuals in society. Since the earlier revolutions led by communists took only proletarian world view as their points of departure they failed. In society people identify themselves with different sorts of social divisions according to the position each of them is objectively or subjectively placed.

So, nationality, religion, gender even environment consciousness may be a person's identifying ground. For them, class is just another such identity. In the Indian context, they find a specific ground for identification in *jati*-caste divisions. They oppose the primary position of the class struggle, calling it a meta narrative. For them all those identities which are oppressed should first try to reorganise the civil society so that a plural society where the oppressed identities will get democratic representation can be formed. In essence it is a branch of bourgeois futurologist brand of philosophy. But contrary to post-industrialism, another branch of the same philosophy they take the side of the oppressed identities. A section of them even tries to make people believe that their views are development of Marxism, because Marx himself has spoken about civil society many a time. But with all their phrase-mongering they take away the essence of Marxist dialectics. Marx in his preface to a *Contribution to the Critique for Political Economy* wrote on this question in the following words : "*In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, these relations of production correspond to a definite development of their material power of production. The total of these relations of production correspond to a*

Sometimes it is done under the garb of Marxism-Leninism itself, some times their theoretical weapon become Post-modernism, sometimes some other facade might be used.

The first set propagate that since Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Mao had never treated caste-system in India in details, India needs a new Marxism-Leninism. They forget that Marxism is not Brahminism, for which scriptures are absolute. Marxism is a method of analysis, a process of thought and guide to action. Application of Marxism means concrete analysis of concrete situation and action on that basis. At the same time Marxism is the world view of the proletariat. It is a class ideology. India does not need a new Marxism-Leninism, but a correct application of Marxism-Leninism. These so-called Marxists want to rob Marxism of its class essence. But influenced by them even some in the ranks of communist revolutionaries get confused and start talking about '*dalit* proletariat party'. They forget that proletariat is a class that do not need any adjective to qualify its anti-*jati* casteist character. They often talk of Ambedkar, but never try to learn from Ambedkar even. When Ambedkar formed Independent Labour Party, explained: "The party believes in having interest it regards as paramount. The word 'Labour' is used instead of the word 'Depressed classes' (at that time it was the coinage for dalits), because labour includes depressed classes as well". Actually their call for integrating Marxism-Leninism with Ambedkarism in the specific condition of India is just a tactical manoeuvre to draw the *dalits* away from Marxism-Leninism utilising their immense respect towards Ambedkar.

Postmodernists are more direct in their attack on Marxism. They say, class consciousness was not a

definite development of their material power of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructure arise and the which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life. It is not consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or— what is but a legal expression for the same thing with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a social revolution. With the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations, the distinctions, should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.”

Reorganisation of civil society is possible by changing production relations of the existing society, not the vice-versa. The Postmodernists with their phrase-mongering actually want to hoodwink the revolutionaries away from the task of revolutionary change of the existing production

relations.

Essentially they obfuscate the objective reasons behind the oppressions of identities. Oppressions on the basis class *jati*-caste, gender, nationality, religion, language etc. goes on not because of the subjective wishes of the oppressors, or because, as some bourgeois sociologist peddle, men by nature want to dominate others, but because of a definite production relations, in which the oppressors are placed in and advantageous position.

In modern society only the proletariat can lead all other oppressed identities to end the oppression they face by leading them to the path of social revolution.

MARXIST-LENINISTS AND PRESENT DAY *DALIT* MOVEMENT PROGRAMME AND IMMEDIATE TASKS

So far the historical perspective in which the movements against *jati*-casteism is placed at present have been discussed. But that is not enough. A concrete programme for the eradication of *jati*-casteism is needed.

Jati-casteism is a special feature, a concrete structure for the retention of feudalism in India. Imperialists also want to retain in just for the same reason as that for which they retain feudalism. In case of feudalism, imperialism did not retain it as it was before the British came to India. So, many capitalistic features have been added into it. Moreover, due to the semi-colonial, semi-feudal nature of Indian society and state, classes and *jati*-castes are not one and the same. Yet the agrarian revolutions is the key to put an end to the feudal, comprador bureaucratic capital

as well as imperialist exploitation. Same is true for abolition of *jati*-casteism too. Because through agrarian revolution the old production system and production relations can be destroyed. *Jati*-casteism developed as a definite social organisation of labour in definite system. It has undergone many changes, but the basic structure remained because the basic economic organisation of production has not changed. Agrarian revolution will remove the basis of perpetuation of *jati*-caste system.

Since *jati*-casteism presents machination of structuring the society on the basis of occupation and divides mental and physical labour as well, any concrete programme for eradication of *jati*-casteism must contain a programme to remove that.

Agrarian revolution itself will unfold a prospect of development of industries in the rural areas, making old occupational structure absolute and create a basis for the eradication of *jati*-caste structure. But the barrier created between mental and physical labour through this structure cannot be removed per se by agrarian revolution. In the present state structure certain measures have been introduced, not so much as to eradicate *jati*-casteism, but to assimilate a section of the oppressed *jati*-castes to develop to certain extent. So, affirmative actions such as reservation in jobs, education and extending assistance to development in other fields must be part of the programme.

When we put in our programme

“Affirmative measures will be taken to end inequality based on caste”,

“Protection of artisans and handicrafts”, it meant the above. Reservation in education and jobs will remove hereditary determination of occupation to a large extent. Village artisans co-operatives could be formed and with the development of agriculture these would be the bases of village industries.

Such measures would do away with the economic basis of *jati*-casteism. But its social basis should also be eradicated. The most important factor in perpetuating *jati*-casteism in the social arena is endogamy. Law alone would not be sufficient to remove it. Certain other measures are also necessary. First individual freedom of marriage is to be established. Secondly, inter-caste marriage should be encouraged by allowing special rewards. Moreover any attempt of caste oppression suppression and discrimination in all spheres of life would be severely dealt with so that such oppressions, suppressions and discriminations are abolished.

The origin of *jati*-casteism was not only to develop and control a specific production system and to establish a social discipline for that, but also to establish a control of the state over toiling masses. Any democratic state must have arrangement for the representation of the *jati*-castes which have been oppressed so-long, so in the state system arrangement should be made such that *dalits*, minorities and women are represented according to their ratio in population.

Even all these economic political and social measures will not suffice to eradicate *jati*-casteism unless and until people themselves understand the undemocratic and oppressive nature of *jati*-caste system. The brahminical

order has created such an ideology that all *jati*-castes feel that it is law of nature and *jati*-castes are proud of their position in relation to the *jati*-castes placed below them. Without fighting this at the ideological level democratisation of state and society will be meaningless. So the new democratic state must carry on continuous ideological struggle against *jati*-casteism. This will help the new democratic state to carry ideological struggle against the division between mental and physical labour, against development of bureaucracy in running the society and economic system.

Still in the Indian villages, *paras* (hamlets) are divided according to *jati*-castes and religion. Even in towns such arrangements are to be found. This is designed to keep the oppressed castes away and to practise untouchability. Even now there are villages in India where the oppressed *jati*-castes and untouchable are not allowed to move freely through the main streets of the villages, prohibited to draw water from the same well. One of the programmes for eradicating *jati*-casteism is to put an end to such practice. So in new democratic India efforts must be taken to abolish this practice of dwelling in clusters on the basis of *jati*-caste and religion.

In all future town and village planning and housing schemes this particular practice of *jati*-casteism should be abolished and planned arrangement should be made so that there be no separate clusters based on *jati*-caste or religion.

Such all pervading programme is necessary to remove *jati*-casteism from society completely.

To achieve this long term programme, certain immediate tasks are to be formulated.

It has already been stated that the main slogan for organisation should be, 'Unite the *dalits*, and unite with the *dalits*'.

There are certain organisations amongst the communist revolutionaries who concede that concrete programme to eradicate *jati*-casteism is to be taken, but oppose the organisation of *dalits* as *dalits*. They do not understand the basic idea of such organisations. Workers are organised in mass organisations of the workers i.e. trade unions. Through these trade unions they defend themselves and learn the first lessons of the need to fight for a classless society. Peasants are organised in peasant associations to get organised and fight against the feudal oppression and exploitation. Through that experience they understand the need of agrarian revolution and new democratic revolution. Similarly *dalits* should also be organised to fight against casteism. They also be organised to fight against those oppressions, suppressions and discriminations and through experience they too would understand the need for agrarian revolution and new democratic revolution. Similarly *dalits* should also be organised to fight against *jati*-casteism.

These *dalit* organisations should be the mobilising point of the *dalits* and democratic persons to fight against *jati*-casteism and for the eradication of *jati*-casteism. The party on the basis of its slogan to '**unite the *dalit* and unite with the *dalits***' will have to take concrete measures of working within the existing *dalit* organisations or building up *dalit* organisation according to the concrete situation

obtaining in different parts of the country.

Organisation on the basis of *jati*-caste sub-groups should be discouraged. Because such organisations makes the unity of all the oppressed *jati*-castes difficult. Sometimes such organisations are found to be the handiwork of the brahminical order to divide the *dalits* according to *jati*-caste groups.

Immediate tasks should be divided into tasks in the economic, political, social and ideological field.

ECONOMIC FIELD

- 1. Fight for *dalits* right to land.**
- 2. Fight against feudal exploitation.**
- 3. Fight against the New Economic Policy which is continuously marginalising the *dalits* more and more.**

(The main brunt of the modernisation programmes is being faced by the *dalits* and women.)

- 4. Fight for fulfillment of reservation quotas in educational institutions and government jobs and extension of it to private sector.**
- 5. Fight for OBC quotas in educational institutions and governments, public and private sector jobs according to ratio of population.**
- 6. Fight for all sorts of discriminations and bureaucratic manouvres in granting loans to the**

dalits.

7. Fight for implementing radical land reform on the basis of land to the actual tillers.

POLITICAL FIELD

1. Fight for representation of *dalit* at all levels.
2. Fight against using casteism as vote banks by reactionary politicians.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FIELD

1. Fight against all oppression, suppression and discrimination carried on against *dalits*.
2. Fight for individual right of marriage. Encourage inter-caste, inter-community marriage.
3. Fight against all manifestations of untouchability.
4. Fight for introduction of state languages and local languages in all official work of the state.
5. Fight for the abolition of English as a subject in state level public service commission examinations.
6. Fight against housing schemes based on clusters of *jati*-caste groups and religious groups.

IDEOLOGICAL FIELD

1. Develop self-respect among the *dalits*.
2. Fight against all manifestations of *jati*-casteist ideology.
3. Fight against brahminical interpretation of history.

4. Expose *jati*-casteism of the so-called religious texts.
5. Expose opportunism of the *dalit* parties and organisations who are trying to rally the *dalits* behind the present social structure.
6. Expose the present state policy of continuing brahminical order and conspiracy of trying to assimilate a small section into that order to smash the *dalit* movement.

UNITED FRONT POLICY

Dalits must unite with the oppressed classes *viz.* workers, peasants, petty bourgeois and oppressed nationalities, religious and linguistic minorities, tribes and women for forging a united front against imperialism, bureaucratic comprador capital and feudalism.

Communist party should try to achieve these through the *dalit* organisations and also through other mass organisations where it is in the position to lead politically. Party should also try to unite with other *dalit* organisations and eradication of *jati*-caste system. Communist party should also try to mobilise the democratic forces in the fight against *jati*-casteism.

DAFODWAM :

Aims and programmes of DAFODWAM (Democratic Action Forum Of Dalits, Women and Minorities) are embodied in its name itself. Here Dalits mean scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward communities. DAFODWAM is not a frontal organization of any Political Party, but it is very much well aware of social and political incidents of the country. Financially it is dependent on co-thinkers, not on Government(s) (Central or State) or west based funding organizations (usually known as funded NGO).

DAFODWAM thinks that India is a de facto upper caste Hindu state and Brahminism derived from MANU SANGHITA is still the guiding philosophy of the Indian ruling classes. Untill the abolition of the caste system and discrimination based on gender and community there is no chance of the victory of class struggle, in whatever form.

Besides taking programmes of rights of Dalits, Women and Minorities (Religious and Linguistics) DAFODWAM is in the area of publication of books on concerned subjects in different languages.

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