The Caste Question in India

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Introduction

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

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

1. Origin of the Caste System

The history of the caste system can be traced back to over 3,000 years. It is inextricably linked to the development of class society, emergence of the state, the development of the feudal mode of production and the continuous but often forcible assimilation of tribal groups, with their own customs and practices, into the exploitative agrarian economy. The origin and development of the system can be traced through the following periods:

1. *Vedic Period:* The period from 1500 BC, when Aryan pastoral tribes and non-agricultural tribal communities took to agriculture; the emergence of agriculture as the dominant production system; to the rise of the state around 500 BC.
2. *The Period from 500 BC to the 4th century AD:* The period of the expansion of agriculture based on Shudra labour; the growth of trade and its decline; the rise of small kingdoms; to the emergence of feudalism.
3. *The Period from the 4th century AD onwards:* When the development of feudalism took place, and Brahminical Hinduism and the *jati* system acquired their complex and rigid form.

For a country as vast as India, and a history so ancient, the above can only be broad periods which can be covered here, but there will be differences in every specific region. Yet the broad trends apply to the whole of India.

1.1. Indus Valley Civilization and Caste

Some Marxist historians have speculated that the roots of the caste system may be traced to the theocratic Indus Valley Civilization and in the tribal belief in magical power and pollution, common among Dravidian tribes. But there is no substantive proof to support this speculation nor is there any adequate explanation as to why such a complex system would exist in this earlier period. That the Harrappan city population was divided into these classes, with endogamous hierarchically placed groups, is not yet known. It is a fact that primitive tribes possess belief in the magical power of certain objects and in pollution, but from this one cannot conclude that in the earliest period whole sections within tribal communities were considered permanently polluting. Hence, we cannot conclude that some form of the caste system existed in the pre-Vedic period.

The study of this earlier period of history (3000 BC to 1500 BC) shows that even before the Aryan (Indo-European) tribes entered India, various communities and tribes with varying economic and social-cultural systems existed within the country. Some had developed agriculture, a division of labour, and even trade, and there were sharp class differences. They were in the copper age. Others ranged from shifting cultivation (*jhum*) to hunting, fishing and food gathering. Some were herders. Many of them had matrilineal social organizations. The pastoral Indo-European tribes with patrilineal social organization entered India in waves from around 1500 BC.

1.2. From Tribal to Class Society

Class society emerged from the clashes of the various pastoral Aryan tribes and the indigenous tribes and the development of agriculture with the widespread use of iron. It took the form, initially, of the four Varnas. Hence, we can say that the four Varnas were the form that class society took in the later Vedic and the Upanishad period.

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

adopted agriculture; and from the local tribes, the chieftain clans and the priestly clans were being incorporated into the Kshatriya and Brahmin Varnas respectively.

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

The widespread use of iron, not only for weapons but also for agricultural purposes, from around 800 BC, marked a qualitative change in the production system of the ancient tribal societies. Plough-based agriculture could generate considerable surplus on a regular basis. Dense forests could be cut down and land cleared for cultivation. Thus iron enabled the agrarian economy to become the prominent production system in this ancient period. The spread of agriculture was achieved at the cost of the non-agricultural tribes. They were either subjugated or displaced from the forests and their traditional means of livelihood. The conquest of new territories and the possibility of regular settlements further enhanced the importance of chieftains. Tribal oligarchies emerged. Many of the chieftains turned into kings who needed grander *yagnas* to consolidate their rule not only over their own clans and tribes but also over the territories they commanded (the *janapada*). The Varnashrama Dharma was already being developed by the Brahmin priestly class. The rituals became more complex, elaborate and wealth consuming. These rituals were the means by which the surplus could be redistributed. The surplus appropriated in the form of gifts was shared by the ruling Kshatriyas and the

Brahmin priests. Gifts were no longer voluntary. They were forced. The *Arya dharma* and Varna ideology legitimized the increasing power of the kings and priests and the absorption of the subjugated tribals into the lower Varnas. It became the ideological expression of the classes that had emerged from the womb of the various tribes. Those groups that did not accept the rituals and forced tributes were considered *anarya* or *mlechha*.

Development of agriculture, including paddy cultivation in the Gangetic plains, was accompanied by the increasing division of labor and the growth of trade. Private property in land emerged. Towns developed. Few classes came into existence — the Vaishya traders and the gahapatis, the landowners. The *gahapatis* did not themselves till the land but got slaves or *shudras* to till it. Tensions between the upper two Varnas and the lower Varnas, and between those who owned and those who labored, emerged. This led to the emergence of the ancient State. The first States emerged in the Gangetic plains, in Bihar.

1.3. Rise of the State

The emergence of the Kosala and Magadha monarchies around the 6th century BC was the form in which the State developed in ancient India. The ruling clans in the proto-states and these early States relied heavily on *yagnas* and rituals to buttress and legitimize their rule. The early States had the explicit function of upholding the Varna order and private property. Gifts were replaced by taxes. But the upper two Varnas, the Brahmins and Kshatriyas were not taxed. A standing army came into existence.

The Varnashrama ideology reflected and buttressed this class situation in the interests of the ruling Kshatriyas and Brahmins — "the Brahmen and Kshetriya enclose the *vaishya* and *shudra*," "a Visshya a tributary to another to be oppressed at will... a *shudra*... the servant of another, to be removed at will, to be slain at will." In the context of the differences between the classes becoming sharp, the Varna divisions had become rigid. Social distance and endogamy came to be emphasized.

But the newly emerged classes, the lower two Varnas and the non-subjugated tribal communities did not accept this ideology and the Varna hierarchy with Brahminical superiority. The rise of the Lokayata, Mahavir, Buddha and other opposing sects and philosophical systems was a challenge to this Vedic *yagna*-based Brahminism and Varna-based hierarchy. These sects gained the support of traders and artisans organized into guilds and the semi-tribal kings and chieftains. Later, with the consolidation of the state formation with Mauryan rule (4th–3rd centuries BC), the reduction in the importance of *yagnas* and the consolidation of the agricultural economy, Brahminism itself underwent transformation. Reducing the importance of *yagnas* and borrowing certain principles from Buddhism, Brahminism tried to reassert its ideological role. Yet, it had to contend with Buddhism and Jainism for commercial and royal patronage and for social domination. This reflects the struggles put up by the various classes and peoples to the consolidation of the caste system based on Brahmin-Kshatriya superiority. Yet, Brahminism played a key role in the development and consolidation of the state in ancient India and the development and formalization of a class society in the form of the Varnas.

1.4. The Mauryan Empire

The Mauryan Empire, which rose in the Magadha region in the 3rd century BC, was the first major fully formed state in India (after the Indus Valley civilization). It was an "ancient communal and state ownership" type of state with Shudra-based production. The origins of the Mauryas themselves are obscure, but the State was guided by the famous Brahmin Kautilya, also known as Chanakya. Chanakya's Arthashatra was the first and hence frank account of how to rule. It laid down the principles of statecraft without any ideological or religious cover-up. The Mauryan state was a centralized state which took the responsibility for the extension of agriculture and trade. This "arthashastra" state settled groups of Shudras where lands could be cleared and brought under the plough. The *sita* lands were farmed directly by the state with the help of Shudra (serf) labor, under an autocratic regime, while *rashtra* lands were farmed by the free peasantry (Vaishya). These *rashtra* lands were taxed on various counts. The state took taxes from the Vaishyas and labor from the Shudras, providing them with the necessities of cultivation. While slavery also existed, slaves were used primarily by landowners for domestic work and by the state for processing the grain collected in the form of taxes and for the production of some commodities. The state also monopolized the mining of minerals. By this period, a class of dependent peasants and laborers (*helots*) — Shudra by Varna — had been consolidated. But the Vaishyas who carried out trade and settled in urban areas began to distinguish themselves from their peasant brethren. In latter centuries peasant cultivation became the hall mark of the Shudras. The ordinary, free peasantry was pushed down

into the Shudra Varna, while the Vaishya Varna became the monopoly of the traders and merchants. At the same time the class of Kshetraswamis, those who got their lands cultivated by sharecroppers and dependent laborers, came to become the norm.

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

1.5. Endogamy and Rigid Marriage Norms

The restrictions on marriage, part of the tribal endogamous practices, were adopted by Brahminism, though their social purpose became different. In early Vedic period, tribal endogamy was not strictly followed in the assimilation of groups. But as class differences started to emerge and the need for a large number of laborers grew, the two upper Varnas enforced strict rules regarding the form of a marriage; a method of distancing themselves from the lower two Varnas, while at the same time sanctioning hypergamy. (Hypergamy is the marriage of a man of a higher Varna to a woman of a lower Varna.) Hypergamy allowed "converted" Brahmins and Kshatriyas to seek partners from among their own tribesfolk, absorbed as Vaishyas or Shudras. It allowed political

alliances with non-Kshatriya chieftains and kings. At the same time, marriage rules for the lower two Varnas were not restrictive — allowing for the rapid increase in the population of the laboring people. In a primitive economy, human labor is the main productive asset. Hence even marriage rules developed according to the interests of the ruling classes and gained ideological legitimacy through the rigid Varna divisions.

1.6. Spread of Buddhism and Jainism

The agrarian economy had no use for the expensive rituals based on the sacrifice of animals, including cattle wealth. The Vaishyas and Shudras, who paid taxes and labored, discontented with their inferior social status, supported the new preachers like Mahavir and Buddha and the sects established by them which opposed these *yagnas* and the superiority of the Brahmins who promoted them. These sects opposed the Varna hierarchy, and Buddha's *sanghas* were open to all members including the lowly Chandalas. But neither Buddha nor Mahavir preached against the new relations of production that had emerged, and a slave could not join the *sangha* without the permission of his master. Shudras from the *sita* lands were also not free to join the *sanghas*. However, both Buddhism and Jainism spread all over India gaining the support of the powerful artisan and merchant guilds. Although their philosophical content and material form changed over the centuries, they provided a tremendous challenge that lasted for over 1000 years. The early ascetics, the Buddhist and Jain monks, became part of wealthy monasteries which were supported by lavish gifts from merchant and artisan guilds and others. From around the 2nd century, as royal

patronage increased, and they received land grants, these monasteries also became landowning institutions. Yet these religions retained their influence and Buddhism maintained its image as a religion that opposed the hierarchical Varna order and Brahminical superiority.

1.7. Brahmanism in a New Form

With the decline of *yagnas*, a transformation in the social role of the Brahmins took place and with that Brahminism also underwent a transformation. Brahmins, encouraged and protected by kings, brought the borders of the kingdoms under agriculture, in the process "aryanizing" the tribals in the region. From Ashoka's times, the free peasants and the Brahmns migrated in search of fresh lands to bring under agriculture. The ashrams set up by the Brahmins in the forests were the pioneer settlements that developed contacts with the tribes in the area, and brought them under the command of the plough and the Vedas. The local tribals were incorporated almost wholly as *jatis* of the Shudra Varna, and retained their tribal customs and became the laborers on the land, carrying out the various tasks necessary for agricultural operations.

The tribal elite were incorporated into the Brahmn Varna. The Brahmins changed the form of their religion. Sacrificial yagnas became symbolic. The principle of *ahimsa* was adopted from Buddhism. The older Vedic Codes, which were glorifications of pastoral life and wars, gave way to newer Gods, like the cult of Krishna, and also Shiva and later Vishnu. Tribal rituals were adopted, for instance, the *agani* rituals, performed only by Brahmins in south Indian temples, were non-Vedic in origin. Tribal worship of mother Goddesses was also

incorporated into the Hindu religion. In fact, with the development of feudalism, the feminine names of certain tribes, *e.g.,* Matangi, Chandali, Kaivarti, and their tribal totems, were also incorporated into the Hindu fold. Gods and Goddesses were incorporated into the Hindu pantheon as avatars of the main God, Vishnu. This was the ideological manifestation of the social process of the absorption of tribes and semi-tribes into the spreading agrarian economy at the lower levels of the social hierarchy. The significance of the Varnashrama Dharma in this process, the importance of the Brahmins in the unfolding agrarian economy and the generation of surplus, their role in the daily and seasonal rituals connected with cultivation increased their importance and social base. In the king's court they provided the genealogy that proved the Kshatriya/Brahmin status of the ruler's family; hence, Brahminism was supported by the rulers. Yet in the period up to the 6th century AD, at least, Brahminism and the caste system could not gain hegemony in India, due to various factors like the invasion of foreign groups like Kushans and Shakas which ruled over large territories, the strength of artisan and trade guilds, as also the influence of Buddhism and Jainism.

1.8. Extension to the South

Aryadharma spread to the South, along with iron, from the 6th century BC, along the trade routes through the Deccan. When the groups of Brahmins entered the South the Varna scheme had already become rigid in the North. In the South, a division of labor and a class differentiated society with a developed culture, within the structure of tribal society, already existed. They

coexisted with tribes based on different subsistence systems and social organizations. The society was semi-tribal, in transition from tribe to a full-fledged class society. Both exchange and conflict between the various groups with different subsistence systems prevailed. For the non-agricultural groups raids on the agricultural settlements were an important means of obtaining necessary resources. Trade across the sea was also developing. Brahmins, with their knowledge of iron and superior technology of cultivation, and the Varna scheme, obviously suited the peasant settlements and their chieftains. The Varnashrama Dharma helped to bring order to the society in which conflicts between the peasants and the laborers had emerged. In keeping with the change in the North, the peasant communities were incorporated into the Shudra Varnas. The chieftains closely linked to the peasantry, did not form a separate Varna. The local priestly clans became part of the Brahmin Varna. Buddhism and Jainism also spread in South India from the 3rd century BC and they attracted a following among different sections of the people; artisans and traders in the towns and semi-tribal groups. With flourishing Roman trade, the Buddhist and Jain centers received major donations from the artisan and trade guilds. The three religions contended for political influence and all three got support in greater and lesser degrees.

Brahminism itself expanded in the form of various sects, the most prominent being Shaivism and Vaishnavism. These devotional sects drew upon popular tradition and thus helped to transform a scriptural religion into more popular devotional cults which could strike roots among the peasantry and others. The philosophical content to this new Brahminism was given

by Sankara in the later period (800 AD). This *Veerashaiva* preacher not only contested Jainism and Buddhism but also organizationally strengthened the religion by establishing the *maths* in different parts of the country.

1.9. State Formation in the South

The first major state formation in the Deccan took place with the establishment of the Satavahana power in the 2nd century AD. The Satavahanas, also known as the Andhras, supported the Brahmins and the *chaturvarna* system. But they also financially supported the development of the cave monasteries in the Deccan and the Buddhist center at Nagarjunakonda and Kanchi. In the deep South, the rise of the Pallava empire in 575 AD marks the first important state formation. This marked the domination of the agrarian economy over the other modes of production in the region. The Pallavan state introduced important changes in political and military organization, and also promoted Brahminism, by the setting up of Brahmin villages as centres of learning and promoting the use of Sanskrit. Pallava rule was based on the landowning peasant class and kings promoted the expansion of the agrarian order. The first Pallavan ruler is said to have distributed three *lakh* ploughs that could be pulled with bullocks. It is from this period that the clashes between the three religions became sharp and there are many historical accounts of the conversion of kings and the persecution of other religious groups. Mahenuravarman, the Pallavan ruler, converted from Jainism to Shaivism and is said to have killed 8,000 Jains. The first Pallava ruler was also a Jain who was

converted to Shaivism. The early Hoysalas were also Jains.

Brahminism provided the legitimacy to the rulers of the *chakrvartin*, the ruler over a territory, which replaced the king as the ruler over his people. The Brahmins became the religious basis for the legitimacy of the state that emerged. The Varna scheme became the means to break the kinship structures and create broader class type identities. Hence Brahminism consolidated in South India with the support of the state. The close alliance between the Brahmins and the ruling groups can also be seen from the fact that in the Brahmin centers for imparting education, the *ghatikas*, both religious scriptures and the martial arts were taught. The art of administration was also imparted in these centers.

2. Emergence and Consolidation of Feudalism

From around the 6th century AD, in the early medieval period, the caste system, based on *jatis*, began to consolidate in most parts of India. It is clearly linked to the rise of feudalism all over India, when a class of intermediaries was created which expropriated the surplus in the form of revenue or share of the produce from the labouring masses. This was accompanied by the development of the self-sufficient village economy. The decline of trade and artisan guilds, primarily due to the collapse of the Roman empire after the 3rd century AD, the contraction of money circulation, the settling down of artisans in the villages, created the conditions for the rise of feudalism. Land grants began to be given to Brahmins, Buddhist monasteries and to army officials. Though this process began in the Satavahana rule in the 2nd century AD, and with the Guptas in 4th century AD, it became widespread from the 5th century onwards. From the 7th century onwards, appointing feudal intermediaries who collected revenue and took on administrative tasks became common. The distribution of land grants to Brahmins, in the period of rising feudalism, meant that from the beginning they constituted a part of the feudal class. This process essentially took place between the fifth and the seventh centuries, especially, in the parts that were colonized by the migrating peasant settlers — in Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat, and central and western Madhya Pradesh, in the Deccan. It began under the Pallava rule in the 6th century in the South, but reached its peak during the Chola rule from the ninth century onwards, in Tamil Nadu, parts of Karnataka and the Kerala regions.

In this period the proliferation of *jatis* also began. Jati, originally a term used for a tribe with its own distinct customs, coming into a Varna, gradually replaced

the Varna since it became the main organization in which people were bound together. The original peasant settlers emerged as specific peasant *jatis* in particular regions. In the South the dominant peasant landowning *jatis* were considered as *satvik* Shudras, ranked only next to the Brahmins. A number of *jatis* and *upa-jatis,* each with an occupational specialization necessary for agriculture, or for social life in the village, also developed. The carpenter, blacksmith, potter, tanner, skinner of dead cattle were available in the bigger villages. As also the barber, the washerman and the priest. They provided their skills to the peasant and other families including the families of the feudal intermediaries. In return they began to be given a share of the village produce. Initially the share was decided by *nattar*, the association of the dominant peasant community. In later times the shares became more formal, they were also given the right to till a part of the village lands. The *jajmani* system, the *balutedari* or *ayagari* system emerged within the new arrangement of the village structure. Money was not needed for daily exchange. This arrangement greatly aided the Brahmins and the other upper castes from the landowning, feudal intermediaries to raise their ritual status and social prestige, since the lower castes were available in full complement to do all the various types of physical and menial labor. The upper castes did not have to soil their hands. The *jati* system was suitable for the feudal mode of production and it would not be wrong to call this *jati* feudalism.

It is in this period that the number of Untouchable castes swelled greatly. From the 4th century BC itself, there are references to the Untouchables, in Patanjali, for example, who mentions two types of Shudras, the Nirashrit (excluded) and the Ashrit. But their numbers

were restricted. Gradually newer tribal groups began to be included. But it is in the feudal period that their numbers went up greatly, the Chamars and Rajaks, for example, were reduced to the Untouchable status of an Untouchable. Tribal groups, subjugated by force after being dispossessed of their forests/lands, means of livelihood and freedom were relegated to an Untouchable status. Some artisan groups too were pushed down from the Shudra to the ati-Shudra ranks. They were in the main bonded agricultural laborers who were denied by religious injunctions any right to own wealth (gold, etc.) and land. Their only dharma was to labor for the entire village, especially, for the landowning class, but live outside the village at a distance, polluting even by their shadow. Maximum surplus could be extracted from the Untouchable laborers, forced into a low level of material existence and perpetual servitude.

Brahmins, both as individuals and as groups, were granted lands and a share of the revenue from the villages. They lived of the surplus created by the villagers. The Brahmadeva villages in South India became the centers for Brahminical culture and learning. In these villages, Brahmins combined their control over the productive resources with administrative control over the life of the village and the surrounding region. Brahmins were allowed to keep the revenue of the villages, or the larger share (*Melavarm*) of the total produce, they got their own lands cultivated through tenants or sharecroppers. The Dharma allowed them the right to own land, they could supervise cultivation, but they could not cultivate it themselves. A section of the Brahmin castes were closely associated with the rulers. Apart from providing fictitious genealogies to prove the Kshatriya status of the ruling groups, they were the royal

purohits and in many kingdoms they held administrative posts. These Brahmins, who helped to generate the surplus, gained the highest social prestige in the feudal era.

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

At the same time, in this period, the Kshatriya Varna consolidated itself in North-West India. This process did not take place in the South. The class of feudal intermediaries, as also big landowners with feudal armed retainers who lived off the land grants and share of revenue became a permanent feature of feudalism. In the North, the ruling or powerful clans of those invaders like Gujjars, Hunas and Arya Kshatriyas, and the intermediaries consolidated to form the Rajput caste. The clan-kin connections of these groups from the feudal strata were consolidated through marriage alliances to form the Rajput *jatis*. The word originates from Rajrutra, one who controlled a few villages in the early medieval period. In this period the village headman also came to be recognized as an important post. Normally, large landowners from the dominant peasant caste, they separated themselves from their cultivating peasant castemen, and consolidated their position through kin relationships and marriage relationships among themselves over a region. The *Reddis* in Andhra Pradesh (from *pedda rettis*) and the Gaudas emerged as separate caste groups through this process in the medieval feudal period.

The process of the consolidation of the *jati* structure was completed in the main by the 10th century,

before the raids of Mohammed of Ghazni. The feudal class upheld the *chaturvarna*. Even rulers who professed Buddhism were proud upholders of the *chaturvarna*. This scheme provided a ritual status to the various *jatis*. All castes connected with physical labor (peasants, artisans), or those that challenged Brahminical superiority or the notions of hierarchy (*kayasthas* or court writers, *vaids* or doctors), were classed as Shudra. But since this scheme was unable to explain the multiplicity of the various *jatis*, the *varnasamkara* theory was put forward. This theory explained the various *jatis* as being a result of the unsanctioned marriages between men and women of different Varnas. The Manusmriti (1st or 2nd century AD) proved to be a harbinger of the feudal order that emerged, providing it with a perfect ideological justification. This theory was nothing but the justification for the superiority of the exploiting classes and provided sanction for the lack of freedom and degradation of the majority.

It is often claimed that untouchability arose as a result of the ritually polluting nature of certain occupations and their low value. However, the nature of occupations cannot create a class of permanently polluting people. The ideology of ritual pollution and purity, on the contrary, provided the means of creating a class of semi-slaves for the agricultural and urban economy. As a ruling class that controlled the land and labor of the exploited classes, and in the condition of strong resistance and sharp class contradictions, Brahmins, as active members of this ruling class, developed the theory of pollution and purity. For this, they may well have borrowed from tribal terms, with the Brahmins themselves as the reference point to measure purity. The occupations became polluting. The ideology

of Varna became the ideology of the whole society, which shows the importance of the caste system in the feudal mode of production.

The significance of Brahminical ideology in the generation of surplus, in the legitimization of rule and, above all, in the consolidation of an agrarian village economy based on intense exploitation, gave it hegemony over Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhist and Jain centers had become centers of opulence competing for royal grants. Though these religions too had changed to suit the feudal order, and they too accepted the *jati* system, yet their role in the economy declined. They remained as ideological centers counter to Brahminism, in spite of the fact that they were hounded and violently suppressed by various rulers, especially after the 7th century. With the invasion of the Turks at Sarnath and Nalanda, Buddhism could not recover in India from this destructive attack.

2.1. Turkish Invasion

The establishment of Turkish power in North India, through the slave dynasty in the 13th century, marked an important phase in the feudal mode of production. They centralized the administration and introduced a more systematic system of revenue collection. The composition of the ruling class underwent a change. Initially, it was the Turk slave families and their relatives that ruled, they were successively replaced by ex-slaves of Indian origin, Indianized Turks and foreign immigrants, to be replaced by even more foreigners. The most important changes related to the methods in which the rights to revenues collection (*iqta*) were assigned. Originally restricted only for life, on the decision of the king, by the end of the 15th century they

were made hereditary. The Turks were urban-based and favored Islam. Thus, Turkish rulers displaced the original feudatories and created new ones over a period of time.

The administrative changes introduced by the Turks, and adopted in the Deccan too, introduced changes in the powers of revenue collection and administration, affecting military service holders, administrators, village headmen and the priestly class, the officeholders came to be called *inamdars*, *watandars*, *iqtadars*, *deshmukhs-desais*, and later as jagirdars, during Mughal rule. Although some of the earlier intermediaries who had lost their posts regained them during the later part of the Turk rule, yet in this period the composition of the feudal classes in North India was not stable. However, this did not affect the structure of the village economy. The Turks introduced new techniques in the science of war. They also gave a fillip to trade, commerce and artisan production in the urban areas. Hence, this period saw the development of the productive forces in Indian society.

Although the same instability in the feudal ruling class did not take place in South India, the emergence of the Vijaynagara Kingdom in the 14th century, a militarist rule, also brought changes in the ruling class. The Vijaynagara kings owed the success of their rise to power to the military techniques they had introduced, which they, in turn, had learnt from the conquering Muslims. They were allied with a class of warriors, called the *nayakas*. These *nayakas* emerged as powerful intermediaries over the older local chiefs. They were granted *amaram* tenures — the right to a major share of the produce in the land, in return for maintaining an agreed number of troops and animals, ever-ready to join the war along with the forces of the king. From the 14th

century onwards these nayakas also became a part of the feudal class. Both the Vijaynagara kings and their feudatories patronized the temples and the Brahmins, and Brahminical Hinduism remained a very important part of the legitimizing ideology of the Vijaynagara kingdom till its decline in the 16th century.

2.2. Tribal Kingdoms

In the later feudal period various tribal kingdoms came up. This denotes both the differentiation emerging within the tribes and their Hinduization over the centuries. The Dome founded a kingdom in the foothills of the Himalayas in the 13th century, the Bhars came to power in Assam in the 13th century, and ruled up to the 18th century, the Nagbanshis and the Cheros ruled in Chottanagpur and Palamu in the 12th century, the Gonds founded kingdoms in Central India between the 15th and the 18th centuries, the Mahadev Kolis founded a kingdom in south Gujarat in the 17th century. As these tribes settled down to agricultural production, they were influenced by the technologically and culturally advanced Brahmins and peasants settled in the area through land grants; inequalities within the tribal societies grew. In the tribes in which a small clan made a push for power, kingdoms emerged. Although some of these early kingdoms opposed Brahminism in their initial phase, and some of them worshipped both Hindu and Buddhist Gods, all these tribal kingdoms were active supporters of Brahminical Hinduism. They invited Brahmins to settle in their kingdoms, attracting them with generous land grants. They also got genealogies prepared, to claim Kshatriya status. Within the tribal kingdoms too, the ruling elite adopted Varnashrama Dharma to legitimize

their power before their own people and before neighbouring kingdoms. A lot of these tribal kingdoms later became intermediaries of more powerful rulers, such as the Mughals and the Marathas.

2.3. Resurgence of Trade and Commodity Production

The resurgence of trade and commodity production by artisan groups began around the 12th century in South India and a century later in the North. It led to the strengthening of the traders and artisan groups all over the country. The temples became centers for the growth of towns. Military encampments and administrative towns and ports developed as urban centers. The result of this was the assertion of the artisans and trading castes to break out of the constraints of Brahminical control. In South India, the rise of the left handed caste association, the *Idangai*, was the most powerful expression of the process. From the 12th century onwards, the artisan castes, especially those connected with urban trade, came together as the *Idangai*. Through this association they defended their rights against feudal agrarian domination and the oppression of traders. The right handed castes, the *Velangai*, tended to represent the agrarian related castes, and came from the low castes. As the putting out system developed for the production of certain commodities, the conflicts between the traders and the artisans dependent on them increased. In North India members of the artisan castes converted to Islam, for instance, the weavers, the *julahas*, etc.

2.4. Protest – The Bhakti Movement

The growth of commodity production and the political and cultural changes created the material conditions within the feudal society for the rise of protest against the caste system.

The caste system, with its emphasis on Vedic learning and Brahminical superiority, faced its next major blow in the form of the Bhakti movement. Spanning a period from the 12th to the 17th century, the Bhakti movement was a popular opposition to the caste system. Most of the Bhakti saints were from the artisan castes, like blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, although a few of the religious reformers were also Brahmins. A few, like Nandan (a *Nayanar*), Tiruppan (an *Aalvar*), Chokhamela and Sant Ravidas, were from the Untouchable caste. The movement also brought women saints into the limelight. The Bhakti movement had a moderate stream, represented by the likes of Ramanuja, Gyaneshwar and Chaitanya, which stressed on the oneness of all before God. The more radical stream, comprising of saints like Basavanna, Tukaram, Namdev, Kabir and Guru Nanak, criticized caste discrimination and Brahminical hypocrisy openly. Some of them initiated measures of social reform as well. Kabir and Guru Nanak went out of the fold of Hinduism. The movement, by emphasizing the personal relation of the individual with God, transcended the barriers of caste. It struck a major blow at the concept of Brahminical superiority based on the monopoly of the knowledge of the Vedas.

The Bhakti movement was a major assault on the ideological and material premises of feudalism. Preaching in the local languages, it gave an impetus to the regional

languages, laying the basis for the growth of nationalism in the different regions. Even though towards the end of this movement, a conservative trend also came up in the form of Ramdas and Tulsidas, who upheld the *chaturvarna* and sought the re-establishment of Brahminical superiority and prestige, yet, in the main, the Bhakti movement was a movement for religious and social reform. The movement, however, failed to break the caste system. The main reasons were that the movement did not attack the base of the caste system, the feudal mode of production and the land relations therein.

3. Agrarian Economy and Ruling Classes in the 17th and 18th Centuries

The Mughals who came to India in the 16th century from Central Asia consolidated their rule by associating with the Rajput chiefs and other upper caste intermediaries and the ruling groups of kingdoms annexed in North India and in the Deccan. Thus, throughout the early period, though the Mughals monetized the collection of revenue to some extent, and also increased the exploitation of the peasantry, yet, they did not basically affect the social structure of the agrarian village economy as it had evolved over the previous centuries. It consisted of the intermediaries at the top of the rural structure, who were also, invariably, large landlords themselves. Often they held a post from the ruler, which gave administrative responsibilities and powers. There were also village chiefs and village level officials like accountants. These office holders and feudatories lived off the revenue collected from the peasants. They also controlled lands which they got tilled by either tenants or sharecroppers. In some areas, they used the bonded labourers from the tribal or Untouchable castes. Most of these feudal intermediaries were from the upper most castes; Brahmins, Rajputs and even if they originally came from the Shudra cultivating castes, they had elevated themselves to Kshatriya or to a high non-Brahmin status. In some areas they had even acquired Brahmin status. The control of temples had given the Brahmins wide control over the resources of the agrarian economy in the South. The appointment of Brahmins to high administrative and military posts during the Vijaynagara rule further concentrated power and resources under their control. In Western Maharashtra too, the Maratha rule concentrated economic and political power in the hands of the Brahmins.

The main cultivating castes were exploited for revenue and innumerable taxes. Yet their rights to the land had evolved over the centuries, even if they were under the feudatories. The *jajmani/balutedari* system institutionalized the system of exchange between the services of the various castes and the peasants and the landlords. On the one hand, it formalized the share of the various castes to the produce, but on the other, it increased the power and prestige of the feudatories and Brahmins, and formalized the system of *Begar* (forced free labor). Higher caste landowning sections could withdraw from all manual work, especially, work connected with agriculture. The other castes served as their *jajmans*. It included free labor for a number of artisans and service castes, who served various families at the same time, but the Untouchable castes, were in many areas attached to a particular family. While specific Untouchable castes, in specific regions, served as lower level functionaries (watchman, general servants marking boundaries, relaying messages, etc.) of the administration, and for this they received the right to cultivate a small portion of the village lands, the vast majority of them were agricultural laborers. They have been called as bonded servants, eristic slaves, and landless serfs. The religious prescriptions suited this structure perfectly — while it was a sin for the higher castes to touch the plough, Untouchables could own no land nor acquire any capital in the form of wealth. Other prescriptions, like style and type of clothing, names, carriage customs, etc., served to emphasize their degraded status and reinforce it. In many parts of the country, the names for the Untouchable field laborers highlights this situation. Bonded laborers in south Gujarat are called *halis* (those who handle the plough).

In UP, they are called *halwahas*, *holiyas*, and *sewaks*, in Punjab, *halis* and *sepis*. In Kerala, they were the *adimas*. Bondage was widespread during the time of the Mughals. According to estimates, more than 10 percent of the population comprised of agricultural laborers, most of them in various forms of bondage. At the beginning of the 19th century, in the southern provinces, this proportion was even higher. Almost all of them were from the lowest castes of tribals. The British colonialists inherited this structure when they began their rule.

3.1. Pre-British Role in Upholding Caste

Given the repeated attempts by the oppressed castes to reject the caste system, to oppose Brahminical tyranny, it must be emphasized that the pre-British feudal state not only upheld the philosophy and ideology of relations of caste but also actively intervened to maintain it. The feudal king had the authority to intervene in caste disputes, even those related to ritual superiority. Expulsion from the caste or readmission, decisions on rights of particular castes to ritual practices and modes of worship were decided by the political-secular authority. Muslim rulers too arbitrated in these disputes. The Vijaynagara Kings, the Sultans of the Deccan, and even the Mughals arbitrated in the disputes. For the State, this served the purpose of punishing subjects, and also gaining financially — they collected fees for arbitration. But more important is the fact that since the feudal rulers depended on the caste system they had to maintain it. The rulers had the right to extract free labor (*begar*) from the artisan and service castes, as also from the Untouchables, especially, for public works. The ideological use of the caste system was clear, it

upheld and legitimized the dharma of the rulers to wield power.

The growth and consolidation of the caste system was, therefore, not a spontaneous process, but linked to the support and power of the State. The caste system was upheld with violence. Brahminism, in addition, sanctioned violence by the uppermost castes against the Untouchables. They had the right to kill the Untouchables who in any way transgressed the limits. The caste system was maintained not only through the ideology of the religion but also through the sword.

The Varna system, and the caste system, having been such an important aspect of the socio-economic and political life of ancient and feudal India, much of political and economic activity was organized on caste-kin basis. Hence, a large number of social and economic conflicts were expressed in the form of conflicts between castes and religious sects — the conflicts between Buddhism, Jainism and the Brahminical sects, the conflict between the Shaivites and the Vaishanavas, the struggle between the right handed and the left handed castes, are examples of this. Since caste permeated the economic and political structures, it has taken this form to express the contradictions in the society. Tribals in India, too, have had a long glorious history of attempts to fight the feudal order served by Brahminical Hinduism. The struggles of the ancient Naga people, the Nishads and the Bhils, against those who ousted them from their ancient lands, their resistance to attempts at Aryanizaton — the forcible incorporation into the agrarian economy as semi-slaves — all are a part of this history. It is in this background that Brahminical Hinduism, in all its *Shastras*, *smritis*, and even in the epics, depicts the tribals who resisted in the most insulting and demeaning

language. Eklavya, for instance, was the son of a tribal chieftain. Brahminism destroyed all the literature of the ideologies that opposed it, from Charvaka to Buddhism. The literature destroyed in India could only be found preserved in the monasteries in China and Tibet. This distinctive quality of Brahminical Hinduism has been hidden under the veneer of *ahimsa* and abstruse philosophy, and thousands of years of exploitation and parasitic existence could be justified under the clock of ritual superiority and contempt for manual work.

4. The Impact of British Rule

Colonial rule did not touch or tamper with the Brahminical Hindu order and the inequitable caste system. The East India Company, in fact, gave a fresh lease of life to the *chaturvarna* system by incorporating it into the legal system being used in India. By passing local customary and caste practices, they upheld the Dharmashastras, appointing Brahmin pundits to advise the British judges in interpreting the Shastras in disputes relating to family and marriage, property and inheritance, and religious rights, including the status of specific castes. Hence the British legal system upheld the denial of entry into temples to the Untouchable castes in the name of protecting the "established rights of other castes." The British courts entertained caste claims regarding privileges and precedence of exclusiveness in respect to religious rituals as well. In the name of respecting the autonomy of castes, they upheld the disciplinary power of castes against violators of caste norms, even in inter-caste disputes. Thus, they upheld caste although in a much more restricted sphere than in the feudal period.

The early British rulers encouraged and financed the study of Sanskrit and the translation of Sanskrit texts into English. One section of the East Indian Company administration even attempted to make Sanskrit the medium of instruction in the universities in the system of education that they were setting up. It is another matter that the direct colonial racist interests were upheld when English was chosen as the medium of instruction.

Under pressure from the Non-Brahmin movement and the reformers, the British were forced to enact resolutions and legislation granting access to public places, tanks, schools, wells, etc., (maintained out of

public funds) to members of all castes and classes, but they did little to oversee their implementation.

Yet, at the same time, the British administrators, in their selfish interest of seeking support for colonial rule, implemented the policy of divide and rule, encouraged the conversion of the lower castes to Christianity by missionaries, and propagated the racist theory on the origin of caste, emphasizing the Indo-European origins of the Aryan race, and caste as a means of maintaining racial purity.

From 1901, through the Censuses, the caste backgrounds of the people were recorded, and castes were classified on the basis of "social precedence as recognized by native opinion." Through the censuses, the colonial rulers provided the various castes with a rallying point. The castes, which had started organizing themselves on a regional basis through caste conferences and caste newspapers, started mobilizing to record a higher status for themselves. The colonial state came to be seen as the means of raising caste status. The process of Sanskritization was aided by the British government.

The economic changes introduced by the colonial rulers in the 19th century in order to consolidate their rule and intensify the exploitation of India had an impact on the relations of production in the rural areas and created new classes from among the various castes. The commoditization of land, its accessibility to members of all castes, the various revenue settlements — the Zamindari, *rayatwari*, *etc.,* the introduction of railways, defence works, the colonial education system, the uniform criminal and civil law and the colonial bureaucracy affected the caste system and modified its role in society.

In the land settlements, the British ignored the inalienable rights of the actual cultivators, and in many

areas made the intermediaries, the non-cultivating sections that only had a share in the produce traditionally, become the sole proprietors of the land. In the Zamindari settlement areas, the Shudra peasants became tenants at the mercy of the landlords, in other areas, a class of peasant proprietors arose, but, even in this, the larger peasants gained while the actual cultivators became tenants or sharecroppers. The Shudra peasantry was divided into an upper section of the rich; intensified exploitation coupled with famines and other crises, indebted peasants of all the cultivating castes who were pushed into the ranks of the landless. A section of artisans became landless labourers. A class of rural poor, landless or poor peasants, emerged from the ranks of most of the middle and lower castes in the 19th century.

A working class linked to industrial production also emerged from the ranks of the middle and the lower castes. A small section among the lower castes also found avenues for mobility with jobs as small contractors, traders and investors in land. With access to education, service in the army and the government bureaucracy, a class of petty-bourgeoisie also developed within the middle and the lower castes. But they found their avenues blocked by the monopoly of Brahmins over the government jobs.

The introduction of Western education helped the Brahmin castes to monopolize the colonial bureaucracy. With their tradition of learning, and their socially and economically powerful position, the Brahmins and others from the higher castes took Western education and soon came to occupy most of the posts in the administration and judiciary.

The development of new classes among the Non-Brahmin castes led to the growth of a democratic

consciousness among them. This was reflected in two processes. Among the upper sections of the Non-Brahmins, for instance, the Kayasthas in the north and the Nairs in Kerala, reformers started organizing caste associations to press for changes in the practices of the caste system, giving up outmoded customs to adjust to the new opportunities available under colonial rule. Among the lower castes too, the petty-bourgeois sections mobilized caste associations to give up occupations that were considered as defiling or degrading, and start emulating the customs of the higher castes in an attempt to get a higher status. The conservative trend among the Non-Brahmin movement was strong among these caste associations of the upper sections. The movements among the Patidars in Gujarat and the Rajputs, and the Marathas led by Shahu Maharaj in Western Maharashtra emphasized the process of Sanskritization and were conservative in their orientation. These attempts were led by the landlord and trading elite sections of these castes and helped them to gain access to positions of power and privilege in the state structure and in electoral politics.

At the same time, the masses of Non-Brahmins were in contradiction with the feudal elite and moneylenders, the social props of the colonial rule, most of whom were from the uppermost castes, especially, Brahmins in many parts of western and south India. Members of these feudal upper castes also monopolized the State bureaucracy. These contradictions led to the emergence of a Non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra and south India, especially, Tamil Nadu. The movement, objectively, had an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist content, but the leadership of the movement could not comprehend the contradictions in this manner and therefore failed to articulate them in this manner.

4.1. The Non-Brahmin Movement

The Non-Brahmin movement developed in the early part of the 20th century by mobilizing the Shudra middle castes, as well as, to some extent, amongst the Untouchable castes against Brahminical feudal domination and exploitation. They concentrated, primarily, on various aspects of caste oppression — superstition, caste-feudal privileges and rights, hereditary nature of posts, *etc.* The movement used the racial theory of the origin of caste to explain caste oppression, by interpreting Brahmins as Aryan invaders who conquered the Dravidian race. The conservative trend within the movement tended to restrict itself to opposing the monopoly of Brahmins in the field of education and government employment, in the legislatures and the struggle to get representation in the legislatures and control on District Boards. The Justice Party, Non-Brahmin Party, the Unionist Party (Punjab) marked this trend. The Triveni Sangh in Bihar also restricted itself to the three main middle castes, the Yadavs, the Kurmis, and the Koeris. This trend was not sympathetic to the oppression and needs of the lowest castes.

The radical sections of the Non-Brahmin movement were more broad-based, more thorough in their anti-caste stand, rejecting the whole caste system with its hierarchy and oppression. They took up the questions of the peasantry and of the middle castes as well. The leadership of the Non-Brahmin movement aroused the democratic consciousness of the oppressed masses and prepared the ground for their mobilization into the anti-imperialist movement. But the classes in the leadership, having gained their demands for representation and a share in the decision-making, gave

up their anti-caste programme. These movements placed political power in the hands of the upper sections of the Non-Brahmin castes, the smaller landlords and big tenants, when the land reforms were implemented by the Nehru government in the 1950s. Hence these sections emerged in the post-1947 period as the main oppressors of the poor and landless peasants, most of whom are from the lowest castes. The Marathas in Maharashtra, Reddys and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh, the Vokkaligas and Lingayats in Karnataka, Patels (Patidars) in Gujarat and the Yadavs and the Jats in Bihar and Haryana, respectively. The class interests of the leadership of these movements prevented them from taking up a thorough anti-caste programme which should have included the land question from the viewpoint of the lowest castes, the poor and the landless, and thus they consolidated their own position but betrayed the interests of the middle and the poor peasants of their castes. The Non-Brahmin movement was strongest in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, and threw up important leaders like Periyar and Jyotiba Phule.

4.1.1. The Non-Brahmin Movement in Maharashtra

The movement began with the founding of the Satyashodak Samaj (SS) in Pune. The rise of the SS took place in the context of a rise of Brahminical Hindu revivalism in western India in the 1870s, with its base in Pune, which put the upper caste reformers on the defensive. After working as a social reformer for almost 20 years, Jyotiba Phule founded the SS in 1873 in Pune. The main task of the SS was to make the Non-Brahmins conscious of their exploitation by the Brahmins. Phule

himself belonged to the Mali (gardener) caste, a caste involved in the cultivation of vegetables, and their trade in the vicinity of Pune. His family was middle-class and he was educated in a mission school. The SS did not restrict its activities to any particular caste and worked among the various Non-Brahmin (NB) castes in the rural areas of Thane, Pune and, later, in other districts in Bombay Province and Berar. They also worked among the workers in the textile mills of Bombay. The songs, booklets and plays written by Phule used a popular hard hitting style and language to expose the various ways in which the Brahmins duped the people, especially, the peasants. The SS interpreted the racial theory of the origin of caste in the context of popular tradition — the Aryan invaders had enslaved the local peasantry, the rule of Baliraja, the peasant king was defeated — showing the links of the SS with the democratic sentiments of the peasantry. In Phule's time, the SS campaigned for social reform — they rejected their own feudal-style marriages and adopted the SS marriages which were based on principles of equality, mutual respect and loyalty between husband and wife. The SS reform campaign in Phule's time led to a strike by barbers who decided not to tonsure widows leading to tensions in the village. Phule ran a paper called *Din Bandhu* (Friend of the Oppressed). His main supporters were Telugu contractors and workers in the textile mills. The first reformist organization among the textile workers of Bombay, the Millhands Association, was formed in 1890 by N.M. Lokhande under Phule's guidance. This association represented the grievances of the mill workers till it was pushed aside by the militant trade unions that emerged among the workers in the aftermath of the First World War. Phule promoted modern agriculture among the

peasantry and personally bought land to experiment and set an example before them. He was influenced by the democratic American writings of Tom Paine and the principles of liberty and equality. He wrongly believed that British rule had destroyed the rule of Brahmins and brought modern education to all castes, and hence, was a supporter of the colonial rule in the country.

4.1.2. The Non-Brahmin Movement After Phule

After Phule's death, the activists of the SS continued to work. The fact that units of the SS were formed in villages not only in the districts like Ahmednagar, Satara, Kolhapur but also in the Berar region in Amravati shows that the growing peasant consciousness was being mobilized through the SS in the beginning of the 20th century. Their propaganda struck a chord among the peasantry. Campaigns against social problems like drinking and against untouchability were taken up. The SS also took up the problems of the peasants, promoting cooperatives among them. The contradictions in the rural areas were expressed by the SS as a conflict between the Shetji/Bhatji and the Bahujan Samaj (moneylender/priest and the masses). The SS functioned systematically, holding annual conferences after 1910, and bringing out a magazine. SS *tamashas* (the drama) toured the villages, singing songs and putting up performances to spread their message. The basic content of the activities was anti-feudal. The propaganda of an SS *tamasha* led to a spontaneous revolt of the peasants against Brahmin landlords in 1919 in Satara. The peasants were demanding a reduction in the rent. They broke idols and abused the gods and the wives of the Brahmins. This revolt was not supported by

the landlord sections of the NBs in the rural areas. Nonetheless, SS activity continued and SS activists were involved in peasant agitations in other districts in the 1920s. The SS attacked the feudal authority in rural areas and aroused the democratic consciousness of the peasants. The SS campaigns led to the exodus of Brahmin landlords from the villages in western Maharashtra. It laid the ground for the militant anti-imperialist struggles led by the peasantry in the region in the 1940s, like the Patri-Sarkar movement in Satara, when a parallel authority was setup against the British.

The interests of the feudal and rich peasant sections of the NBs could not be satisfied within the SS, nor could they support the populist and militant propaganda. In 1915, the Non-Brahmin Party was formed in order to contest District Board elections and enter the legislature. This trend was closely allied with the colonial government and the textile mill owners in Bombay, and was strongly anti-Tilak and anti-Congress. The NB party was very active in Pune in the 1920s in a long drawn and bitter battle with the Congress extremists like Tilak and his supporters. Another conservative trend, associated with the NB party was the group led by Shahu Maharaj, the ruler of the Kolhapur principality. The Maharaj supported education for the lower castes, setting up hostels for them. But the main thrust of his activities was gaining Kshatriya status and forming a priesthood parallel to Brahmins. He was attracted to the Arya Samaj later.

While Phule, and the later SS activity, supported colonial rule, their main activity was arousing mass consciousness about social and cultural oppression. However, the NB Party was collaborationist from the beginning and failed to express the mass sentiment

aroused to direct anti-imperialist consciousness. Hence, a large section of the NB Party joined the Congress in the 1930s, while a much smaller group led by Javalkar joined the CPI. The dominant section of the NB movement consolidated the interests of the narrow sections of the Non-Brahmins, the landlords, and developed a hegemonic Maratha consciousness within the Congress. They betrayed the interests of the other middle and lower castes and the anti-caste tasks. They suppressed the entire *Satyashodhak* tradition. This tradition was kept alive by middle peasant based parties that emerged in the region in the 1940s, like the Peasants' and Workers Party and the Lal Nishan Party as well as the Dalit movement.

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

4.1.3. The Non-Brahmin Movement in Tamil Nadu

The concentration of religious and economic power in the hands of the Brahmin castes in the erstwhile Madras presidency, the concentration of Brahmins in the modern fields — education and bureaucracy in the

province — the emergence of petty-bourgeois and nascent bourgeois classes among the lower classes, including an educated intelligentsia, led to the emergence of the NB movement in Tamil Nadu. While the first stirrings of the movement began by the mid-19th century itself, a movement against the domination of the higher castes started by the end of the century and gained organized expression by the 1920s.

The fact that the Brahmins, as the largest section of the intelligentsia, were the first to become active in the leadership of the Congress, and in the Home Rule League that was founded by Annie Besant and Capt. Olcott, added to the separation between the NB movement and the anti-imperialist movement from the its early days. It led to the view being put forward that unless caste differences were eliminated India's political development would not be possible.

The social reform movement in the form of the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association (1892) — which was active in promoting the education of women, reform of marriage, abolition of untouchability — involved a wide cross-section of the intelligentsia. The violent conflicts between the low caste toddy tapper Nadars, after they had risen economically through trade, and the feudal Marwaris, in the vicinity of Sivakasi in 1899, after the unsuccessful attempt of the town Nadars to enter a temple, reveals that with social differentiation the lower castes were astir for their democratic rights, against traditional inequalities and hierarchy. This movement led, on the one hand, to the formation of the Justice Party which primarily sought and obtained representation in the legislatures through communal electorates and used patronage for gaining posts in the bureaucracy. It was strongly pro-British. On the other hand, the much more

mass based and radical Self-Respect Movement, led by E.V. Ramaswami, EVR or 'Periyar,' did not restrict itself to promoting the interests of the NBs in the administration, but went further and launched an all round attack on the caste system and Brahminical Hinduism. While Periyar often used the platform of the Justice Party, yet his movement was mass based and iconoclastic. The Justice Party was led by, and clearly represented the interests of, big landlords and merchants from among the upper castes among the NonBrahmins only. Periyar's movement was based on wider support of the rising working class, the middle class and the traders, especially, in the urban centres like Erode, Madurai, Coimbatore, Salem, Tiruchirapalli, Tuticorin and other towns. At its peak, the Self-Respect Movement took up the activities of propagating against moneylenders' exploitation and the problems of the peasantry.

The Justice Party was formed in 1917 in response to the political reforms being proposed by the British government. It campaigned in India and in England for separate representation to the Non-Brahmins in Madras Presidency. It won the elections in 1920 and formed the provincial ministry in Madras Presidency. In 1923, its base had eroded but it managed to continue in the government, but in 1926, it lost badly to the Swarajists. The Justice Party, in office, showed itself against the interests of the Untouchables and working class. Hence its base was easily eroded.

While the Justice Party took a strong pro-British stand, anticolonial intellectuals among the Non-Brahmins, many of whom were active within the Congress, for instance, Kesava Pillai, EVR, Dr. Varadharajalu, formed the Madras Presidency

Association in 1917 to press for full communal representation for the NBs.

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

In the 1930s the Self-Respect Movement, under the influence of Communists in Tamil Nadu, and the influence of Periyar's trip to the USSR, supported socialism. Communists like Singaravellu propagated materialist philosophy and socialism through the magazine. During that period, two trends were active

within the Self-Respect Movement, one which preferred to restrict itself to social reform, and the other, which wanted to take up anti-capitalist propaganda and activity. The Self-Respect socialists began organizing on problems of the peasantry along with their regular conferences. Under the influence of the CPI leaders, the Self-Respect socialists (*samadharma* group) merged into the Congress Socialist Party in November 1936.

Periyar faced repression from the British Government for his attack on the NB Government, and for "promoting Soviet Bolshevism." Consequently, Periyar retracted. The Self-Respect movement could not sustain its social radicalism consistently and was unable to give expression to the sentiments of the masses demanding a full attack on feudal land relations. Periyar then entered the Justice Party and in 1942 formed the Dravida Iyakkam (DK). They supported the efforts of the British in the war. In 1947, during the transfer of power, Periyar called for August 15 to be observed as a "day of mourning," demanding freedom from the Brahmin Raj that had been inaugurated. Differences within his organization on this call, as well as on Periyar's organizational methods and morality, led to a split with C. Annadorai forming the DMK. During Congress rule under Rajagopalachari, the DK launched strong agitations against the decision to impose Hindi. The anti-Hindi agitations took place in 1948 and in 1952, and again in 1965, thus giving expression to the Tamil nationality sentiments against the domination of the all India comprador bourgeoisie. These agitations were violently suppressed. The DK also continued its anticaste propaganda, breaking the images of Lord Ganesh, calling for a boycott of temples, burning thousands of copies of the Constitution in 1957 for maintaining the caste

system. The NB movement continued in the 1950s as a cultural expression of the oppressed castes and the Tamil nationality. Periyar supported the Congress when a Nadar, Kamaraj, became the Chief Minister. Later he supported the DMK Government.

The DMK and the AAIDMK, the parties formed from within Tamil Nadu, represented the interests of the regional comprador sections with whom the Self-Respect Movement had compromised. It also compromised with Brahminism and with the policies of the all India comprador bourgeoisie. While initially, in the 1950s, they gave expression to the Tamil nationalist sentiments, and propagated against casteism, ever since they achieved power at the state level they consolidated the class interests of the landlord sections of the middle castes and the regional comprador bourgeoisie. Hence these parties have not been sympathetic to the demands of the lowest castes and have been equal to the Congress in the suppression of the militant and revolutionary agitations of the lowest sections of society. In order to further their class interests they have come to an agreement with the all India comprador bourgeoisie and sacrificed the interests of the Tamil nationality as well. Thus, a section has even supported the repression of the struggle of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

4.2. The Dalit Movement During the Colonial Period

Due to the betrayal of their interests by the Non-Brahmin movement and the limitations of the upper caste reformers, the castes most oppressed by the caste system, the Dalits, developed their own movement, especially in South India, from the early part of the 20th century. The Dalits, calling themselves as Panchamas,

changed their names to Adi-Dravidas, Adi-Andhras, Adi-Karnatakas, to show that they were the original inhabitants of their respective regions and started organizing separate conferences. The Chamars in Punjab broke away from the Arya Samaj and its "shuddhi" (purification) programme and its defense of the Vedas and began the Adi-Dharma movement. They invoked the name of Sant Ravidas, the Bhakti movement saint. Initially, these associations emphasized education and Sanskritization. But soon there was a shift from the imitation of the upper castes to an assertion of social equality, the demand for political representation and an end to specific forms of caste oppression. A successful movement was led by the Ezhava community of traditional toddy tappers in Kerala, under the leadership of Shri Narayan Guru. He founded the Sri Narayana Guru Dharmsa Paripalana Yogam in 1902-03 with the help of the first Ezhava graduate Dr Palpu. Initially, they tried to demand a higher status, and emphasized the need to take to education. They tried to enter the temples and the Vaikom Satyagraha in 1924 was the effort of the Ezhavas along with progressive sections of the people in Kerala. The strongest and longest lasting separate movement of the Dalits emerged under Dr Ambedkar's leadership in Maharashtra. While Ambedkar broke with the upper caste reformers and the NB party, he took his inspiration from the SS movement and Jyotiba Phule.

4.2.1. Maraharashtra

The Marathi speaking districts of Bombay Province and the Central Provinces and Berar were the first areas in India where a full-fledged independent

movement of Dalits emerged in the 1920s. The movement was based on the majority Untouchable community in Maharashtra, the Mahars. Dr Ambedkar emerged within this movement, and shaped it with the strength of his personality and activity.

The Dalit movement emerged in the background of changes wrought by the imperial policies of the British. The Mahars, general village menials, migrated to urban areas in much larger numbers than other Untouchable castes due to their lack of a fixed traditional occupation that tied them to the village economy. The economic insecurities of the landless, economic distress, combined with new economic opportunities in textile mills, ports, defence works and railways, the army and petty trade, led the Mahars to gain employment in these areas. The class differentiation within the community took place rapidly, and a small but influential petty-bourgeois, and even usurious, capitalist class developed within the community. A sizeable section became part of the working class.

Social and educational reform activities among Mahars began at the turn of the century. But in the 1920s mass mobilization began in the community on the question of civic and social rights. This was preceded by a spate of magazines brought out by leaders like Ambedkar, Kisan Faguji Bansod and others. The dominant sections of the NB party were hostile to the demands of the Mahars. Within the working class, especially in the Bombay region too, in the textile mills, the homogenization of the working class could not take place, partly because of the caste prejudices among caste Hindu workers and the conscious efforts of the mill owners, including Indian capitalists, to keep the workers divided. The uneven development of the various

communities forming part of the working class hampered a unified class consciousness from developing. This problem is evident in other states too, for instance, the struggle of the B & C Mills in Madras was hampered by the division between the caste Hindu and Adi-Dravid workers. Hence the Dalits, especially the Mahar workers in the Bombay working class, remained outside the active trade union struggles till the mid-30s, and they were under the influence of their community leaders. In Nagpur, where caste discrimination was not too sharp, and the Mahars constituted almost 25 percent of the mill-workers, their integration was greater. Hence the Dalit movement developed independently, led by the petty-bourgeoisie with the support of the poor peasant and working class masses of the community.

Ambedkar was a pioneer of the movement of scheduled castes for equality and against untouchability in the country. Ambedkar, the son of a Subhedar-major in the British Army, was the first graduate in his community. With financial help provided by the Maharaja of Baroda, he went for further studies to the United States of America, completed his doctorate and returned to India in 1916. He took up employment with the Baroda Maharaja but having faced caste discrimination he resigned and came to Bombay to teach in a college. He began participating in the reform activities of the community and also started a paper. He countered upper caste reformers and wanted the Dalits to create their own leadership and develop their self respect. He went to England again to do his post doctoral work at the London School of Economics and came back in 1923 with a thesis and a law degree. He was the first Dalit to have gained a doctorate abroad.

In the second half of the 1920s Ambedkar was active in a series of struggles launched to assert the civic and religious equality of the Dalits. The Mahad Satyagraha, organized by Ambedkar with the support of younger and more militant sections of the NB party and other progressives, galvanized the Dalits in Maharashtra and proved important in creating mass awareness in the community. After a government resolution was passed opening public places to members of all castes, the Dalits attempted to use the public tank in Mahad, a town in Konkan. This was resisted by the upper caste sections controlling the Municipality. Subsequently, a massive conference was organized in Mahad in December 1927. Although the upper castes in the Municipality were able to obtain a stay order from the court preventing the Dalits from collectively using the tank, yet, the mobilization, the burning of the *Manusmriti* and the propaganda created a stir. In 1928 and 1930 two temple entry programs were taken up. The Nasik Satyagraha was a protracted struggle that lasted five years. Both were unsuccessful. Through these experiences, Ambedkar was disillusioned with attempts to reform the Hindu community and turned to seeking political rights and safeguards for Dalits as a means for achieving equality.

In the 1920s the NB movement responded to the constitutional reforms proposed by the colonial government by trying to get separate electorates for the Non-Brahmins. Ambedkar was among the first Untouchable caste leaders to recognize the importance of political rights and political power, but, along with the dominant trend in the nationalist and NB movement, he envisaged this completely within the context of political institutions created by the imperialist government. Hence, from 1928, he demanded separate electorates for

the Dalit castes. In 1928 he appeared before the Simon Commission. In 1930 and 1931 he went to England to represent the Dalits in the Round Table Conferences (RTC), the forums created by the British imperialist Government to plan constitutional reforms. The RTC marked a significant turn in the relation between Ambedkar and the Congress. While the Congress boycotted the RTC, Gandhi attended the second RTC and claimed to speak for the whole of India. While refusing Ambedkar's claims to speak for the Untouchables, he claimed that he alone represented the entire Hindu community, including the Untouchables. The British granted separate electorates to the Depressed Classes and Gandhi and the Congress strongly opposed this decision. The British played their devious game of divide and rule, of gaining the support of the Untouchable castes, and, at the same time, encouraging the contradiction between the Dalit movement and the Congress. Gandhi sat on his well publicized hunger strike against separate electorates in Yerawada jail in September 1932. The Poona Pact was a compromise between Ambedkar and Gandhi. Separate electorates were withdrawn and joint electorates, with reserved seats, were agreed upon. This entire conflict, while on the one hand, created a wide awareness about casteism in Indian society, also divided the Dalit masses, just awakening to a democratic political consciousness, between allegiance to the anti-imperialist movement and that to the Dalit movement.

The1930s were the period of mass movements of the peasants and the workers. Ambedkar was the first important Dalit leader to come out in support of Swaraj. He launched the Independent Labour Party (ILP) which fought the 1937 elections and won 14 seats in the

Bombay Provincial Assembly. In this period, the Dalit movement in the province moved closer to the wider class struggle going on, as is evident from the joint workers' strikes and the anti-feudal struggles supported by the ILP. The pro-landlord, pro-capitalist orientation of the Congress was thoroughly exposed in the two years that the Congress ministry held power in the province from 1937; cooperation between the socialists, the communists and the ILP in this period continued.

4.3. Dalit Upsurge in Other States

It is in this phase that in other parts of the country, the militant sections of the lower castes in the NB movement joined the Communist movement. The Ezhava community in Kerala, after their experience in the Vaikom Satyagraha, became more militant and joined the newly formed Communist Party in the state in large numbers. The more militant sections of the Self-Respect Movement too had close connections with the Communists and under their guidance entered the Congress Socialist Party in 1936. In coastal Andhra the peasant organization led by N.G. Ranga had mobilized the cultivating castes within the peasant movement in the 1920s itself. This became increasingly more radical under the influence of communist activists. In the early 1930s Ranga had formed the Harijan Seva Dal and several social reformers were associated with it. Although separate Adi-Andhra Conferences were organized under the leadership of Kusum Dharmanna, B.S. Venkatrao and others, it was the communists who mobilized the masses of Dalits in organizations of agricultural labourers which took up the basic questions of the Dalit masses, their oppression under the *vetti* system and the distribution of

wastelands. In the late 1930s one section of the Dalit leadership started becoming pro-Muslim under the Nizam's patronage, while another section drew close to the Congress through Gandhi's Harijan Sewak Sangh activity. In the widespread democratic awakening, the Dalit masses spontaneously participated in the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles raging at that time.

4.4. Transfer of Power in War

With the declaration of World War II the political situation underwent changes. Ambedkar supported the allies unconditionally in the war. In 1941, he was invited to join the National Defence Council, and he became Labour Minister in the Viceroy's Cabinet in 1942. As Labour Minister, Ambedkar initiated the setting up of formal institutions for consultations between the management and the labour representatives, and for the settlement of labour disputes. He introduced some legislation for improving the conditions of labour, but, in the main, his activity was centred on helping the war effort by ensuring increasing labour productivity. The dominant concern of the Dalit movement led by Ambedkar was to obtain representation for the Dalit castes (DC) at all levels of the administration. In this period he succeeded in getting 8.33 percent reservation for the DCs in government posts, and scholarships for technical education for the DCs abroad. During the later part of the war, and immediately after, it became clear that the actual and serious negotiation for the transfer of power had begun, and the comprador bourgeoisie had tightened its control over the Congress leadership, the British imperialists had been negotiating only with the Muslim League and the Congress. All other forces and

political parties had been sidelined altogether. Ambedkar had dissolved the ILP in 1942 and formed the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) in order to be able to represent the Dalits in the constitutional set-up that was being negotiated.

In spite of their efforts in 1946, the Dalits got no guarantees from the British imperialists. The Congress had succeeded in bringing a section of the Dalit leadership under its influence, due to which Ambedkar and the SCF faced a setback.

In the period between 1946 and 1950, in the context of the transfer of power, Ambedkar decided on a strategy of co-operating with the Congress in order to ensure safeguards for the Dalits in the new constitutional set-up. He was appointed as the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee by the Congress, and later as Law Minister in Nehru's cabinet. The Nehru Government kept Ambedkar out of the opposition and utilized his skills to get a Constitution drafted that suited the interests of the new ruling classes. Though Ambedkar himself did not take the full credit for the Constitution and recognized the contradictions facing the Dalits, his experience in Nehru's cabinet was bitter. When Nehru, in league with reactionary, feudal forces within the Congress, went against his own promise of passing the Hindu Code Bill, Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet in protest in 1951.

Meanwhile, in this period, the Dalit movement in Maharashtra and other states remained confused and divided. While the Dalit masses participated in the various revolts of the peasants that developed all over the country, the petty-bourgeois sections all over the country, with little organizational connection with the masses, were divided between the SCF and support to various

political forces of the bourgeois and feudal classes like Congress and the Muslim League. For instance, in Telengana, while the Dalit masses were active in the heroic people's struggle for power, the SCF had no organizational connection with the rural masses, while another section of the Dalit leadership, such as Shyam Sunder and Venkatrao, allied with the Nizam.

In Maharashtra the Dalit movement revived in the 1950s when Ambedkar and the SCF cooperated with the Socialists and the CPI in the demand for a unified Maharashtra state. In 1956 Ambedkar dissolved the SCF and formed the Republican Party of India (RPI). During this period the RPI, along with CPI, took up several rural struggles for the distribution of government lands to the landless.

At the same time, Ambedkar concentrated his attention on setting up colleges in Aurangabad and Bombay and in 1956 he implemented his long standing resolve to leave Hinduism and converted to Buddhism.

5. Changes in the Post-Colonial Period

In the post-colonial period, caste configurations have undergone considerable changes. They are a result of the partial implementation of the Zamindari Abolition Acts in some states and the penetration of capitalist relations and the blows delivered by the people's struggles.

The most significant changes have been in the countryside. The close correspondence between caste and class no longer exists in most parts of the country. The old upper caste zamindars and other big feudal landlords have, to some extent, been weakened and feudal authority is, to a large extent, asserted by smaller landlords, the former big tenants of the zamindars and the large peasant proprietors. While the position of the upper castes has weakened the most, the new landlords are from the middle castes. The middle castes are, today, significantly divided along class lines. The landlords and the rich peasants are a small group from the traditionally cultivating castes, and these castes are also found in large numbers among the middle and poor peasants and even among the landless. The lower sections of the middle castes, that is, the artisan castes, are primarily middle, poor or landless peasants and some are continuing their traditional occupations. Therefore, today, the main exploiting class in the rural areas consists of the earlier upper caste elements, i.e., the Brahmins, the Rajputs, the Bhumihars, together with the upper stratum of the middle castes, such as, the Patidars, the Marathas, the Jats, the Yadavs, the Vellars, the Lingayats, the Reddys, the Kammas, the Nairs, etc. The middle peasants, comprising about 25 percent of the rural households, largely, come from the major cultivating castes and from other lower castes, as well as a small section of the Dalits. This section has contradictions with upper sections of the

rural elite, but due to the caste relations and low class consciousness in areas of low class struggle they are tailing behind the elite landlord sections of the other castes.

The poor and the landless, who consist of 60 percent of the rural households, have the greatest number of caste divisions, including a large number of small artisan and service jatis, and even Muslims. This class consists also of a large number of households from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Of the rural agricultural labor families, 37 percent are Scheduled Castes and 10 percent are Scheduled Tribes, while the remaining half are drawn from the cultivating castes and other lower castes. Hence, caste divisions among the exploited are the greatest. The caste-class relationship in the present period is indeed complex.

With the growth of the state capitalist sector of industrial production and the government bureaucracy, caste discrimination has reproduced itself in this sector with some modifications. In the highest rungs of management in industrial enterprises and the bureaucracy, the upper castes are dominant. Dalits, on the other hand, are accommodated in Class IV positions as sweepers, peons and other menial jobs. In working class jobs, Dalits are mainly employed in the relatively, unskilled, low paid and insecure work, as contract labor and in the small scale industry.

In the state and central administration, due to the pressure of movements, a certain percentage of reserved posts, especially in the clerical category, as well as in the lower managerial category, are being filled, yet, the social distance between those from the SCs and those from other backgrounds remain. Although it is no longer manifest in the overt practice of untouchability, yet, it

prevails in the form of discriminatory attitude and deep-seated prejudices. The most lucrative professions, too, remain a monopoly of the highest castes.

The linguistic reorganization of the states helped the small upper sections of the middle castes to gain power at the regional level, especially, in western and south India. But in the north Indian States, the upper castes remained in control of the state machinery and the government.

The economic crisis of the 1980s led to an intensification of contradictions in the country, including, an intensification of the contradiction of the regional comprador bourgeoisie and the landlord sections with the dominant power. With the growth of pro-capitalist landlord/rich peasant forces in several states, due to policies like the Green Revolution and the industrialization of specific regions, their demand for a share of the state's resources has grown. The all India comprador bourgeoisie, unwilling to share resources, attempted to further centralize the state. The political instability in the late 1960s and early 70s led to the assertion of various landlord/pro-capitalist landlord sections that were denied a share in the political power in the north Indian states. The formation of the various non-Congress governments, like that of the BKD, led by Charan Singh in UP, who represented the Jat landlord sections from western UP, was one such attempt, but this assertion could not be consolidated.

The pro-capitalist-landlord sections and the trading elite among the middle castes reasserted themselves in co-operation with the regional comprador bourgeoisie through the Janata Party in 1977. But this coalition of various classes could not last due to the pulls in different directions. In the 1980s the Congress (I) came

back to power, representing the interests of the all India comprador bourgeoisie and centralized resources. The pro-capitalist landlord sections came together on an even wider basis in UP and Bihar, once again, in a coalition of classes, to form the Janata Dal, which came to power at Delhi in 1989. To stabilize their social base, and to get a share of the State's resources through control of the higher rungs of the administration, they demanded reservations in Government jobs and higher professional education for the OBCs. The appointment of various Commissions at the state level, and that of the Mandal Commission in 1977, was a part of this process. The implementation of the Mandal Commission report, dealing with posts in the Central Government Services, was an attempt by the rural elite from the middle castes to guarantee their share in the State resources and stabilize their hold over their class brethren from the poorer classes.

Hence the intensification of the political and economic crisis of the present semi-feudal, semi-colonial system has intensified the contradictions in the realm of the caste system and this has manifested itself in: **a)** the pogroms against Dalits, especially, in rural areas, and **b)** the demand for reservations for the OBCs and violent agitations against the reservation policy.

5.1. Attacks on Dalits

The mass killings of Dalits began with the Kilvenmani massacre of Dalit agricultural labourers in Thanjavur district in 1971. It was a reprisal for their attempt to strike in support of their demand for higher wages. This was soon followed by similar massacres in various parts of the country, especially, from the late 70s

onwards, for instance, in Bihar (Belchi, Farasbigha, *etc.*), Marathawada in Maharashtra and Andhra (Chundur, Karamchedu, *etc.*). These killings, and the countless attacks in every state, are attempts by the landlord sections to crush the growing assertion of poor Dalits against their caste based exploitation and their caste based position in the village. While the caste/class relation in the context of the laborers is clear and related — the poor are Dalits the aggressors in many of the cases have been exploiter members of the middle castes. They have taken place in areas where the class struggle is sharp but a united front of the exploited classes could not be forged, or in areas where the class struggle is less sharp and the Dalits have, in isolation, asserted their demand for equality. These brutal killings and attacks are a reflection of the intensified contradictions crying out for a revolutionary solution. They have also catalyzed the resurgence of the Dalit movement in the country.

5.2. Reservation Policy

The reservation policy, granting the reservation of a certain percentage of jobs in the administration and seats in educational institutions for professional courses for SCs and STs, began in the post 1947 period, although it was introduced for the Scheduled Castes in 1943. But this policy was implemented in a half hearted manner at the all India level till the mid-1960s. With the upper sections of the NB castes gaining power in the southern states, and the pressure of the strong NB movement, a large proportion of the seats in professional institutions and government jobs were reserved for various NB (OBC) castes as well. This policy was implemented for the OBCs in the northern States since 1980.

In a backward country like India, with uneven development and industrial and bank capital concentrated in the hands of a small elite coming from the trading upper castes or non-Hindu communities like the Parsis, where recruitment is based more often on kin-caste considerations, the government sector has become the primary means of employment for the less privileged sections. For the emerging educated youth among the Dalits and other lower castes, aspiring for petty-bourgeois status, this is the main source of white-collar employment. At the same time, the economic crisis engendered by the imperialist stranglehold over our economy has meant economic stagnation with limited and distorted development. The government sector is unable to satisfy the demands of the educated unemployed whose numbers grow by leaps and bounds. The scramble for jobs has made reserved seats prized among the Dalits, and they arouse the hatred of the middle classes among the higher castes. The upper caste bureaucrats and ruling elite have attempted to scuttle the implementation of reservations in every way and deny the Dalits even what is their right under the law. Hence reservations have generated a great deal of the tension within the urban petty-bourgeoisie of the upper castes and the Dalits. What is basically a non-antagonistic contradiction among the people has taken an antagonistic form, leading to agitations, riots and attacks on Dalits as a whole.

There are severe limitations to the reservation policy from the perspective of Dalit liberation. The reservation policy has been used by the ruling classes to stabilize a petty-bourgeois class among the Dalits and also create a small, but influential, elite amongst them. This policy has fostered dependence on the state and

created an illusion that the Dalit castes can gain equality within this exploitative system, something impossible without smashing this semi-feudal, semi-colonial economy, the foundation of the caste system. The class of government employees created by this policy is denied political rights and this has hampered the petty-bourgeoisie from participating in militant mass struggles and this class has sought to restrict their agitations within constitutionally recognized channels and through the politics of lobbying and patronage. Reservation is a reformist policy which provides relief but not liberation. Though these limitations of the reservation policy need to be exposed, yet, at the same time, we must understand that, for the SCs, reservations have provided white collar employment and has been the main avenue to enter the higher professions which are still the monopoly of the higher castes.

5.2.1. Anti-Reservation Agitation

Reservations for SCs and STs, as well as for the OBCs, have led to violent agitations against them. These agitations have been backed by the main ruling class parties, the Congress and the BJP.

As long as the reservations for the SCs and the STs were implemented marginally, opposition to them did not take an agitational form. But in the mid-70s, under the pressure of mass revolts of the Dalits and tribals, the ruling classes started implementing the reservation policy to some extent in most sectors. A violent agitation began in Gujarat in 1981, led, initially, by medical college students against reservations. Bitterly false but provocative arguments that reservations lead to inefficiency, etc., were put forward to get the support of

the urban petty-bourgeoisie from the upper castes. The upper castes were reacting against a threat to their monopoly over the lucrative professions and the government bureaucracy. The agitation in Gujarat spread from the cities to the villages. The landed Patels used the anti-Dalit atmosphere created by the agitation to attack their Dalit laborers, who had begun to oppose their unchecked exploitation, and browbeat them into submission. The anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat was supported by the students and youth from the upper castes aspiring for professional education in other states as well. The ruling classes gave publicity to their agitations and an anti-Dalit atmosphere was generated all over the country.

By the 1980s the middle castes — the OBCs — too, began to demand reservations. In 1977, when the Janata Party state government in Bihar, under Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, implemented reservations for the OBCs in the State administration and professional colleges, it led to a violent agitation by the "forwards" — the upper castes — against the "backwards," the middle and lower castes. The agitators forced the state government to modify the policy and introduce reservations for the Economically Backwards as well (EBC).

The commission, under the Chairmanship of B P Mandal, appointed by the Janata Party government in 1977, was also under the pressure of the growing assertion of the landlord and rich peasant sections among the middle castes in north India. The Commission recommended reservations for the OBCs. The Congress (I) government shelved this report. The all India comprador bourgeoisie led Congress government, with its reduced support from the agrarian elite in the northern

belt, was interested, primarily, in the centralization of the State. In the 1990s the Janata Dal Governrnment implemented the Mandal Commission recommendations of reservations for the OBCs in the Central goverrnment administrative machinery and in the institutions of higher education. From the 1980s, sections of the OBC had been pressing for the implementation of reservations, though it had not taken the form of a mass agitation.

The middle castes, whether of landlord or ordinary peasant backgrounds and artisan castes, have been even more backward than the educated sections among the Dalits. They are trapped in the semi-feudal agrarian economy of their traditional occupations and way of life. The emerging educated sections among them are the social base for the demand for reservations for the OBCs. But the OBCs are much more class divided than the Dalits. Upper sections of the OBC castes have tried hard to be included in the OBC lists in the different states.

In an attempt to check the BJP's efforts to dislodge it, the Janata Dal government announced the implementation of reservations for the OBCs. But this was widely opposed by the upper castes in the form of anti-reservation agitations. The extent of the upper castes' control over the government bureaucracy and prestigious professions can be seen from their violence and aggressiveness against the implementation of the Mandal Commission. The comprador bureaucrat bourgeoisie and its media gave wide publicity to this agitation which was restricted to elite institutions. The techniques they used, like self-immolation, to show their opposition also gave their agitation more publicity. The upper caste sections of the bureaucracy also supported this agitation. The agitating students were from the ABVP and NSUI, although both the Congress and the

BJP opportunistically remained silent during the agitation.

While recognizing that implementation of reservation policy for OBCs, will, in spite of income limits, favor the landlord/elite sections of the OBC castes, and, in that, only a few castes may gain; yet, the fact is that most of the OBCs are poor and landless peasants or those eking out a bare subsistence in their traditional occupation. Reservations will provide only a very small section among them a secure middle class existence, for the majority, the agrarian order has to be overturned in order to give security and a better life. But the middle castes have hardly been represented in the administration and they have a right to their share in this sector.

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

5.3. Movements in the Present Period

5.3.1. Dalit Panther Revolt

The economic and political policies of the reactionary ruling classes have led to agitations among the Dalits and other sections of the lower castes from the 1970s. Although the leadership of the Dalit movement was co-opted and splintered in the 1960s, the plight of the masses of the lower castes, including the Dalits, worsened. The practice of untouchablity continued unabated in the rural areas, caste forms of extra economic exploitation like Vet Begari, Vetti, etc., persisted in many parts of the country. Caste discrimination and prejudices in urban areas also became sharp. This situation, coupled with the Brahminical Hindu culture's domination and lack of opportunities among the Dalit youth led to the revolts. Under the influence of the world wide upsurge among the students, the youth and the Blacks in the 1960s and the Naxalbari movement, Dalit youth in Maharashta revolted under the banner of the Dalit Panthers. The movement began in the city of Bombay in 1973. It was initially a cultural movement, of poems and articles printed in the small magazines brought out in that period. Dalit students and youth from the slums, hostels and chawls condemned the Manusmriti, announced that the 15th of August was false independence and called for a boycott of elections. The movement did not last long, but it spread rapidly to other urban centres like Pune, Nagpur, and even to cities in Madhya Pradesh and other places like Karnataka, Gujarat, Chandigarh, Bhopal and Agra, where units of the Dalit Panthers were formed.

The Panthers revolted against caste oppression and also the RPI Dalit leaders who they felt had betrayed the Ambedkarite anti-caste/anti-untouchability movement. Their campaign to villages where caste oppression was reported indicates this. They also attacked the ideological bastion of the caste system by burning the *Manusmriti*. They also attacked the corrupt parliamentary system by calling for a boycott of the by-elections to the Lok Sabha in Worli at Bombay, and managed to get almost 85 percent of the SCs in the area to boycott the elections. This was the first time that the Dalit movement took an explicitly anti-state stand. They were able to mobilize thousands of people for their *morchas* and faced acute state repression. During one their *morchas*, the Shiv Sena attacked with a volley of stones and when the Dalits resisted the police fired on the morcha in defence of the Shiv Sainiks. In this police firing a young poet, Bhaskar Jadhav, was killed. Later, the Shiv Sena, acting as the storm-troopers of the upper-caste dominated state machinery, systematically attacked the Dalit Panthers. The Panthers militantly resisted these Shiv Sena attacks, which instigated riots in Dalit slums and chawls. The physical battles at Worli, between the Shiv Sainiks and the police on one side and the Dalits on the other, lasted for over three months. Hundreds of Panthers were thrown into jails. The Panthers confronted state repression, but having been a spontaneous revolt led by the petty-bourgeoisie, and lacking a unified strategy and tactics, they started disintegrating by 1975. The Dalit Panther movement was a part of the democratic revolutionary class struggle in the region. It was as a result of this movement that the scheduled castes of the country began rejecting the derogatory word *Harijan* (with its Hindu connotations) and instead adopted the word "Dalit."

The leadership of the movement was won over by the Congress government by giving cultural awards and other enticements and gradually most of them fell prey to lumpenness, political bankruptcy and opportunism. In spite of this, the mass of the Dalit youth and students in various parts of the state have repeatedly become active and their militancy has burst forth on issues like the renaming of the Marathwada University, against the banning of Ambedkar's book *Riddles in Hinduism,* the agitation against the killing of 11 Dalits in police firing at Mumbai (Ramabai Nagar) and other local issues.

The Dalit Panther movement shook up Maharashtrian society and forced it to acknowledge the existence of caste discrimination and prejudice. It struck a major blow at the upper caste monopoly and superiority and to the politics of co-option. The cultural establishment was particularly affected; they were forced to give recognition to the literature of the oppressed masses, and Dalit literature expressing the agony of Dalits in this casteist system saw a new expression. Also, it was only after this outburst that reservations for Dalits began to be filled. Till then, besides a handful and in the post of sweepers, the reservations were only on paper. This movement also had an impact on Dalits in other parts of the country.

5.3.2. Karnataka

A similar movement emerged among the urban Dalits in Karnataka. The Dalit Sangharash Samiti began as a resistance against upper caste attacks in urban areas and soon spread to the rural areas to fight caste based atrocities. It led to a popular opposition against casteism in Karnataka too. This movement revealed the hidden

truth of untouchability and the persistence of caste oppression and also resulted in the development of Dalit literature. But soon it too became sectarian and evolved as a pressure lobby that was used by the various ruling class parties.

5.5. Elite Dalit Politics

Due to this outburst of revolt the ruling classes have consciously sponsored an elite among the Dalits who have, consciously appealed to Dalit solidarity and a sectarian approach, while denying any unity with other exploited sections and parties representing them. They were maintained as powerbrokers whose main task was maintaining a class alliance with the ruling classes through the medium of the state. They have been playing the role of repeatedly building up the faith in the ruling class state among the Dalit masses. The Dalit leaders have promoted the ideology of Ambedkarism which suits the ruling classes. Instead of learning from the life and experiences of Ambedkar, and drawing lessons from his positive democratic aspects, they have highlighted and dogmatized all those aspects of Ambedkar's thoughts that will legitimize the existing state. They are upholding the Constitution as sacrosanct, defending liberal political philosophy the politics of bargaining and lobbying. Hence they are taking a sectarian approach to the unity of the Dalits with other sections of the exploited masses, or talking only of caste unity between the Dalits and the OBCs, without considering the class contradictions that make this unity practically impossible to sustain. They are unwilling to address any of the basic questions of the Dalit and the OBC masses. Thus the elite political leadership among the Dalits, in league with ruling class

parties, is trying to keep the Dalit masses under their organizational and ideological influence, repeatedly preventing their militancy from being integrated into a revolutionary struggle, and channelizing it into parliamentary politics. They are preventing the building up of united struggles which alone can wage a successful fight against all forms of caste oppression, particularly, the dastardly system of untouchability and the overthrow of the caste system from its roots.

5.6. The Dalit Movement in the Present Period

The intensification of contradictions in the past decade, the caste atrocities, the impact of the anti-feudal struggles under revolutionary leadership in Telengana and Bihar, have led to a widespread awakening among the Dalits and other lower castes in various parts of the country, especially, in the northern states like UP, Haryana and MP which were relatively untouched by any social reform movement for the upliftment of the Dalits in the colonial period. This awakening was particularly among the petty-bourgeois sections of the Dalits. The BSP, the party formed on the base of Dalit bureaucrats and ruling class elements from amongst the Dalits, has become the main organization through which this democratic sentiment against caste discrimination, and for social and political power, is being expressed, and, hence, mass struggles under its leadership have also taken place locally, in the various states, in the face of repression from local vested interests and the police. But the BSP, with its anit-Brahmin rhetoric, its emphasis on caste alliance, the exclusion of class unity, the absence of a systematic socio-economic programme and its complete faith on electoral politics, which, in practice, has meant

alliances with ruling class forces and parties, cannot satisfy the democratic aspirations and sentiments of the Dalits and other lower caste masses. Their alliance with the regional comprador and landlord based parties has meant that they have betrayed the interests of the poor and the landless peasants. With its support to the pro-imperialist economic politics, which has led to privitization, unemployment and increased imperialist exploitation of the agrarian economy, the BSP cannot but betray the interests of even the petty-bourgeois sections amongst the Dalits. It is acting as the major tool amongst the Dalits for keeping them enslaved to feudal and imperialist exploitation, and diverting them from the path of revolution.

However, the intensifying crisis in India is bound to lead the Dalit masses and petty-bourgeoisie to more and more struggles. The constitutionalism being fostered by the elite and corrupt leadership of the Dalits is dissipating their militancy into lumpenness on the one hand and political lobbying on the other. Thus, their interests cannot be satisfied.

Only by joining hands with the revolutionary struggle that is being waged against imperialism, its social prop feudalism and the comprador bourgeoisie, the three enemies of the Indian people, that are sustaining all the reactionary forces and all the reactionary social relations and ideology, can the caste system and Brahminical ideology be uprooted from the Indian soil. The parliamentary system has placed power in the hands of the feudal and comprador bourgeois classes, while it will seek to co-opt only a small section from the middle or lower castes. But for the masses of the oppressed castes and classes political power can be gained only through a revolutionary struggle to first overthrow the

control of the handful of upper castes over the means of production. Without taking control of the means of production, the power of the oppressed cannot be built. Hence, while fighting against all forms of caste oppression and humiliation, it is this task that remains principal in our struggle to annihilate the caste systems.

6. Caste, Class, and Stages in Indian History

In this section, we shall trace the interlinking between caste and class through history from the advent of class society. We have seen continuous changes in this, which we shall try and trace in this section.

Any overview of Indian history would show that, "All hitherto history of India has been the history of caste and class struggle." The processes due to which classes, Varnas and jatis came into being, and their roles in the different stages of Indian history, are now more clear. It is also now proved beyond doubt that Indian society has been a changing society, and has gone through different stages in history prior to its present stage of a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society.

Based on the definition given by Marx and Engels in the *The German Ideology,* that "The various stages of development in the division of labour are just so many different forms of ownerships, *i.e.* the existing stage in the division of labor determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument and product of labor," we can categorize the different stages in preBritish Indian society as **1)** Tribal-Oligarchy, **2)** Ancient communal and state ownership which proceeded, especially, from the union of several tribes by agreement and/or conquest, accompanied by the enslavement of the Shudra-*helots, i.e.,* the "Arthasashtra Mode" and **3)** Feudal or estate property accompanied by the Jati-based system, i.e., feudalism of an Indian variety.

The Tribal period extends from the early Vedic period, wherein, the Aryan tribes came to the Punjab, at about 1500 BC. This continued to 500 BC, by when they had conquered, subjugated and assimilated the non-Aryan tribes and had overrun the Doab (Ganges plains). It was in this period that the decaying gentile society

broke up due to the incessant intra-kin and inter-kin conflicts for cattle, land, water sources and, later, slaves, classes were born, and Varnas came into being. Settled agriculture developed due to the wooden and then the iron plough. Transplantation of rice was known. Iron use was widespread. The state was yet to come into being. Varnashrama Dharma, outlined in the Brahmin texts, brought order and was the ideology of the ruling Kshatriya/ Rajanya and Brahmin classes who expropriated the surplus through the extraction of *Bali* (Tribute) or *Dan* (Gifts).

From 500 BC onwards, we see the emergence of the "Arthasashtra State" which was based on the expropriation of surplus, in the main, from the Shudra who tilled the king's sita lands and also the tributes from the peasantry. The Arthasashtra mode of production based on tributes and expropriation of surplus from the Shudra-*helots* declined after Ashoka and disappeared in the main after the Gupta period (4th century AD) in the north and the Chola period (9th century AD) in the south.

From the 4th century AD onwards, we see a new intermediary class coming into existence, which not only kept a part of the surplus but also administered fiefdoms. Also, during this period, money economy and trade declined, local barter increased, the guilds/*srenis* nearly disappeared, and the self sufficient village economy, with its Jajmani, Balutedari and Ayagar system, came into existence. The Jati system was born. Thus, the third stage of Indian History came to be — the Indian variant of feudalism — till the British came. The British continued the feudal and semi-feudal system with changes suited to their imperial designs.

6.1. The Changing Role of the Varnas

In each of the first three stages of Indian history, the role of the Varnas did not remain unchanged with regard to the ownership of the material and instruments of labor and the expropriation of the product of labour. The *Varna Vyavastha* too was not a constant which remained unaltered.

In the first stage we have traced the development of how, from the tribal chiefs or Rajanyas who were given *bali,* and also from the priestly class of Brahmins who were given *dan,* arose the tribal-oligarchy of the 7th century BC. It was this ruling alliance that kept control over the ordinary tribal-folk, Vis, and a small class of domestic slaves, the Shudras. The Vaishya was a tributary to another, to be oppressed at will, while the Shudra was "a servant of another, to be removed at will, slain at will." The Varnashrama Dharma was a code of conduct propounded by the ruling classes to keep the ruled in check and in order.

But, in the next mode of production, we see a change. The Brahmins, in this period, keeping aside the rules of the Varnashrama Dharma, which restricted them to priestly functions, had now transgressed into the territory of the Kshatriyas, acting as advisors to the rulers, and taking up tasks in the administrative set-up. Also, they had become *gahapatis*, *i.e.,* landowners, and *gahapati/settis,* i.e., merchants — traditionally, the preserve of the Vaishya caste. In the Arthasashtra mode of production, wherein, due to the development of agriculture, the importance of cattle and farm animals increased — the sacrificial *yagnas* declined — the Brahmin priests had to search for fresh avenues.

The Vaishya Varna also saw a break up into different classes. The upper crust in the urban areas became merchants of trade and their guilds controlled towns. The *Nagarsettis* became the main backers of Buddhism and Jainism and contended for a share in the power set up, together with the wealthy *gahapatis* of the rural areas, who had numerous Shudra domestic slaves and farm laborers.

The *Paura-janapada,* the ruling classes of the Arthasashtra state, consisted of the Kshatriyas, the Brahmins and the upper crust of the Vaishya Varna. The Vaishya Varna witnessed the formation of another class within it. A class which was skilled in certain crafts (like making chariots) later became part of the Karmarkar Shudra. Also, the Shudras performed farm-labour as hired helots in the Arthasashtra state, which was not witnessed in the Vedic times.

Thus, we can conclude that while in the tribal period Varnas were itself classes and had certain roles, this changed in the Arthasashtra mode of production, in which Varnas of the Arthasashtra society were not congruent to classes.

In the next stage, from the Gupta period onwards, we once again see changes in the role of the Varnas with the emergence of the *jatis* and the self-sufficient village economy.

The Brahmins, missionaries who helped settle villages for the state, had become the priests, astrologers and keepers of accounts in the self-sufficient village. The Brahmin missionaries brought with them the knowledge of the *Naksatras*, the use of the iron plough, rice transplantation, etc. They contributed to the production process and became a part of the *balutedari* system. At another level, the court Brahmins of the numerous rising

feudatories — characteristic of this period — granted and sanctified Kshatriyahood to a section of the erstwhile Shudras or foreign conquerors; in return, receiving, of course, large grants of tax-free land. Thus, the Brahmin Varna took up priestly functions once again and also consolidated their position as landlords.

The Vaishya, as a Varna, had nearly disappeared from the scenario and were restricted to big urban centers only. This was so because trading had declined and local barter had increased. The majority amongst them in the rural areas (i.e., the cultivators) became assimilated with the Shudras. The Shudra became synonymous with the class of peasantry. The Shudras were again divided into the Satvik Shudras, *i.e.,* the cultivators and the non-Satvik *shudras*, the laborers. Also, an ati-Shudra caste of Untouchables were born. The Untouchables could not own land or wealth and were usually laborers.

The Kshatriyas became a bigger Varna in size with the numerous new foreign and local entrants to it

It is in this stage that we see the jatis being born. Many *jatis* composed a Varna. Also, classes were composed of many *jatis*. The Kshatriya and Brahmin castes comprised the ruling class. The Varnashrama Dharma outlined the hierarchy and also who were the rulers and who could be exploited. Thus the jatis were fitted into the Varnashrama Dharma scheme by the ruling classes. Also, the new entrants were given befitting status by the theory of the newly invented *varnasamskara* theory.

Thus we see that though classes did not take exactly the form of the Varna after the tribal stage, i.e., during the Arthasashtra and the feudal stages, yet, the two higher Varnas comprised the ruling class of Indian

feudalism during, and after, the Gupta period (4th century AD).

Muslim rule, from the 13th century AD onwards, did not bring about any fundamental changes, although certain things, like the Persian wheel or the *Araghata*, helped increase agricultural production. Also, the introduction of cement lime helped in storage of water, etc. Yet rural parts of the country stayed as they were in the matters of caste and class. Though Islam did not discriminate and did its own bit in loosening the bonds of caste, yet, the higher castes remained close to the seats of power from the local level to the center. Muslim feudalism collaborated and colluded with Hindu feudalism. There were no fundamental changes in the realm of production relations, *i.e.,* the base. Thus, though the composition of the ruling classes changed, the majority of the lower castes were the lower classes also.

6.2. The British Period and the Birth of New Classes

Before the British colonized India, during the Mughal rule, trade and urbanization had again gained ascendancy — a new mercantile class was born. This nascent national bourgeoisie was crushed by the colonial plunder in its infantile stage itself.

It was during the British period that the modern proletariat was born, as also the comprador bourgeoisie was born and brought up by the imperialists. Within the peasantry too, a slow and gradual differentiation was taking place. It was from this period onwards that caste and class coincided less and less

For, from amongst the peasant and artisan castes of the Shudra status, came the factory worker. Also, the former ati-Shudra Untouchables, the Dalits, were

recruited in large numbers in the army, railways, road construction and in unskilled jobs in the factories. The mines and the plantations also employed the Dalits and the *Adivasis*. All these together constituted the modern proletariat.

The merchants and moneylenders were from amongst the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Muslims, erstwhile Vaishyas, the trading communities and from the erstwhile Shudras also.

The comprador business houses came from amongst the *Banias*, *i.e.,* trading caste and communities, like the Parsis, the Jains and from the Khattiya, i.e., the Kshatriya caste. A few were from the Brahmin and erstwhile Shudra castes. The bureaucracy was dominated by the Brahmins, the Kayasthas, the Anglo-Indians, the Parsis, the Muslim educated elite, *etc.*

The British also legally constituted classes notified as landlords (other than *Vatandars* or *Inamdars*), tenants and laborers. Although the *Zamindars*, the *Khotedars* and the *Talukdars* mostly came from the upper castes, the smaller landlords and rich peasants, notified as tenants, came from the erstwhile Shudra castes. The ati-Shudras, Adivasis, and the Nomadic Tribes constituted the bulk of the landless and agricultural labor force. Also, a large section of the impoverished Shudra peasants became laborers and landless.

Thus, within each caste, classes were created and the modern proletariat especially was a multi-caste class with the *Savarnas* and the Dalits both within its fold. The peasantry was composed of the Shudra and the ati-Shudra castes. The higher caste predominance over the

means of production continued. These were also well entrenched in the bureaucracy.

Since the British did not bring about a change in a throughgoing manner, since they merely superimposed their colonial rule, keeping the material base as intact as possible, changing and transforming only what was necessary and suitable for their purpose, India became a semi-feudal society under colonial rule.

6.3. Post-1947: Caste and Class

Post 1947, India saw even more changes, especially, in rural India. Semi-feudal and semi-colonial India saw the rise of new casteclass configurations, due to the growth of some capitalist relations and blows delivered by the people's movements. In the rural areas, especially, the pre-dominance of the Brahmin and the Kshatriya castes has been reduced and their place has been taken up by the upper section of the erstwhile Shudra castes. The ruling elite in the countryside now composes not only of the Brahmin, Rajput, Vellala, Bhumihar castes, etc., but also of the Patidars, Patels, Marathas, Kunbis, Jats, Yadavas, Kurmis, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, Kamma, Reddys, *etc.*

The bulk of the middle peasants come from the erstwhile Shudra caste while the small, landless and poor peasants comprise the Shudra and ati-Shudra castes, Nomadic Tribes, Adivasis and religious minorities.

Thus, today, a close correspondence between class and caste does not exist. Today, it is not possible to establish multi-class unity along the lines of the non-Brahmin movements, against the feudal elite, as was possible earlier.

Today, unity along caste lines can only lead to class collaboration and making the toiling masses of the oppressed castes into tails of the exploiting sections of their own castes. Unity along class lines can provide the basis for the comprehensive struggle against the caste system, *i.e.,* real unity forged by taking up the caste question as the question of the entire oppressed classes.

7. Caste and Agrarian Revolution

During the colonial rule, we see, in the agrarian sector, broadly two trends within the movements of the peasantry. The one led by the All India Kisan Sabha and the other by the Non-Brahmin organizations.

7.1. The Non-Brahmin Movements

The leadership of most of the Non-Brahmin movements during the British period failed to understand the nexus between British rule and feudalism.

They failed to realize that feudalism was the social prop of British Imperialism and that the British were in alliance with decadent feudalism, propping it up, and also utilizing the putrid caste system, modifying it to their advantage.

Another important failing was that they did not correctly put forward how to break the control of the ruling classes on the forces of production and how to establish the real control of toilers over them and, thus, how the political power of the toiling masses is to be established. Therefore, while hitting out at upper caste domination in the bureaucracy, and caste and feudal authority, thus assaulting feudalism and making dents in it and the caste system, no revolutionary transformation could be effected.

The Non-Brahmin movements took up struggles against money-lending and other caste/feudal related non-economic forms of oppression, against the hereditary nature of posts, the domination of upper castes in the educational and cultural sphere, etc. They also took up issues like taxation, rent, access to water, *etc*. Nearly every Non-Brahmin movement had a strong nationality content.

Although, these movements, could build a united front by rallying the erstwhile Shudra and ati-Shudra castes, *i.e.,* the Bahujan Samaj, the leadership of these movements were by-and-large the rich and middle peasantry — who gained substantially in the social and economical sphere. The lower-level landlords came from the upper sections of the erstwhile Shudra castes, e.g., the Marathas/Kunbhis. Utilizing these movements they gained ascendancy even in the political sphere and became co-opted into the ruling-class political structure at the Taluka, District and Provincial levels.

It was the radical trends within these movements which joined the communist fold in many provinces. But the communist leadership failed to lead these mass-movements by drawing correct lessons from them. For example, a class analysis of the non-Brahmin movement was not done. The limitation of caste based mobilization was not really understood. Most important, the significance of the anti-feudal struggle was not recognized, as also, the caste question, as an important question for the success of the New Democratic Revolution, was not understood at all.

7.2. The Dalit Movements

The Dalit movements separated themselves from the Non-Brahmin movements, (at times even ideologically), and took up militant mass struggles against feudal and caste bondage. Struggles for entry into temples and the use of common water tanks became widespread. In the realm of production relations, the struggles centered on the refusal to perform traditional caste duties, performing forced labor for the landlords and government officials. Another arena of struggle,

representing the aspirations of growing Dalit petty-bourgeoisie, was related to the access to education and employment.

The Dalit movement, like the Non-Brahmin movements, failed in understanding the link between British Imperialism and feudalism. They did not grasp the fact that the key to demolish the caste system lay in demolishing the semi-feudal, semi-colonial relations of production. The linking up of the struggle to control the means of production, and the seizure of power as a strategy to demolish feudalism, was not understood. In fact, the Dalits were encouraged to leave the village arena and take up challenges in other avenues. The Dalit movements tried to build up a united front with the working class in the urban areas but there were few attempts in the rural areas, where caste oppression was strong. There was an objective reason for this — it was difficult for the Dalit movement to propose a unity with the non-Dalits, who had strong biases against them and practiced untouchability. Another reason due to which class unity could not be achieved was the sectarian outlook of the Dalit leadership, also seen in the urban areas later.

7.3. The All-India Kisan Sabha Led Movements

The *kisan* movements, too, had taken up caste related issues varyingly in different provinces. In some areas they turned a blind eye to the issue, for instance, in Maharashtra, where, even after winning over the radical sections of the Non-Brahmin movement, it did not draw upon its lessons. In some areas it did take up the issue to a limited extent, but in the name of not damaging the

united front of different classes of peasants, still pandered to the upper-caste biases of the *kisan* leadership.

The *kisan* movements took up the issues of Zamindari abolishment, forced and hereditary labor, money-lending and various other non-economic, caste related forms of oppression, increase in wages, etc. They were also much linked to the national aspirations of each region.

The *kisan* movements, too, did actually build up the Bahujan unity in the rural areas, but they did not take up the caste question as a question to be solved, neither at the practical level nor at the theoretical and political plane (*i.e.,* understanding its relative importance for the accomplishment of the New Democratic Revolution and drawing up a special programme for it).

Since the CPI leadership turned revisionist, it betrayed the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles, although the rank-andfile often led heroic struggles. The middle and rich peasantry, from the upper castes and a section of the middle castes, who were at the forefront of these movements, gained the most. Zamindari abolishment, for the revisionists in most areas, meant land distribution — it did not mean the seizure of power and the ownership of production in the hands of landless and poor peasants.

It was only during the Telengana movement and consciously from Naxalbari onwards that the connection between the "land to the tillers" slogan and the ownership of the means of production and seizure of political power was outlined. Only by displacing the landlords from power and the ownership of the chief means of production, *i.e.,* land, and implementing the land to the tiller slogan, and placing power in the hands of the

peasantry, led by the landless and poor peasantry and agricultural laborers, can feudalism be demolished and caste-linked feudal authority smashed.

7.4. Agrarian Revolution

Today, the genuine liberation of the oppressed castes lies in advancing the Agrarian Revolution along with the demands of "land to the tiller" and "power to the people" committees. This is to be achieved by uniting the most oppressed with the poorer sections of all other castes, and building up the new power structures with the landless and poor peasants in the leadership; thereby overthrowing the trio of feudalism, imperialism and comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie, which serves as the basis for the continuation of caste oppression.

An oppressed caste-class unity, forged by means of facing repression together, the gaining of self-respect and self-confidence among the oppressed castes, through the armed might of the people and the growth of people's authority, during the course of the armed agrarian revolution, are pointers to the methods, with which to solve the caste questions, in the course of the struggle.

The mobilization of the oppressed castes into revolutionary class struggles in rural Telengana, rural Bihar-Jharkhand, formerly a region of the most savage feudal forms of caste-class oppression, based on the demands of land-to-the-tiller and for the establishment of people's authority in place of caste-linked feudal authority, along with the other general demands of the peasantry, shows the path of solving the problem of caste.

With agrarian revolution as the central task it is also necessary to fight any and every form of caste

oppression and discrimination, and, particularly, its most horrendous form in untouchability. Smashing the hierarchy of caste is a necessary aspect of the democratic reorganization of Indian society; and removing the upper-caste biases is a necessary requisite for strengthening class unity of the oppressed (coming from all the castes).

8. Towards Some Tasks for Caste Annihilation

The programme of the party of the proletariat against caste system, has as its perspective that the anti-caste struggle must aim to overthrow feudalism, imperialism, and the comprador bureaucrat capitalism, the classes which are upholding the caste system in India today. Hence,

1. The proletariat must direct the class struggle against the caste system as an integral part of the struggle to accomplish the New Democratic Revolution.
2. For this, mobilize all the exploited classes in the struggle against caste oppression, exploitation and discrimination.
3. Smash caste-linked feudal authority in the villages and place political power in the hands of the oppressed classes, led by the landless and poor peasants.
4. Struggle to implement land-to–the-tiller, keeping the interests of landless peasantry and poor peasantry at the forefront.
5. Wage an ideological struggle against Brahminical casteist ideology and all other forms of casteist thinking. Expose the casteist ideology in the scriptures like the Manusmriti, the Gita, and the Vedas, *etc*.
6. While upholding the right of the individual to pursue his or her faith, conduct a relentless ideological struggle against all forms of caste rituals and practices, like thread ceremony (*moonj*), etc.
7. Fight against propagation of vegetarianism, based on its link with "purity," and other forms of

superstition regarding "pollution." Oppose Gohatya Bandi.

8. Fight social stigma against certain occupations and customs of lower castes, like beef eating or pork eating.
9. Fight against symbols of caste identity and degradation, and the language and culture having a caste slang.
10. Defend and actively support the struggle of the Dalit masses for self respect. Defend the right of the Dalits to enter temples and to convert.
11. Struggle for the civic and social rights of the Dalits and other lower castes, and oppose discrimination, *e.g.,* use of common wells, hotels, toilets, and hostels, *etc.*
12. Struggle for equal participation of lower castes in social functions. Try to establish social intercourse between the people belonging to various castes participating in the class struggle. Encourage inter-dining among different castes.
13. Oppose housing schemes based on caste segregation.
14. Defend and encourage inter-caste marriages. Demand incentives for all inter-caste marriages. Children of inter-caste marriages should get facilities as accorded to either parent.
15. End use of caste names in official records.
16. Encourage trade unions to take initiative in the implementation of reservation policy. Fight for reservations in private sector. (Public limited companies).
17. Fight bureaucratic delays and corruption in loans and subsidies for Scheduled Castes and OBCs.

18. Demand special schemes to upgrade technology and the skills of lower castes and artisan groups.
19. Demand increase in scholarship amount and improved facilities in hostels for SCs and Sts.
20. Expose the reactionary nature of caste associations, especially, upper caste associations.
21. Fight against and expose the casteist leadership within the oppressed castes, who prevent the class unity of the toiling masses. There is a false consciousness among the poor people belonging to the upper castes that they are socially equal with the rich people of their castes. We have to expose this myth and make them understand that their real comrades-in-arms are the oppressed people of other castes. We should never put caste before class.
22. Fight and expose the opportunistic and reformist trends within the leadership of the oppressed castes. Fight bourgeois democratic illusions among oppressed castes.
23. Struggle against caste prejudices and caste beliefs within the ranks of the proletariat and other sections of the toiling masses, and build up a struggling unity among the exploited classes.
24. The communists should be one among the oppressed people of all castes and be with them in words and deeds. At the same time we should expose the pseudo communists who are rank casteists in practice.
25. Educate and struggle against casteist beliefs of activists of mass organizations.
26. Form special platforms of democratic sections to fight caste discrimination and pogroms against lower castes.

27. Form anti-riot squads in defence of lower castes in areas of caste tensions.
28. Propagate materialist scientific ideology, promote atheism.
29. Struggle to create a democratic culture, based on equality of all irrespective of caste and gender.

9. Caste After the New Democratic Revolution

The CPI held the position that caste oppression shall automatically disappear after a revolution. Caste was only seen in the superstructure and it was interpreted that once the base changes, the problem of the superstructure would not be of much hindrance.

In fact, it is not only that after the seizure of power that castes shall remain in the realm of the superstructure, even before, we shall have to recognize it as a reality and struggle against it. Wherever it exists, even if remnants of the caste system continue, it has to be fought against.

The other fact is that the problems of superstructure cannot be postponed till after the seizure of power. Even during the revolution, while destroying it at its roots in the base itself, we shall have to struggle against caste-discrimination and prejudices, wherever they occur.

After the seizure of power by the four class united front, based on the worker-peasant alliance, led by the proletariat, caste based exploitation, that is, caste system in the realm of production relations, shall be abolished. (Even before the countrywide seizure of power, if power is seized in an area then the above shall hold true). Caste institution-held big private property or temple held big private property shall be seized.

Caste discrimination shall be fought against. Untouchability shall not only be abolished, but punishment shall be meted out to anyone practicing it.

All caste-based inequalities shall be done away with. Reservations shall continue and incentives shall be given to lower castes to develop the required skills.

Not only in the rural areas, but also in the urban sector, lower castes shall be given the training and skills to enhance their knowledge. In the rural sector, caste

based occupations shall be abolished and alternate employment given by teaching new methods and techniques. Localized agro-based industries shall be promoted, handicraft industries shall be gradually mechanized.

Agriculture shall be developed and industrialized and industry shall be based on agriculture.

Reservation and preferences shall be continued in the educational sphere for the oppressed castes, particularly the Dalits.

Encouragement, protection and incentives shall be given to inter-caste, inter-community marriages.

At the ideological and cultural plane, the fight against Brahminical practices, *Pujapath*, superstition, rituals, religious and caste prejudices, contempt for labor, and any and every symbol of hierarchical superiority, *etc.,* shall continue, while upholding one's right to practice one's faith.

The gap between mental and manual labour, urban and rural divide, sexual and caste discrimination shall be continuously fought against.

Learning from Mao's China, wherein the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution had taken place, we shall have to emulate and learn lessons continuously to create the new person, the socialist person. In the Indian context it means, specifically, eradicating all caste sentiments and ingrained thoughts of superiority through a continuous process of cultural revolutions.

Appendix:
Manifesto of the Dalit Panthers (1973)

Today we, the "Dalit Panthers", complete one year of our existence. Because of its clear revolutionary position, the "Panthers" is growing in strength despite the strong resistance faced by it from many sides. It is bound to grow because it has recognized the revolutionary nature and aspirations of the masses with whose smiles and tears it has been bound up since its inception. During last year, motivated attempts have been made, especially in the far corners of Maharashtra, to create misunderstandings about our members and our activities. Misconceptions about the objectives of the 'Panthers', about our commitment to total revolutionary and democratic struggles, and about its policies, are being spread. It has, therefore, become necessary clearly to put forward our position.

Because, "Panthers" no longer represent an emotional outburst of the dalits. Instead, its character has changed into that of a political organization. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar always taught his followers to base their calculations about their political strategy on deep study of the political situation confronting them. It is necessary and indispensible for us to keep this ideal before us. Otherwise we might "mistake the back of tortoise for a rock," and may be drowned in no time.

The present Congress rule is essentially a continuation of the old Hindu feudalism which kept the Dalits deprived of power, wealth and status for thousands of years. Therefore, this Congress rule cannot bring about social change. Under pressure of the masses it passed many laws but it cannot implement them. Because the entire state machinery is dominated by the feudal interests, the same hands who, for thousands of years, under religious sanctions, controlled all the wealth 'and power, today own most of the agricultural land,

industry, economic resources and all other instruments of power. Therefore, in spite of independence and the democratic set-ups, the problems of the dalits remain unsolved. Untouchability has remained intact. It remains intact because the government did not do anything to eradicate it except passing some laws against it. To eradicate untouchability, all the land will have to be redistributed. Age-old customs and scriptures will have to be destroyed and new ideas inculcated. The village organization, the social organization, peoples' attitude – all these will have to be restructured to suit true democratic objectives. We must pay attention to the objective process of the power that imprisons the dalit and which has succeeded in making him tie his own hands. The Hindu feudal rule can be a hundred time more ruthless today in oppressing the dalits than it was in the Muslim period or the British period.

Because this Hindu feudal rule has in its hands all the arteries of production, bureaucracy, judiciary, army and police forces, in the shape of feudal, landlords, capitalists and religious leaders who stand behind and enable these instruments to thrive. Hence the problem of untouchability of the dalits is no more one of mere mental slavery. Untouchability is the most violent form of exploitation on the surface of the earth, which survives the ever-changing forms of the power structure. Today it is necessary to seek its soil, its root causes. If we understand them, we can definitely strike at the heart of this exploitation. The oppression of dalits still exists despite the lives and work of our two great leaders – Jotiba Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar. It is not only alive, it is stronger. Hence, unless we understand and give shape to the revolutionary content latent in the downtrodden lives of the untouchables, not a single

individual seeking a social revolution would be able to remain alive in India.

Truly speaking, the problem of dalits, or scheduled castes and tribes, has become a broad problem, the dalit is no longer merely an untouchable outside the village walls and the scriptures. He is untouchable, and he is a dalit, but he is also a worker, a landless labourer, a proletarian. And unless we strengthen this growing revolutionary unity of the many with all our efforts, our existence has no future. The dalit must accordingly accept the sections of masses, the other revolutionary forces as part of his own movement. Only then will he be able to fight his enemies effectively. If this does not take place, we shall be condemned to a condition worse than slavery. We must develop and help this consciousness ripen every year, every month, day, hour and every moment. Then alone shall we possess the right to be called human beings at all. It was for this that Dr. Ambedkar made us realize our humanity even in our state of beast-like exploitation. We should, to be successful, accept and understand a thing only after deep study, with a calm mind. We should not fall prey to slogans and outbursts. We must uproot the varna system, the caste system that enslaves us in its snares. The soil in which it survives and grows must be made infertile. We must understand that the caste nature of the term dalit is breaking down.

What has the government done for the dalits?

When India obtained Independence in 1947, the face of the administrative class changed. In the place of the king's prime minister came the "people's representative." In the place of the Vedas, Upnishands,

Manusmriti and Gita, came the Constitution. On a blank page, independence, equality, brotherhood proliferated. From 1947 to 1974 is a long period of time. In these 27 years the Congress government, turning the freedom struggle into its own capital, has been ruling with a monopoly. Four five-year plans, five general elections and three wars have gone by in this post-independence "coming of age." But the problems and needs of the dalits, of the entire population, have been kept in a sort of deep freeze by the government.

Beyond preserving state power in its hands, the government has done nothing else. On the contrary, by raising slogans of people's rule, of socialism, 'garibi hatao' (eliminate poverty), and green revolution, it has crushed the dalits, the landless, poor peasants and the working class under its feet. Gambling with their lives, tempting a handful amongst them, the government tried persistently to endanger their very existence. Using divisive tactics that split people along religious, caste and other lines, they endangered the very integrity of democracy. In a democracy where men cannot exercise self-respect, well-being and an importance to their lives, where men cannot develop his individuality and his society, where those who with their blood wet every grain of the country's soil have to starve, where men have to forgo the land under their feet, the roof over their heads, where the upright have to break down and fall, where men have to see their mothers and sisters raped, in such a democracy, independence cannot be called true independence.

The struggle for independence was a struggle under the leadership of national capitalists, landlords, feudal, for their own benefit. It was not under the leadership of the people, or of the Dalits. And Dr.

Ambedkar had always said that it should be of the latter. That man called Gandhi in whose hands the leadership of the struggle rested, was deceitful, cunning, an orthodox casteist and one who gave shelter to those who wanted to preserve class rule. Merely to preserve the unity of the Independence struggle, he flirted with problems of the Dalits, of untouchability, of the people. And that is why Babasaheb (Ambedkar) called him, time and again, the enemy of the people, the villain of the nation. Babasaheb used to say, Gandhism means preservation of religious authority, Gandhism means traditionalism, Gandhism means casteism, Gandhism means preservation of traditional divisions of labour, Gandhism means incarnationism, Gandhism means the holy cow, Gandhism means worship of images, Gandhism means an unscientific outlook.

The British gave up their rule because of the seamen's mutiny, the emergence of the Azad Hind army, because of the struggles of the peasants, workers and dalits. Because of these they could no longer remain in power. Giving independence to Gandhi and Gandhians meant that the British wanted their own interests in the country to be looked after. This was the sort of borrowed independence we got. True independence is one that is snatched forcibly out of the hands of the enemy. One that is like bits thrown to a helpless beggar is no independence. In every house and every mind the flame of true independence has to be ignited. This did not happen. That is why the Dalit, the worker, the landless and the poor peasant did not become free; the muck at the bottom of the pond remained where it was and, in fact, the government that retained the status quo kept on telling bigger and bigger lies to the Dalits.

What have other parties done for the dalits?

The left parties, having fought five elections, have grown bankrupt. They are now interested in moving from election to election. In 1967, the Left parties united against the Congress. There was such opportunism in the united front that parties like the communists joined hands with communalist parties such as Jan Sangh and Muslim League. In some states, Left united fronts came to power. But the absence of a clear cut programme made the anti-Congress stand useless. In the task of putting some alternative before the people, of solving the problems of the dalits, of establishing the rule of the poor in the country, all the Left parties proved powerless.

As a result, revolutionary people's groups lost faith in electoral democracy. Uprisings like Naxalbari took place and the spark spread around the country. With the 1972 elections, things came back to square one. The Congress sat like a beast on the heads of the dalits, of the people; famine struck, the very livelihoods of crores of people were uprooted, animals perished. Factories were shut down, workers faced unemployment, everyone was harassed by the mounting price rise. The full eclipse that Congress rule represents for the life of the country has not yet terminated. But our Left parties, playing the politics of parliamentary seats, are still wasting time trying to get recognition from the Congress. Not one dares to turn revolutionary to take up the problems of the people. All those Left parties who do not possess political power have ignored questions of a social revolution. They have not combine he class struggle with the struggle against untouchability, have not raised a voice against cultural and social domination along with economic exploitation. Untouchability is nothing but an

extremely poisonous sort of exploitation. This exploitative system was given birth to by Hindu feudalism and thrives for its benefit. The framework of untouchability is simply widening with the help of the army, the prisons, the legal system and the bureaucracy.

Under the name of highflown philosophy and liberation of the soul (*moksha, nirvana*), dalits have been deprived of earthly happiness, and have been looted of all they possess. With the industrial revolution, machines came into being. Dalits were harnessed to the machines. But in the minds of the upper castes, feudalism survived. Because the owners of the machines could make a profit only by keeping the social structure intact. Only if a social revolution grips the minds of the dalits, will there be a political revolution. If this takes place, the upper caste, the upper class, will lose the power it possesses. The stand that is take by the Left parties prevents the spread of revolutionary ideology amongst the people. Because struggles really and truly meaningful to the dalits were not conducted, dalits have grown poorer. They have had to face innumerable atrocities.

The Republican Party and the Dalit Panthers

The problems of the dalits today, be they social, political or ethical, cannot be solved within the framework of religion and caste. This is what Dr. Babasaheb realized after his defeat in the 1952 general elections. A scientific outlook, class consciousness and a completely atheistic approach and fighting for humanism alone could add an edge to the struggles of the dalits. For this purpose, Dr. Ambedkar wanted to transfer the then-

existing Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) into a broad-based party. This could not happen during his life time.

After his death, his 'followers' simply renamed SCF as the Republican Party started to pursue casteist politics. They never united all the dalits and all the oppressed. Above all, they conducted the politics of a revolutionary community like the dalits in a legalistic manner. The party got enmeshed in the web of votes, demands, select places for a handful of the dalits and concessions. So the dalit population scattered over the country, in many villages, remained politically where they were. The leadership of the party went into the hands of the middle class in the community. Intrigue, selfishness and division became rife. Destroying the revolutionary voice of Dr. Ambedkar, these contemptible leaders made capital out of his name and set up their beggars' bowls. This is Dr. Ambedkar's party, they said. This is Dr. Ambedkar's flag, they said, and filled their coffers. And thus, except the satyagraha of the landless conducted under the Dadasaheb Gaekwad's leadership, the party did not take up any programme worth its name. the atrocities against dalits grew endemic. In a period of one and a half years, 1117 dalits were murdered. The land grew barren, not a drop of water was available. Honour was violated, houses gutted, people killed. Along with the very question of living, physical indignities grew sharper. What did the Republican Party do? The party got caught in the net cast by a cunning ruling-class leader like Yashwantrao Chavan. Its life perished. Unity vanished, impotents filled the party. If we put our future in the hands of such impotent leaders, we will forgo our very lives, and that is why today we have to announce with deep pain that we are no blood relatives of the Republican Party.

The dalits of the world and the Panthers

Due to the hideous plot of American imperialism, the Third Dalit World, that is, oppressed nations, and dalit people are suffering. Even in America, a handful of reactionary whites are exploiting blacks. To meet the force of reaction and remove this exploitation, the Black Panther movement grew. From the Black Panthers, Black Power emerged. The fire of the struggles has thrown out sparks into the country. We claim a close relationship with this struggle. We have before our eyes the examples of Vietnam, Cambodia, Africa and the like.

Who is a dalit?

Members of scheduled castes and tribes, Neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion.

Who are our friends?

1) Revolutionary parties set to break down the caste system and class rule. Left parties that are left in a true sense. **2)** All other sections of society that are suffering due to the economic and political oppression.

Who are our enemies?

1) Power, wealth, price. **2)** Landlords, capitalists, money-lenders and their lackeys. **3)** Those parties who indulge in religious or casteist politics, and the government which depends on them.

Burning questions before dalits today

1) Food, clothing, shelter **2)** Employment, land, untouchability **3)** Social and physical injustice.

The struggle for the emancipation of the dalits needs a complete revolution. Partial change is impossible. We do not want it either. We want a complete and total revolutionary change. Even if we want to move out of the present state of social degradation alone, we will have to exercise our power in economic, political, cultural fields as well. We will not be satisfied easily now. We do not want a little place in the Brahmin alley. We want to rule the whole country. We are not looking at persons but at a system. Change of heart, liberal education, etc. will not end our state of exploitation. When we gather a revolutionary mass, rouse the people, out of the struggle of this giant mass will come the tidal wave of revolutions. Legalistic appeals, requests, demands for concessions, elections, *satyagraha* – out of these, society will never change. Our ideas of social revolution and rebellion will be too strong for such paper-made vehicles of protest. They will sprout in the soil flower in the mind and then will come forward with full force with the help of steel-strong means.

Dalit Panther is not a mere slogan

The way we look at our questions is the first step to solving them. Panthers will paralyzingly attack untouchability, casteism and economic exploitation. This social system and state have taken maya cruel path to convert us into slaves. Turned us long back into 'shudras'. In the present modem forms of slavery there

are mental chains of slavishness. We will try to break them. In our struggle we will become free.

Our Programmes:

1. More than 80 per cent of India's population lives in the villages. Of those, landless peasants are 35 per cent, and 33 per cent of all landless agricultural labourers belong to scheduled castes. (Those Dalit poor peasants who do own pieces ofland, own a negligible amount). The question of landlessness of the dalit peasants must be resolved.
2. Landless peasants must immediately get excess land through the application of the Land Ceiling Act. Waste and jungle land must likewise be distributed.
3. Feudal survivals are still to be found in the villages. Due to this, dalits are cruelly oppressed and exploited. Landlords and rich peasants get social prestige along with wealth. Due to this, the atrocities on dalits have grown endemic. This system has clamped itself on the dalit's chest, affecting every part of his life, from day to day living to the deeper economic questions. This system must be destroyed.
4. The wages oflandless labourers must be increased.
5. Dalits must be allowed to draw water from public wells.
6. Dalits must live, not outside the village in a separate settlement, but in the village itself.
7. All means of production must belong to the dalits.
8. Exploitation by private capital must cease.
9. Social, cultural and economic exploitation must be removed and socialism must be built in India.

Misleading nationalization must give away to a true introduction of socialism.

10. All dalits must be assured of daily wages.
11. Unemployed dalits must be given unemployment benefits.
12. All dalits must be given free education, medical facilities, housing and good quality cheap grains.
13. When giving employment in educational institutions, the requirements to declare one's caste and religion must be immediately removed.
14. The government must stop giving grants to religious institutions immediately and the wealth of religious places must be used for the benefit of dalits.
15. Religious and casteist literature must be banned.
16. The division in the army along caste lines must be ended.
17. Black marketeers; hoarders, money-lenders and all those exploiting the people economically must be destroyed.
18. The prices of essential commodities must be refunded.

We will build the organization of workers, dalits, landless, poor peasants through all city factories, in all villages. We will hit back against all injustice perpetrated on Dalits. We will well and truly destroy the caste and varna system that thrives on the people's misery, which exploits the people, and liberate the dalits. The present legal system and state have turned all our dreams to dust. To eradicate all the injustice against the dalits, they must themselves become rulers. This is the people's democracy. Sympathizers and members of the Dalit Panthers be ready for the final struggle of the dalits.