

CASTE QUESTION IN INDIA
-OUR PERSPECTIVE

CENTRAL COMMITTEE
CPI (M-L) (PEOPLE'S WAR)

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CHAPTER-I

ORIGIN OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system is one of the specific problems of the Indian Democratic Revolution. Linked to the specific nature of the evolution of the Indian society, it has been one of the most important means of exploitation and oppression of the labouring masses, from the ancient to the modern period. For the ruling classes in India, the caste system serves both as an ideology as well as a social system that enables them to repress and exploit the majority of toilers. To root out the caste system we have to first understand its origin and development.

The history of caste can be traced back to over 3000 years. It is inextricably linked to the development of class society, the 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 the development of the caste system can be traced through the following periods :

1. Post Rig-Vedic The Varnashrama Dharma period :

In the period from 1500 B.C. when Aryan pastoral tribes clashed with agricultural and non-agricultural tribal communities, varnas as classes came into existence. The Kshatriya and Brahmin were the ruling alliance and the Vaishyas the exploited peasantry. The Shudra as captive slaves and the lowest varna, came into existence when agriculture emerged as the dominant production system. The state emerged around 500 B.C.

2. The Proto-feudal period :

The period from 500 B.C. to the fourth century A.D., the period of the expansion of agriculture marked by the widespread use of the Iron plough and village settlement. Surplus was expropriated in the form of taxation and tributes from the Vaishya peasantry. In the vast tracts of King's lands (Sita lands) Shudras performed forced labour. Trade and large kingdoms grew. Buddhism and Jainism became prevalent.

3. The caste-based feudal period :

This period from the fourth Century A.D., onwards upto the arrival of the British was marked by the rise of small feudatories and intermediaries between the King and the people who were given land grants and right to collect revenue. The caste system became consolidated. Buddhism and Jainism declined. Brahminism gained-ascendancy.

For a country as vast as India, the above can only be broad periods. There will of course be differences regarding every specific region, yet broad trends apply to the whole of India.

By 2000 B.C. itself, in India there were civilized societies belonging to Bronze Age that practised simple agriculture. The Dravidians in the Indus Valley region grew crops by irrigating lands after building dams on the rivers, when even iron and plough had not been known. Cities like Mohanjodaro and Harappa were built when the world was still in the threshold of civilization. The merchants of Indus region had trade relations with ancient civil societies like Nile and Mesopotamia. During that period in northern and southern parts of India, there were small agricultural and tribal societies of the Bronze Age. Some tribes were engaged in agriculture, food-gathering and cattle rearing. In southern parts there was maritime trade also. But the production was lower than that of Iron Age. All of it was concentrated in the hands of King, Priest and trading class. The pastoral Aryans entered India in 2000 B.C. By then itself, they knew weaving, practice of medicine and making of weapons. They defeated the civilized Bronze Age Dravidians and the Stone Age barbarians who were less civilized than themselves. The patriarchal system of Aryans replaced the then existing matriarchal system of Dravidians.

The Vedic Aryans entered from the Punjab side and spread towards the Gangetic doab. They were already divided into an aristocracy (Rajanya), priests (Brahmins) and ordinary clansman (Vis). In the incessant conflicts and wars associated with their spread eastwards, conflicts among the various pastoral Aryan tribes and between the Aryan tribes and local tribes for cattle, water sources, land and at a later stage also for slaves, sections of tribes that were defeated began to be enslaved, known as *dasas-dasyus*.

Whenever there were fights between Aryans and other tribes, the *Dasas* fought on behalf of the Aryans. The *Dasas* and other non-Aryans who were enslaved by the Aryans did not become slaves to the Aryans since the society of Aryans who taken to food production by that time in

North India was not based upon private property but was a clan society based on collective property of land and cattle. They became servants for the entire Aryan clans i.e. became Sudras. As the Dasas were not subjugated into slaves but into Sudras, the Roman type of slave system did not evolve in India. Instead an under-developed slave society emerged.

The wars increased the importance of the chieftains. They relied on ritualism to enhance their prestige and to consolidate it, and to appropriate the surplus through these rituals. Tributes of cattle and slaves were given by the ordinary vis to the rajanyas. The rajanyas, in alliance with the Brahmins increasingly performed major and minor yagnas. The ruling elite and the priests lived off the gifts (dana/bali) given to them by the 'vis' at these yagnas. At this stage the tribal organisations based on clan and kin were still dominant. The emergence of the Brahmin and Kshatriya varnas was the process of breaking down of the kin based clans 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 tribes. The pastoral tribes had adopted agriculture from the local tribes. The chieftain clans and the priestly clans were being incorporated in the Kshatriya and Brahmin varnas respectively. There was thus a continuous assimilation of the non-Aryans into the Aryans. In spite of it, the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins constituted only a minority of the Aryan population. The subjugated tribals, both Aryan and non-Aryan, gradually came to form the Shudra varna. Not all of them were slaves. While domestic slavery existed, yet it was basically the vaishya peasants (from the kin-based 'vis' the broader vaishya varna emerged) and the Shudras (a smaller varna in size relatively) 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 B.C., 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 dominant 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 over their own clans and tribes but also the territories they

commanded. The varnashramadharma was already being developed by the Brahmin priestly class. The rituals became more complex, time and wealth consuming. These rituals were the means through 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 legitimised 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.

The Aryans also utilised social and cultural assimilation and adjustments along with violence, as tools. Varnas are classes of the period when the production was in its primitive stages. The Aryans under the guise of religio-philosophical form appropriated the surplus production from producers. Gradually the differences between Aryans and non-Aryans died down and new tribal economy emerged. The Brahmins who were performing sacrificial rituals of vedic period and other priestly acts entered the forests and gave respectability to the innumerable superstitions. They made genealogy of tribes and princely families as epics. They accepted the tribal customs of worshipping serpents and monkeys as well as human and animal sacrifices in order to make friendship with local leaders. Thus the Brahmins by giving official recognition to superstition of these tribes, could muster the co-operation of the opposing forces. They introduced agricultural techniques to the ancient primitive tribes who did not know long-term observation nor mathematics while determining the lunar calendar and astronomy which was essential for agricultural activity. Although the emergence of this new system - the use of iron plough and such other new instruments of production, and food production as the main source of livelihood-had also developed gradually by 1000 B.C. itself, they did not completely give up the form of clan system until (around) 600 B.C.

By 6th century BC, Aryans began to come down towards south in small batches. Armed aggressions did not become necessary to spread Aryan culture in the south. The hitherto chieftains of tribals before the advent of Aryans were recognised as kings. Clan priests came into the newly emerged Brahmin elite. As the clan system declined and surplus production increased the trade expanded.

Development of agriculture, including paddy cultivation in the Gangetic plains was accompanied by increasing division of labour and the

growth of trade. Private property in land emerged. Towns developed. New classes came into existence - the Vaishya traders and the Gahapatis (the land owners). The Gahapatis did not till the land but got slaves or Shudras to till it. Tensions between the upper two varnas and the lower two varnas emerged, and tensions between those who owned and those who laboured also emerged. This led to the emergence of the state. The first states emerged in the Gangetic plains, and in Bihar.

The early states and the ruling clans in the proto-states yet relied on yagnas and rituals to buttress and legitimize their rule, upheld the varna order and private property. Gifts were replaced by taxes. The upper two varnas were not taxed.

But the newly emerging classes from the vaishya varna, the powerful merchant guilds, the artisans guilds and the lower two varnas on the whole and the non-subjugated tribal community did not accept the varnashram dharma ideology and the order it propagated. The emerging agrarian economy too had no use of the expensive rituals based on sacrifice of animals including cattle wealth. Numerous philosophies and 'Lokayata', Buddhism and Jainism gained prominence.

The Mauryan Empire, the first major full formed state in India in the third century B.C., reflected this new reality. The class of wealthy traders, merchants, and landlords from amongst the vaishya varna was included in the nobility and in the bureaucracy-called the 'Paura-Janapada.' It was from this period onwards that Brahmins leaving aside their traditional profession of performing yagnas were accommodated in the bureaucracy and became powerful advisors and ministers to the king.

This new type of state was based on vaishya taxation and shudra labour. Guided by the famous Kautilya or Chanakya's 'Arthashastra' the first, frank account of how to rule, a state-craft without any religious cover up. This 'arthashastra' state was a centralised state which took the responsibility for the extension of agriculture and trade, monopolised mining, settled groups of shudras where lands could be cleared and brought under the plough, providing necessities and infrastructure like irrigation for cultivation. The 'Sita' lands were farmed directly by the state by enforcing captive shudra (helot) labour while 'Rashtra' lands were farmed by the free peasantry (vaishya), and were taxed on various counts. While slavery existed, slaves were primarily used for domestic work by land owning 'Gahapatis', or by the state for processing the grain collected and production of some commodities.

Under Mauryan empire, there were three kinds of regions. Some were settled villages, some agricultural migrant groups. The majority were forest-based pastoral tribes who did not know the usage of iron.

A class of 'Karmakar shudras' became free artisans, and were even permitted to enter the Buddhist 'sanghas' (the Dasa Shudras were not allowed). A section of the vaishyas also became skilled artisans in special professions like making the chariots. The upper most section of the vaishyas became part of the nobility while most of them were pushed into the shudra varna by the next stage of Indian history.

While the tribal elite were incorporated into the Brahmin varna, most of the tribals became labourers and part of the Shudra varna. Sacrificial yagnas became symbolic. Vegetarianism, Ahimsa and the Karma theory were borrowed from Buddhism, the cult of demi-God Krishna gained prominence. Tribal communities were incorporated and the 'varna-samskara' theory and Manu-smriti (2nd Century A.D.) which assigned roles and positions to the incorporated 'Jatis' came into being. The importance of Brahmins in the unfolding agrarian economy, with their knowledge of the use of the iron plough, the 'Nakshatras', and 'Aryanising'-thus bringing into submission the various tribes increased their importance and social base. In the king's court they provided the Genealogy that helped the numerous kings, of emerging feudatories of dubious origins, legitimise their rules. Therefore neo-Brahminism gained the support of rulers - especially during and after the Gupta period (fourth Century A.D.).

It was only when the Kushans and the Shakas in the North and the various tribes in the South were assimilated into the varna order, trade declined and self-sufficient village economy came into existence by the sixth Century A.D., that neo-Brahminism and the Jati system based on Manu-smriti gained hegemony over most of India.

Earlier Buddhism had risen as a challenge to the yagna-based Brahminism and the varnashram dharma. It was backed by the powerful merchant and artisan guilds. It also reflected the aspirations of the Vaishya varna, the elite of which (the Nagar-Shettis and Gahapatis) were incorporated into the nobility and bureaucracy in the Arthashastra state, which though secular mainly backed Jainism and Buddhism. The lower Karmakar-shudras could also separate themselves and climb up the hierarchical order. Though the Dasa shudras could not join the Buddhist sangha they too had backed the aspirations of Buddha. Later on, as trade declined the village based

economy emerged, the largely urban based Buddhist monasteries lost their appeal as they too by obtaining land grants became land owning institutions and were seen as part of the ruling classes by the people. These wealthy monasteries supported by lavish gifts did not play a useful role as compared to the Brahmans in the village level. New Brahminism in comparison played a useful role in the economy to extract surplus and yet subdue the masses. The rulers therefore preferred this new role of Brahminism for example, the Second Century A.D. Satavahana state south of the Vindhya, the Pallava state in the South in five seventy five (575 A.D.) called themselves Kshatriyas and Brahmans and backed varnashram dharma. The features of Buddhism like Ahimsa, Karma theory and Vegetarianism useful in the agrarian economy, were already incorporated by Brahminism.

From around the sixth century A.D., the caste system began to consolidate in most parts of India. The decline of trade and artisan guilds, the collapse of the Roman Empire after the third century A.D., the contraction of money circulation and the settling down of artisans in the villages, accompanied by the development of the self-sufficient village economy created conditions for the rise of feudalism, based on Jatis. The rise of feudalism was marked by the rise of a class of intermediaries which expropriated the surplus in the form of revenue or share of the produce from the peasantry and the labouring masses. Initially only land grants were given (land grants were given to Brahmans, Buddhist monasteries and to army and other officials), later on administrative tasks were also assigned. This started off as early as second century A.D. during the Satavahana rule and became prevalent during the Gupta period (fourth Century A.D.). Slave system collapsed by the time of the Guptas. Dasas were used only for household work. Their work was to render various services to their masters. On the one hand, serfdom and on the other the transformation of classes into castes, continued. People of the same profession began to be transformed into one caste. Profession and caste became synonymous.

By providing with some more religious rights during and after the Gupta period, the situation of Sudras was gradually changed. Many artisans and tribals were added to untouchables and the Sudra community was divided. Along with untouchables, those who had been languishing in conditions of slavery from the beginning were considered as pure Sudras and they were specially provided with a religious code. They considered agricultural labourers and some lower level artisans and few others as impure Sudras.

In north India, since the decline of the Mauryan empire, formation of self-sufficient village system had started. In the process of assimilation of tribal clans, the castes expanded. The gods and goddesses of the tribals, who had been transformed into castes, were brahminised and temples were constructed for them. The social bases of the Varna system of Yajurveda period and the caste system were entirely different. During the phase where found production began to be adopted, Aryans used to get the production done by the subjugated non-Aryans, and for that purpose the Varna of sudra was adequate. To differentiate between Aryan people and the ruling class, the division like vaishyas, Brahmins and Kshatriyas was sufficient. But for self-sufficient villages this four varna system was not at all adequate. In the process of expansion of agriculture and in the process of formation of a new rural society only many 'Sudra' castes were formed without any concern to the varna system. Real cultivators and artisans became sudras. Vaishyas became confined to commerce. The population of sudras increased by leaps and bounds where as vaishyas were reduced to a minority. Varnas became castes. In the four varna system in India, the agriculturist had the position of sudras, where as caste jobs like those of chamars, Mahar and butcher etc., which were considered as menial works, were being done by family slaves. In Indian feudal society along with four varnas, the fifth varna came into existence which comprised of untouchables, the most down trodden section. In the process where the majority of vaishyas were slipping to the status of sudras and population of slaves was increasing, the fifth varna of untouchables was created to get the menial works done. The Karma theory played a chief role in consolidating the foundation of varna system and suppressing sudras. The fourth and fifth varnas could be suppressed by preaching the ideology that the varna-order was ordained by god, and that one cannot but helplessly suffer since the fate is all powerful. If any one violates there will be serious consequences.

The Vaishya varna became a minuscule part of the population with the decline in trade. Also most of its members had become peasants and thus part of the shudra varna. The Kshatriya varna also became a very small part of the population since the peasantry were part time soldiers called to war when their feudal over-lords ordered it. In the north, ruling or powerful clans of those invaders like Gujjars, Hunas and the Arya Kshatriyas and the intermediaries consolidated into the Rajput caste. The clan-kin connection of these groups from the feudal strata were consolidated through marriage alliances to form the Rajput jati. The word originated from 'Rajputra', i.e., one who controlled a few villages in the early medieval

period. In the south and in the east, in most of the non Gangetic-valley there was the near-absence of the Kshatriyas. In the south in this period the village headman also came to be recognised as an important post. Normally large land-owners from the dominant peasant caste, they separated themselves from their cultivating peasant caste men, and consolidated their position through kin relationship and marriage relationships among themselves over a region. The Pedda-Reddis in AP from Reddis and the Guadas in Karnataka emerged as separate caste groups through this process. In India the rise of the Jati system was inextricably interwoven with feudalism.

It is in this period that the number of untouchable castes swelled greatly. From the fourth century B.C., 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 untouchable status. Tribal groups, subjugated by force after being dispossessed of their forests/lands, means of livelihood and freedom were relegated to untouchable status. Some artisan groups too were pushed down from Shudra to Ati-Shudra ranks. They were in the main bonded agricultural labourers who were denied by religious injunctions any right to own wealth (gold etc.) and land. Their only dharma was to labour for the entire village, especially for the land-owning class, but live outside the village at a distance, polluting even by their shadow. Maximum surplus could be extracted from the untouchable labourers, forced into a low level of material existence and perpetual servitude.

The process of the consolidation of the Jati structure was completed in the main by the tenth century before the raids of Mohammed of Ghazani. The feudal class upheld the Jati system, even rulers who professed Buddhism were proud upholders of the Jati system. All castes connected with physical labour (peasants, artisans), or those who challenged Brahminical superiority or notions of the hierarchy were classed as Shudra. The Manusmriti (second century A.D.) provided perfect ideological justification for the superiority of the exploiting classes. It provided sanction for depriving the freedom and the degradation of the majority.

The establishment of Turkish power in North India, through the Slave dynasty in the thirteenth century A.D., marked an important phase in feudal mode of production. They centralised the administration and introduced a more systematic system of revenue collection. The composition

of the ruling classes underwent a change. Initially Turk slave families and their relatives ruled, they were successively replaced by slaves of Indian origin, Indianised Turks and foreign immigrants, to be replaced by even more foreigners, low castes and Hindus. The most important changes related to the methods in which rights to revenue collections (Iqta) were assigned. Originally restricted only for life, on the decision of the king by the end of the fifteenth century they were made hereditary. The Turks were urban based and favoured Islam. Thus Turkish rulers displaced the original feudatories and created new ones over a period of time.

The administrative changes 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 office-holders came to be known as Inamdars, Watandars, Iqtadars, Deshmukhs, Desais and later as Jagirdars (during Mughal rule). Though some of the earlier intermediaries who lost their posts gained it back during the later part of the Turk rule yet in this period the composition of the feudal class in North India was not stable. This did not affect the structure of the village economy. The Turks introduced new technique 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.

In the south the composition of the ruling classes did not undergo any change, except that sections of the lower classes were co-opted into the ruling classes. For example, the Nayakar - a class of warriors became the intermediaries who were granted 'Amaram' tenures in the Vijayanagar kingdom. In this period, various tribal kingdoms arose, the Doms in the foot-hills of the Himalayas in the thirteenth century A.D., the Bodos in Assam from the thirteenth century to the 18th century, the Nagbanshis and the Cheros in Chota-Nagpur and Palamau in the 12th century the Gonds in central India between 15th to 18th century, the Mahadev Kolis in south Gujarat in the 13th century A.D. These tribes had already developed to settled agriculture, borrowing technology and culture from the adjoining plain areas. Inequalities within the tribal societies had grown. Initially opposing Brahminical Hinduism, they later on adopted Hinduism or Buddhism or converted to Islam. They became vassals under the Marathas or Mughals.

The growth of trade and commodity production and the political and cultural changes created the material condition within the feudal society

for the rise of protest against the caste system. Beginning around the 12th century in south India and a century later in the North, it led to the strengthening and assertion of the traders and artisan group all over the country. The Left hand and Right hand caste associations arose in south India during this period. It reflected the rise of commodity production and the growth of the market. While the Left hand association represented the commodity producing and service castes, the Right hand association represented the trading castes. The two associations often united to resist feudal oppression. In North India, the 'Julaha', members of the artisan castes (weavers) converted to Islam.

It was in this period from the 12th century to the 17th century that the Bhakthi movement emerged as the most popular and significant opposition to the caste system and Brahminical superiority. Most of the Bhakti saints were from the artisan castes, like blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, though a few of the religious reformers were also Brahmins. A few like Nandan (a Nayanar), Tiruppan (an Aalvar), Chokhamela and sant Rohidas were from untouchable castes. The movement also brought woman saints into the limelight. The Bhakti movement had a moderate stream like Ramanuja, Gyaneshwar and Chaitanya who stressed on the oneness of all before God. The more radical stream - comprising of saints like Basavanna, Tukaram, Namdev, kabir and Guru Nanak criticised caste discrimination and Brahminical hypocrisy openly. Some of them initiated measures of social reforms as well. Kabir and Guru Nanak went out of the fold of Hinduism. The movement, by emphasising the personal relation of the individual with God, transcended the barriers of caste. They struck a major blow at the concept of Brahminical superiority based on the monopoly of the knowledge of the scriptures.

The Bhakthi movement was a major assault on the ideological and material premises of feudalism. Preaching in the local languages, the Bhakti movement brought the regional languages up, laying the bases for the growth of nationalism in the different regions. Though towards the end of this movement a conservative trend also came up in the form of Ramdas and Tulasidas 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. But due to the historical limitation at that time the movement could not attack the base of the caste system-the feudal mode production and the land relations therein. Hence it could not break the caste system.

The Mughals too in the 16th century A.D., consolidated their rule by associating with the Rajput Chiefs, other upper caste intermediaries and ruling groups of kingdoms annexed in the north and in the Deccan. Though the Mughals monetised the revenue, brought changes in the irrigation system which increased the output of agriculture and also there was an increase in trade, yet the social structure at the village level was not affected. At the top of the rural structure were the upper caste Brahmin or Rajput intermediaries, large landlords who held administrative responsibility and powers living off the revenue collected from the peasant tenants and share croppers or the labour of bonded labourers of the tribal or untouchable castes. The shudra feudatories elevated themselves to Kshatriya hood and in some cases acquired even Brahmin status. Though over the centuries, the cultivating castes came to have a claim and right over land and share of produce due to the Jajmani/Balutedari system institutionalise between them and the landlords yet this system allow for the total withdrawal from manual work even of the village level higher castes, who extracted free labour many a times. Also formalise was the system of 'Vethi-Bigar'. Lastly a non-economic coercive bond was affected by this system. The untouchable castes were assigned positions as lower level functionaries, receiving right to cultivate a small portion of the village land while the majority of them were bonded servants attached to particular families, domestic slaves and landless serfs. Bonded labourers comprised 10% of the population during the Mughal rule, this percentage was higher in the south.

Thus we see that though Islam did not discriminate and helped the loosening of the bonds of caste, yet the higher castes were close to the seats of power from the local level to the centre. Muslim feudalism collaborated and colluded with Hindu feudalism. There were no fundamental changes in the relations of production, that is in the base. The caste system not only remained intact but was maintained by the pre-British feudal states, for not only they gained financially through arbitration in caste disputes but also they could extract free labour especially for public works. Last, but not the least the caste system upheld and legitimised the Dharma of the rulers to weild power. ☞

CHAPTER-II

IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE AND ANTI-CASTE MOVEMENTS

Class differentiation and changes in Caste :

Colonial rule did not touch or tamper with the Brahminical Hindu order and the inequitable caste system. Infact, it was given a fresh lease of life by incorporating it into the legal system by-passing the local customary practices. They appointed Brahmin pandits to advise British judges in interpreting the Shastras and applying them. Untouchables were denied entry to temples in the name of protecting the 'established rights of other castes.' The British courts entertained caste claims and in the name of respecting autonomy of caste they upheld the disciplinary power of castes against violations of caste norms. The British encouraged the finance of the study of Sanskrit and the translation of Sanskrit texts into English. They propogated the racist theory on the origin of caste, emphasising the European origins of the Aryan race and that caste was the means of maintaining racial purity.

Yet, the economic changes introduced by colonial rule 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 commoditisation 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.

Also the British administration having vested interest in seeking support for their colonial rule especially after the Great War of Independence of 1857, implemented the policy of divide and rule. They encouraged the conversion of the lower classes into Christianity by Missionaries. From 1901, through the censuses the caste background of people were recorded, providing the various castes a rallying point for organising themselves on regional basis through caste conferences and caste newspapers to record a

higher status. Amongst the Kayasthas in the North, Nayars in Kerala, reformers started organising caste associations to press for changes in the practices of the caste, giving up outmoded customs to adjust to the new opportunities available under colonial rule. Among the lower castes too, the petti-bourgeois sections mobilised caste associations to give up occupations that were considered as defiling or degrading, and emulating the customs of the higher castes in an attempt to get a higher status, thus aiding the process of Sanskritisation.

Lastly, under pressure from the Non-Brahmin movement and reformers, the British were forced to enact resolutions and legislations granting access to public places, tanks, schools, wells etc., (maintained by public funds) to members of all castes and classes, but they did little to see the implementation of it.

In the land settlements the British ignored the inalienable rights of the actual cultivators, and in many areas the intermediaries, the non-cultivating sections who only had a share in the produce, traditionally, were made 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 share-croppers. The Shudra peasantry was divided into an upper section of rich peasants and a lower section of middle and poor peasants. With the intensified exploitation coupled with famines and other crises, indebted peasants of all the cultivating castes were pushed into the ranks of the landless, and also a section of artisans became landless labourers. A class of rural poor, landless or poor peasants emerged from the ranks of most of the backward and lower Dalit castes in the 19th century. A working class linked to industrial production also emerged from the ranks of the backward and Dalit castes. A small section among these castes also found avenues of mobility with jobs as small contractors, traders, and investments in land. With access to education, service in the army and the government bureaucracy, a class of petti-bourgeoisie also developed within the backward and Dalit 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 monopolise the colonial bureaucracy. With their tradition of learning and their socially and economically powerful position, the Brahmins and others from higher castes took Western education and soon came to occupy most of the posts in the administration and judiciary.

Non-Brahmin Movements :

The development of new classes among the non-Brahmin castes led to the growth of a democratic consciousness among them. The non-Brahmin movements developed in southern and western India in the later part of the 19th century by mobilising the Shudra and Ati-Shudra 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, education based on Sanskrit etc. The movement used the racial theory of origin of caste to explain caste oppression, by interpreting Brahmins as Aryan invaders who conquered the Dravidian race. The conservative trend within the non-Brahmin 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 the representation and control over district boards. The Justice Party, the Non-Brahmin party, the Unionist Party (Punjab) marked this trend. Elsewhere too, the Arya Samaj, the Patidars in Gujarat and Rajput groups represented this trend. The Triveni Sangh in Bihar also restricted itself to the three main erstwhile Shudra castes the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris. This trend was not sympathetic to the aspirations and needs of the Dalits and other lower classes.

At the same time since the masses of Non-Brahmins were in contradiction with the feudal elite and money-lenders, the social prop of colonial rule, most of whom were from the upper most castes, especially Brahmins, in many parts of western and southern India, who even monopolised the bureaucracy in these regions, therefore a radical section of the non-Brahmin movement which was more radical and broad based, thorough going in their anti caste stand, rejected the whole caste system with its hierarchy and its operation.

Phule and the Satyashodhak Samaj :

The non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra, took a concrete shape with the formation of the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873 by Jyothiba Phule in Poona. Phule belonging to the Mali caste (a caste involved in the cultivation of vegetables and its trade) of a middle class family, educated in a mission school, was inspired by the western ideals of liberty and equality and especially by the writings of Tom Paine, the American liberal, to take up social reform.

The British had destroyed the rule of the oppressive Peshwas and had brought capitalist development and western thought to all castes. Phule expected much from western capitalism like many members of the intelligentsia of the country in his time. Phule concentrated his efforts on the oppressed sections of the masses, the working class in Bombay, the peasantry and amongst the untouchable sections in and around Pune. Songs, booklets, plays written by Phule using a popular hard-hitting style and language, exposed the various ways in which the 'Shetji-Bhatji' class (the money-lending trader and priestly class) duped the people, especially the peasantry. Interpreting the racial theory of the origin of caste in the context of popular folk-lore that the Aryan invaders had enslaved the local peasantry by duping them, thus defeating the rule of Bali Raja, the peasant king, the Satyashodhak Samaj established links with the peasantry. The Satyashodhak Samaj rejected the traditional marriage ceremony with Brahmin priests, led a strike of barbers who decided not to tonsure widows, started schools for women, homes for abandoned women, started schools for untouchables and opened drinking water wells for them. Under Phule's guidance, N.M. Lokhande in 1890 formed the first reformist organisation of textile workers in Bombay called the 'Mill-Hands Association.' Phule promoted modern agriculture amongst the peasantry, fought against the superstition of not using canal water, personally bought land to experiment and set an example. He supported whole heartedly the move to form co-operatives, and infact, it was one of the most important points in the programme of the Satyashodhak Samaj. Phule was the first to use Shivaji as the symbol of the Marathi Shudra peasants' resurgence. He fought for education to be imparted in Marathi and the abolishment of hereditary posts in the administration. Though Phule had a democratic outlook and Marathi nationalist spirit which helped him to ally with the peasantry consistently but since he was unable to see the source of oppression also in the colonial policies of the British and the semi-feudal mode of production installed by them, this programme was restricted to fighting Brahminism and the exploitation of the Shetji-Bhatji class. The Satyashodhak Samaj's programme reflected the interests of the rising rich peasantry.

After Phule's death the activities of the Satyashodhak Samaj continued in the districts of Ahmadnagar, Satara, Kolhapur and also spread in Amaravathi in the Berar region. The propaganda of the Satyashodhak Samaj's 'Tamasha' groups led to revolts of the peasantry against landlords in 1919-1922 at Satara and in 1930s at Buldhana. Led by their enigmatic leader Anand Swami the peasants demanded reduction in rent, abused

Brahmins and their gods, and hit out at the money-lenders and traders, looted British treasuries and attacked police stations. Infact, they attacked the feudal authority in every way in the rural areas and also the British, thus arousing an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist consciousness. The landlord section of the non-Brahmins did not support but actually denounced these activities. These movements led to the exodus of Brahmin landlords from the villages in Western Maharashtra. Also these movements became fore-runners to the movement of the 1940's when the famous Nana Patil formed the parallel government - the Patri Sarkar - opposed to the landlord money lenders combine and the British rule. Later this trend of the non-Brahmin movement merged into the peasants and workers party and the Lal Nishan Party, also Javalkar and Nana Patil joined the Communist Party of India. The feudal and the rich peasant sections being dissatisfied with the militant and populist agenda of the Satyashodhak Samaj, formed the non-Brahmin Party in 1915 and contesting the district board elections, entered the legislature. Being strongly anti-Tilak and anti-Congress in the 1920's large sections of this Party joined the Congress in 1930s, became new cooperative bosses and developed a chauvinist Maratha consciousness. The Satyashodhak Samaj could only reform the caste system and feudalism but could not break it since it did not take up the programme of land to the tiller and power in the hands of the basic sections of the masses.

Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement :

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 the bureaucracy in the province, the emergence of petti-bourgeoisie and nascent bourgeoisie classes among the lower castes, including an educated intelligentsia, led to the emergence of the non-Brahmin movement in Tamilnadu. 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 and the amalgamation of castes was a precursor to the non-Brahmin movement in which progressive sections of the intelligentsia were involved. The violent conflicts between the low caste toddy tapper Nadars, after they had risen economically through trade, and the feudal Maravars in the vicinity of Sivakasi in 1899, after the unsuccessful attempts 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. The Justice Party was strongly pro-British and was led by and clearly represented the interests of big landlords and merchants from among the upper castes among the non-Brahmin castes. On the other hand, the much more mass-based and radical self-respect movement led by E.V. Ramaswami Periyar did not restrict itself to promoting the interests of the non-Brahmins in the administration, but went further and launched an all-round attack on the caste system and Brahminical Hinduism. E.V.R. 'Periyar' was born in a wealthy Naicker family at Erode in 1879. He became active in the local non-cooperation movement and joined the Congress. In 1924 he went to Travancore to participate in the Vaikom Satyagraha for temple entry for the untouchable castes. When Gandhi intervened in the affair treating it as an intra-Hindu affair, Periyar lashed out at the conservative leadership of the Congress. E.V.R. formed the self-respect movement 'Suya Mariyathai Iyakkam' after he walked out of the Congress in 1925 for their unwillingness to support separate representation to the non-Brahmins. E.V.R.'s movement was concentrated in the Tamil areas of the presidency, based on the wider support of the rising working class, middle class and traders especially in the urban centres like Erode, Madurai, Coimbatore, Salem, Tiruchirapally, Tuticorin and other towns. EVR's movement was oriented towards the oppressed castes including the untouchables, and took active steps to involve women and youth. They ran a magazine called 'Kudi Arasu'. A militant attack, atheistic in approach, not only on Brahmins, but also on the religion itself, on superstition, caste divisions, and caste privileges was launched by the 'self-respect' movement. 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 ban on the use of Brahmin priests for marriages and popularised Self-Respect marriages, they opposed the use of the 'Rali' and 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 philosophy. The Self-Respect Movement took up the activities of propagating against money-lenders' exploitation and the problems of the peasantry. In the 1930s the Self-Respect Movement, under the influence of Communists in Tamil Nadu and the influence of Periyar's trip to the USSR, supported socialism. Communists like Singaravelu propagated materialist

philosophy and socialism through the magazine. Two trends were active within the Self-Respect Movement, one which preferred to restrict itself to social reform, and the other trend which wanted to take up anti-capitalist propaganda and activity. The Self-Respect socialists took up organising on problems of the peasantry along with their regular conferences. Under the influence of the CPI leaders the Self-Respect socialists (Samadharm group) merged into the Congress socialist Party in November 1936. Periyar faced repression from the British government for his attack on the non-Brahmin Government and for 'promoting Soviet Bolshevism'. 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 by demanding a full attack on feudal land relations. Periyar entered the Justice Party and then in 1942 formed the Dravida Kazhagam (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. 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 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 anti-caste 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 non-Brahmin 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.

Periyar, a militant and forceful speaker gave a sweep to the Self-Respect Movement, Philosophically, a follower of the Atheist American thinker Ingersoll, he was attracted to the achievements of Soviet Russia and Marxism. Though Periyar fought against social and cultural oppression of the Non-Brahmin castes, raised the issues connected with the real socio-economic processes of the down-trodden masses and identified with the democratic cultural aspirations of the Tamil people, yet his dependence on the Justice Party, his support to Kamaraj and the DMK i.e., the pro-landlord, pro-imperialist sections of the Non-Brahmin castes reveals his vacillations and inconsistencies. Hence, the Self-Respect Movement could not develop its potential to become part of the wider all-round anti-feudal struggle. In

the 1940s when the masses of the oppressed castes in Tamilnadu and Kerala took up valiant anti-feudal struggles under the CPI, the Self-Respect Movement was only an observer. Periyar articulated the interests of the weak but growing national bourgeois forces within Tamil Nadu. The support he received from the small industrialists among the Nadars, his strong national sentiments and his basically urban movement based among the small traders shows that Periyar represented these interests and he was unable to transcend the limitations and the weaknesses of this class.

Due to the betrayal of their interests by the Non-Brahmin movement and the limitations of 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. Dalits called themselves as Panchamas and changed their names to Adi-Dravidas, Adi-Andhras, Adi-Karnatakas, to show that they were the original inhabitants of their respective regions and started organising separate conferences. The Chamars in the Punjab broke away from the Arya Samaj and its 'Shuddhi' (purification) programme and its defence of the Vedas and began the Adi-Dharma movement. They invoked the name of Sant Rohidas, the Bhakthi movement saint. Initially, these associations emphasised education and Sanskritisation. But soon, the shift from imitation of the upper castes took place and the assertion of social equality, the demand for political representation and an end to specific forms of caste oppression began to be articulated. 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 Dharmasa Paripalana Yogam in 1902-03 with the help of the first Ezhava graduate Dr. Palpu. Initially, they organised the caste to demand a higher status, and emphasised the need to take to education. They tried to enter temples and the Vaikom Satyagraha, in 1924, was the effort of the Ezhavas along with progressive sections of the people in Kerala.

Ambedkar-His life and political practice

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 non-Brahmin party he took inspiration from the Satyashodhak Samaj movement and Jyotibha Phule.

Ambedkar's movement was based on the Mahars, the majority untouchable community in Maharashtra. It emerged in the background of the changes wrought by the imperialist 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 distress and insecurities of the landless, combined with the 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. Class differentiation within the community took place rapidly and a small but influential petty-bourgeoisie and even some money-lending capitalist elements developed within the community. A sizeable section became part of the working class.

Ambedkar, the son of a Subedar-Major teacher 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 USA and completed his doctorate in 1916. After that, he worked as the Maharaja's Diwan and also as a professor in a college. He then went to England and completed a post-doctoral thesis at the London School of Economics. He came back to India in 1923 after completing his law degree.

It was only in the second half of the 1920s that Ambedkar became active in and led a series of struggles launched to assert the civic and religious equality of Dalits. Prominent among these were, the Mahad Satyagraha, in 1927, for the use of the public tank in Mahad, a town in the Konkan region, by all castes; the huge conference and the burning of the Manusmriti; the Amaravati and Nasik temple entry programme in 1928 and 1930 - the Nasik one lasting for five years. These mass struggles galvanised the militant and youthful sections of the Dalit community and created mass awareness amongst the whole community. Despite mass mobilisation and support from the radical elements of the non-Brahmin community, these struggles were not successful in achieving their immediate demands due to the strong opposition of the reactionary feudal upper-caste sections and the direct and indirect support given to them by the British imperialists.

In 1936, Ambedkar formed the Independent Labour Party. This party, in co-operation with the communists and socialists took part in the textile workers' strike and in the fight against the Khots (landlords in the Konkan).

While a large part of Ambedkar's activities were devoted to struggles and mass mobilisation, he was also deeply enmeshed in petitioning and pleading before the British administration for concessions and benefits for the Dalit community. These mainly consisted in demands for separate electorates, job reservations, scholarships etc., which would primarily aid the development and growth of the newly emerging Dalit petty-bourgeoisie. He participated as representative of the depressed classes in the 1928 Simon Commission and the Round Table Conferences of 1930 and 1931. These were British devices to divert the masses through constitutional reform and Ambedkar participated whole-heartedly in this exercise thus creating serious constitutional illusions among the most oppressed sections.

When World War II broke out, Ambedkar unconditionally supported the Allies and in February 1941 even met the Viceroy to demand that Dalits be recruited into the British Army. When his request was granted, he himself toured various places to encourage and appeal to lower caste youth to join the army.

But the real turning point came when he was appointed to the National Defence Council in July 1941 and when, on his own demand he was appointed as Labour minister in the Viceroy's cabinet in June 1942. With this he began to serve the ruling classes as a prominent member of the repressive state apparatus. Though he brought in some labour welfare legislation, his main effort was to help the war effort by extracting as much as possible from labour. However in this period too he continued to attempt to secure benefits for the Dalit middle classes, and he managed to secure 8.33% reservation for depressed classes in governmental posts and scholarships abroad.

Ambedkar's orientation during this period was basically directed towards obtaining some position in the new constitutional setup that would follow after the British. With this in mind he dissolved the ILP in 1942 and formed the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) to negotiate with the British as a Dalit representative. However despite his service to British imperialists, he was not given recognition by them and after the war he shifted his stand and offered his services to the Congress, the main representative of India's comprador bourgeois-feudal classes. He accepted to serve as Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee and thus he had a prime role in its basic formulation and the continuation of all the British repressive colonial laws.

He then became law minister in Nehru's cabinet. It was during this period that he played the role of silent collaborator to the brutal repression

on the Telangana people's armed struggle by the Indian army. In 1951 however, Nehru chose to side with reactionary feudal forces opposing the Hindu Code Bill, rather than agree with Ambedkar who was pushing for its adoption. Ambedkar had no option but to resign from Nehru's cabinet.

But even after resigning from the cabinet Ambedkar did not return to the earlier path of struggle. He basically concentrated on reformist activities like building of the colleges at Aurangabad and Bombay. And in 1956 just before his death, he led the Dalit masses into Buddhism. His main positive contribution during this period was his support for the Samyukta Maharashtra movement.

Political Assessment of Ambedkar :

Ambedkar's political stands and practice clearly point to his being a constant political representative of the small but growing Dalit petty-bourgeoisie of his times. Though Ambedkar claimed to represent the whole Dalit community, and in fact was the community's main political leader, he did not direct the movement towards resolving the basic causes for the exploitation of the Dalit agricultural labour, poor peasantry and working class. He did not even raise the demand of land to the tiller which is the key to changing the lives of the agricultural labourers and poor peasantry who formed more than 95% of the Dalit community. His struggles for religious and civic rights were a reflection of the self-assertion of newly emerging Dalit petty-bourgeoisie (though these demands were for the benefit of the whole Dalit masses). Other demands like separate electorates, government posts, scholarships etc., would also mainly consolidate the political and economic position of the Dalit middle class within the community and in society as a whole.

Although he was basically a representative of the Dalit petty-bourgeoisie, his life can however be divided into two phases. During the first phase ending in 1941 he definitely played an overall pro-people role and was involved in mass mobilisation and mass agitations. These were firstly for social and civic rights and later also on issues of democratic rights of peasants and workers. He led many anti-caste struggles which are an important part of anti-feudal struggles though mainly related to the superstructure. He and the movement he led thus formed an important part of the democratic forces of that period.

In the post-1941 phase however he went over into the service of the British imperialists and comprador bourgeois-feudal classes. By joining

Viceroy's and Nehru's cabinets and heading the Constitution Drafting Committee, he chose to serve in the camp of the most reactionary, repressive and anti-democratic forces of that period. Though he was later pushed out from positions of power by these ruling classes he did not return to a path of struggle against them. By confining himself and the masses under his leadership to reformist activities he continued to objectively serve the interests of the anti-democratic forces.

We must therefore, recognise and uphold the struggle aspects and the pro-people democratic role of Ambedkar in the first period. At the same time, we must expose and outrightly reject his pro-ruling class, anti-democratic role in the second period.

Ambedkar's Ideology :

At the ideological and philosophical level Ambedkar was basically opposed to Marxism. Due to his liberal bourgeois ideological outlook he was opposed to the Marxist understanding of the development of class struggle and social transformation through revolution. He infact counterposed Marxism and Buddhism and rejected Marx's approach of violent revolution while upholding the Buddha's path of non-violence. Philosophically he rejected materialism and accepted idealism. This led him to search for a religious alternative to Hinduism and finally to enter the Buddhist religion.

This idealist world outlook was also reflected in his understanding on the question of the 'Annihilation of Caste'. In his book on the question, he presented the incorrect idealist understanding that caste arose not from India's ancient production relations but from Hindu religion. He therefore thought that caste could be rooted out by reforming the Hindu religion rather than by changing the social system. He thus proposed laws to abolish the Vedas and to set up one common authoritative Hindu religious books for government appointment of priests through examinations open to any caste, etc. He also saw inter-caste marriages as the final solution to eradicate caste. He thus propagated the illusion that changes in the thoughts and ideas of men alone would bring about the end of the caste system. He did not understand therefore that though inter-caste marriages were to be encouraged right from the beginning, they were not possible on a mass scale without breaking the social and economic basis of caste. His concentration on Hindu religious reform and later conversion did not answer the question as to why caste had persisted in Islam, Christianity, Sikhism

and even Buddhism. Thus naturally the final mass conversion to Buddhism could not prove to be a path to liberation from the caste system.

This idealist outlook also led him to rely considerably on the British administration in the fight against the casteists. He looked upon the British as believers in western christian philosophy that was opposed to Hindu caste ideology. Thus he refused in practice to accept that the British were first and foremost imperialists, whose exploitative and repressive rule depended on their close alliance with the feudal and casteist forces within the country. He therefore did not recognise that British imperialism was not a fighter against caste but its protector; was not a friend in the battle against caste, but an enemy.

Lastly Ambedkar's bourgeois liberal thinking led him to an extremely wrong understanding on the nature of the state. Believing in the concept of a neutral state and not accepting its class nature, he created illusions among the masses that the state's character could be changed, through changes in laws and constitutional reforms. Though he was inspired by the bourgeois democratic revolutionary principles of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', he did not identify the basically anti-people character of the bourgeois dictatorship. He particularly did not recognise the exploitative, reactionary character of imperialism and its successor, the comprador-feudal Indian state. He therefore got bogged down in the mire of reformism and till the end relied on laws, parliament, courts and the constitution to bring about social change.

He was therefore ideologically a liberal bourgeois reformist.



CHAPTER-III

CHANGES IN THE POST-BRITISH PERIOD

In the post-British period, caste configurations have undergone considerable changes. They are a result of the implementation of the Zamindari abolition acts in the various states and the penetration of capitalist relations and the blows delivered by the people's struggle. The most significant changes have been in the countryside. The close correspondence between caste and class has become less discernible in most parts of the country. The old upper caste Zamindars and other big feudal landlords have been displaced by smaller landlords, the former big tenants of Zamindars and large peasant proprietors. 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, poor peasants and even among the landless. The lower sections of the middle castes, that is artisan castes are primarily middle, poor or landless peasants and some are continuing their traditional occupations. Therefore, today the main exploiting classes in the rural areas consists of the earlier upper caste elements i.e., Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars and the upper stratum of the castes like Patidars, Marathas, Jats, Yadavs, Vellalas, Vokkaligas, Lingayat, Reddis, Kammas, Nairs etc. The middle peasants comprising about 25% of the rural households largely come from the major cultivating castes and from artisan castes and even a small section of the Dalits. This section has contradictions with the rural elite, but due to lack of class consciousness they are generally tailing behind the elite landlord sections of their caste.

The poor and landless who consist of 60% of the rural households have the greatest number of caste divisions, including a large number of small artisan and service castes and even Muslims. This class consists also of a large number of households from the Dalits and Adivasis, 37% of agricultural labour families are Dalits and 10% are Adivasis and the remaining half are drawn from the cultivating castes and artisan castes. Hence, caste divisions among the exploited are the maximum. The caste-class relationship in the present period is indeed complex.

With the growth of the state capitalist sector 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 in 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 labour and in small scale industry.

In the state and central administration, due to the pressure of movements a certain percentage of reserved posts, specially in the clerical category as well as lower managerial category are being filled, yet the social distance between those from the Dalits and from other backgrounds remains. The SC-ST population who got employment in the central government would not be more than 1.3 % of the total SC-ST population in the country. That means 98-99% do not have any secure employment. It is a fact that in the bastis of villages or in the innumerable slums of the towns dalits are leading miserable lives in utter poverty and illiteracy. In fact the problem of dalits is primarily the problem of land. Majority belonging to these castes are agricultural labourers whose lives are miserable. These people are subject to perennial feudal exploitation and atrocities, while only less than one per cent of the total land was distributed by the rulers, no where dalits got any land worth the name. In some places though they got some pattas, owing to the landlord's domination dalits could not lay their hands on the lands. Even if at some places they actually got the lands, still they could not have sufficient investment and resources, they had to sell the land at throw-away prices, or forced to mortgage it and at last had to lose the land. Most of the rural employed who migrated to the urban areas are dalits. The reservations and reforms to STs could not bring any basic change in their lives. Though some got educational and employment opportunities they are very nominal and are like a drop in the ocean. Untouchability is still continuing in the villages. Though it is not overtly practised in towns/cities, yet it prevails in the form of discriminatory attitudes and prejudices. At public taps in Bastis, while taking rented houses, and in some public places this discrimination is still seen. The most lucrative professions too are under the monopoly of higher castes.

The linguistic reorganisation of 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 government.

The economic crisis of the 1960s led to an intensification of

contradictions in the country, including an intensification of the contradictions between the all India comprador bourgeoisie and the regional comprador bourgeoisie and landlord sections. With the growth of capitalist landlord/rich peasant forces in several states due to policies like green revolution and industrialisation 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 centralise the state. The political instability in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to the assertion of various landlord/capitalist landlord sections who were denied a share in the political power in the North Indian states. The formation of the various non-Congress governments like 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 capitalist-landlord sections and trading elite among middle castes reasserted themselves, in cooperation with the regional comprador bourgeois sections and a section of the all India comprador bourgeoisie, and formed the Janata Party in 1977. But this coalition of various classes could not last due to pulls in different directions. In 1980, the Congress (I) came back to power representing the interests of the all India comprador bourgeoisie and centralised resources. The capitalist landlord sections came together on an even wider basis in UP, Bihar once again in a coalition of classes to form the Janata Dal which came to power at Delhi in 1989. To stabilise their social base they demanded reservations in government jobs and higher professional education for the OBCs. The appointment 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's resources and stabilise their hold over their caste 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) pogroms against Dalits, especially in rural areas and the growing democratic consciousness among the Dalits against caste discrimination and (b) demand for reservations for the OBCs and violent agitations against the reservation policy.

Attacks on Dalits :

The mass killings of Dalits began with the Kilvenmani massacre of Dalit agricultural labourers in Thanjavur district in 1968. It was a reprisal

for their attempt to organise a strike in support of their demand for higher wages. This has been followed by similar massacres in various parts of the country, especially from the late 1970s onwards as in Bihar (Belchi, Parasbigha etc.), Marathawada in Maharashtra, Andhra (Tsunur, Karamchedu etc.), Karnataka (Thuthur and Bendigere). In Ahmedabad and other regions in Gujarat, the anti-reservation agitations destroyed the houses of the dalits with the help of the state. They also enforced a total boycott of dalits. These killings and the countless attacks in every state are attempts by 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 labourers 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 class struggle is sharp but the united front of the exploited classes could not be forged, or in areas where class struggle is low and 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 catalysed the resurgence of the Dalit movement in the country.

Reservation Policy :

The reservation policy granting reservation of a certain percentage of jobs in the administration and seats in educational institutions for professional courses for SC & ST began in the post 1947 period, though 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 non-Brahmin castes gaining power in the southern states and the pressure of the strong non-Brahmin movement a large proportion of seats in professional institutions and government jobs were reserved for various non-Brahmin (OBC) castes as well. This policy was implemented for the OBC in the northern states since the 1980s.

In a backward country like India, with uneven development and with 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 for 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 the 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. They also utilised this to divide the oppressed people along caste lines. Hence reservations have generated a great deal of tensions between the urban petti-bourgeoisie of the upper castes and the Dalits. What is a contradiction among the people has taken an antagonistic form leading to agitations, riots and attacks on Dalits as a whole.

The anti-reservation agitations clearly revealed the casteist mentality and prejudices among the so-called modern sections in upper castes. The anti-reservation agitation is nothing but an attempt by the reactionary sections of the upper castes to monopolize the prestigious and the most profitable professions. The ruling classes directly instigated them so as to divide the people along caste lines. This is nothing but an indirect attempt to keep the dalits and lower sections of OBCs as inferiors and to retain them as toilers to be exploited at will thereby perpetuating the caste-system. That was why we opposed and we should oppose the anti-reservation agitations. We must unite the people of OBC and other oppressed castes.

There were severe limitations to the reservation policy from the perspective of Dalit liberation. The reservation policy has been used by the ruling classes to stabilise a petti-bourgeois class among the Dalits and also to 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. Reservations are a reformist policy which provides relief but not liberation. These limitations of the reservation policy need to be exposed before the oppressed castes but at the same time we must understand that for the Dalits reservations have provided white collar employment and has been the main avenue to enter to some extent the higher professions, which are still the monopoly of the higher castes.

Though there are several limitations to the reservations, to wipe out the differences between castes, they are but necessary. Even after the seizure of power by the proletariat, to achieve equality between castes, reservations are necessary and will have to be continued for some time. By this the oppressed castes, especially dalits should be provided government jobs

through reservations. Not only that opportunity should be given for dalits and other oppressed castes to enter those profession which had been monopolised by upper castes.

Movements in the present period-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. Though the leadership of the Dalit movement was coopted and splintered in the 1960s the plight of the masses of the lower castes including the Dalits worsened. The practice of untouchability continued unabated in the rural areas, caste forms of extra economic exploitation -veth 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, the corruption of electoral politics lead to tremendous frustration among Dalit youth. Under the influence of the worldwide upsurge among students, youth and Blacks in the 1960s and the Naxalbari movement, Dalit youth in Maharashtra revolted under the banner of the Dalit Panthers. The movement began in the city of Bombay in 1971. 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 15th 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 MP and other states like Chandigarh, Bhopal, Delhi, Agra, where units of the Dalit Panthers were formed.

The Panthers revolted against caste oppression. Their campaigns to villages, where caste oppression was reported, indicates this. They also attacked the ideological bastion of the caste system by burning the Manusmriti. They attacked the corrupt parliamentary system by calling for a boycott of the bye-elections to the Lok Sabha in Bombay and managed to get almost 85% of the SCs in the area to boycott the elections. This was the first time the Dalit movement took an explicitly anti-State stand. They were able to mobilise thousands of people for their morchas and faced state repression On one of their morchas Shiv Sena created trouble and police firing took place in which a young poet was killed. They militantly clashed with the Shiv Sena, which instigated riots in Dalit slums and chawls. The Panthers confronted state repression, but having been a spontaneous revolt led by the petti-bourgeoisie, and lacking a unified strategy and tactics, they started disintegrating by 1975. The Dalit Panther movement was a part of the democratic revolutionary movement which emerged in isolation,

with the lack of a revolutionary class struggle in the region. 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 in issues like the renaming of the Marathawada University, riddles controversy 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. This movement had an impact on Dalits in other parts of the country.

The Dalit movement of Karnataka started in 1974. Although it was triggered in the towns, the petty bourgeois leadership quickly took the movement to the villages. It mobilised the Dalit peasantry and labourers against atrocities of the upper castes. However, its tactic was always to protect the dalits and it seldom resorted to direct struggle against the upper caste feudal interests. Within a decade the movement began to give up struggle. It participated in electoral politics and moved close to the ruling classes. It adopted Gandhi ideology. Its petty-bourgeois background and its marriage with electoral politics quickly led to its break up. As a result of its compromises it has today become a prop for the comprador-feudal ruling classes.

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 denying any unity with other exploited sections and parties representing them.

They are playing the role of power brokers building up faith in the ruling class state among the Dalit masses. The elite Dalit leaders have promoted that part of the ideology of Ambedkarism which suits the ruling classes. They have highlighted and dogmatised all those aspects of Ambedkar's thoughts that legitimise the existing state. They are upholding the constitution as sacrosanct, defending liberal political philosophy and defending the politics of bargaining and lobbying, taking up emotional issues connected with symbols of Dalit identity in the name of Ambedkarism.

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 Dalits and 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 OBC masses. Thus the elite political leadership among the Dalits, in league with the ruling class parties, is trying to keep the Dalit masses under their organisational and ideological influence, repeatedly preventing their militancy from being integrated into a revolutionary struggle, and channelising 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 and overthrow the caste system from its roots.


The Congress during its rule, which only used dalit peoples as their vote banks, showed 'tremendous love' towards SC and STs. Dalit leaders were made political agents by disbursing various posts from ward councillors to central ministers through the reserved constituencies. In towns in every SC basti we find this type of dalit leaders. These persons who have been making illegitimate earnings are exploiting dalits and are by hook or crook, trying to keep dalits under them. For this, they are taking advantage of caste-customs. This comprador leadership always teach that politics which is subservient to the interests of the ruling classes and harmful to the interests of dalits. In the rural areas also there are dalits who are vocal. In addition to them, there is an elite from dalits who have newly emerged as a result of increasing educational facilities, concessions and subsidies. Some families became an industrial bourgeois class, some a merchant class, some became bureaucrats through higher level jobs and these classes have financial and political clout. The slogan 'power to the Dalits only' profits this class only. The reservations which started during the Ambedkar period benefited dalits. But due to a pro-bourgeois attitude through which he got concessions by befriending the ruling classes, he off set the advantages gained by reservations. Without exposing the pro-ruling class methods, we cannot rescue the dalits from the methods of power brokers which had taken solid root among them.

Owing to the development of education and employment among dalits, a middle class is growing. Some among them who are financially better off are striving to acquire artificial social status imitating the upper caste elite, and forgetting about the rest of the fellow dalits who are still in wretched conditions. There are others who sincerely think about the development of dalits. They desire that some thing should be done for dalits. Though not knowing the correct path, they are showing solidarity

and extending all possible help by participating in the rallies taken out in protest against the attacks and rural killings of dalits. These forces have to be channelised into the revolutionary movement.

Dalit Movement in the present period - BSP :

The intensification of contradictions in the past decade, the caste atrocities, the impact of the anti-feudal struggles under revolutionary leadership in Telangana and Bihar has led to a widespread awakening among Dalits and other lower castes in various parts of the country, especially in the northern states like UP, Haryana, MP which were relatively untouched in the colonial period. This awakening is sharp among the petty-bourgeois sections of the Dalits. The BSP, the party formed on the base of Dalit bureaucrats, has gained legitimacy as it would utilise the democratic sentiments of dalits against caste discrimination and for social and political power. But the BSP with its anti-Brahmin rhetoric, its emphasis on caste alliance, the exclusion of class unity, the absence of a systematic socio-economic program and its complete on electoral politics which in practice has meant alliance 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 comprador bourgeoisie, landlord parties has meant that they have betrayed the interests of the poor peasants and landless peasants. With its support to the pro-imperialist economic policies which have led to privatisation, unemployment and increased imperialist exploitation of the agrarian economy, the BSP cannot but betray the interests of even the petty-bourgeois sections of the Dalits. Thus under the leadership of the comprador dalit bureaucrats and the upper stratum of the urban petty-bourgeois intelligentsia and with the support of one section of comprador bourgeoisie, the BSP has become a party in the service of Indian ruling classes. Because BSP has belief in Indian Constitution and parliamentary democracy, and it has no programme what so ever towards land reforms or against imperialism and its reluctance to build up movements organising the people at grass roots. It has become an acceptable party to the Indian ruling classes. Thus in the name of dalits, it has become a representative of the Indian ruling classes. Like all other bourgeois parliamentary parties, BSP also cannot solve the basic problems of Indian people.

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

CHAPTER-IV

RELATION BETWEEN CLASSES AND CASTES IN INDIAN HISTORY

A correct understanding of the relations between class and caste is of great importance for correct revolutionary tactics. Let us therefore trace the relation between classes and castes during the various periods of their origin, development and transformation as outlined in the earlier three chapters. Let us also analyse this relationship in today's society.

Pre-Vedic Period :

Classes emerged in India during the period of the Indus Valley civilization before 2000 B.C. However these classes were not known to be endogamous hierarchically placed groups. Thus castes or forms of castes cannot be traced to this pre-Vedic period.

Post Rig-Vedic Period :

It was only in the next period when the Vedic Aryans entered around 1500 B.C. that class first took on a form that can be traced as the earliest forbearer of caste. Though a prolonged process of conflict and assimilation between the Aryan tribes and the original Dravidian civilizations and tribes, and with the break down of kinship-based relationships and the development of agriculture, arose the varnas which were the form that classes took during that period. Though varnas were not castes as we know them today, they provided its origins.

The two upper varnas, the Kshatriyas and Brahmins, were the classes from which arose the tribal oligarchy, around the 7th century B.C., that kept control over the Vaishyas (or Vis) and the Shudras. The state was yet to come into being but the Varnashrama Dharma provided a code of conduct and control. Thus varna and class coincided during this period.

The Proto-Feudal State :

From around 500 B.C. however, with the emergence and growth of the proto-feudal state, the relation between varna and class changed. Class differentiation emerged within various varnas. Brahmins took on

administrative functions and also became merchants and landowners. The Vaishyas had among them merchants, wealthy landowners and craftsmen. Even the nature of Shudras changed with them being taken as hired agricultural labourers.

Thus varnas did not correspond as closely to classes as in the earlier period. The ruling classes of this proto-feudal state consisted of the Kshatriyas. The Brahmins and the upper of the Vaishya varna. Thus one section of the Vaishya varna had become a ruling class while another section of this varna remained a ruled class.

Another thing to be remembered is that this varna system was still not the rigidified caste system. There was still some mobility possible from one varna to another and it was only in the next stage that castes developed and got consolidated.

Caste-based Feudalism :

The stage of caste-based feudalism from around the 4th century A.D. marks the establishment of the caste system in India. As feudalism expanded, tribes were absorbed as endogamous occupation-based castes within the self-sufficient village communities. They were assigned the status of Shudras or became part of the growing number of the Ati-Shudras (untouchables). A large section of the Vaishyas, particularly those in the rural areas, came to be recognised as Shudras, while a small Vaishya section which remained in the urban areas remained as the merchant class. Foreign invaders and erstwhile Shudras who newly become part of the ruling classes were accommodated as castes with the status of Kshatriyas. The Brahmins took up priestly functions and also consolidated their position as landlords.

It is in this period that the innumerable number of castes (or Jatis) developed and got consolidated as separate endogamous communities with a separate occupational role within the self-sufficient village economy. These castes (or Jatis) became the prime unit for a person's identity or social and economic inter action. The countless castes that developed as feudalism grew were different from the broad varnas of the earlier period. But they were fitted into the frame work of Varnashrama Dharma by the ruling classes. Also the new entrants were given befitting status according to the newly invented 'Varnasamskara' theory. Thus the varna ceased to be the endogamous group but instead became a category indicating the broad status of each caste which became the actual endogamous occupational group.

The relation between class and caste was thus to a great extent re-established and consolidated during this period. The caste system being much more rigidified, there were strict laws preventing members of a particular caste entering into another profession or occupation not assigned to them. Thus one's caste and occupation; or in other words one's position in the production relations and therefore class, was decided by birth and remained unchanged till death. A particular class for example, the peasantry, would be composed of various castes, but a caste would always be fixed within a particular class e.g. village menial, agricultural labourer, artisan, peasantry, merchant, priest, landlord and feudal intermediary, administrator etc.

While this strict co-relation between caste and class remained rigid particularly at the level of the self-sufficient village community, the only exception was among the ruling classes. The ruling classes were broadly the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas, but many a time members of other castes or foreign invaders became part of the ruling classes through conquest. Some of these rulers accepted Kshatriya status (as in North India) but others maintained their previous status as Shudras or Muslims. They however did not make any major changes in the caste system as a whole. In fact, throughout the feudal period the ruling classes made full use of the caste system to facilitate and consolidate their exploitation and class rule.

Semi-feudalism and colonialism :

The colonialists too followed the policy of all earlier ruling classes of using the caste system for their exploitation and rule. But changes which were already taking place before colonisation and the economic changes brought in the 19th century by colonial exploitation and rule itself resulted in significant changes in the caste-based feudal setup. The birth of new classes and the class-differentiation between various castes resulted in a change in the relation between caste and class. It was from this period that caste and class coincided less and less.

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

It was during the British period that the modern proletariat was born, so also the comprador bourgeoisie was born and brought up by the imperialists. Within the peasantry too a slow and gradual differentiation was taking place.

For, from amongst the peasant and artisan castes of the Shudra status came the factory workers, 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. In mines and plantations also worked the Dalits and the Adivasis. All these together constituted the modern proletariat.

The Merchants and money-lenders were from the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Muslims, erstwhile Vaishyas, the trading communities and from the erstwhile Shudras also.

The comprador business houses came from amongst the 'Bania' i.e., trading castes and communities like the Parsis, Jains and from the Khattiya i.e., Kshatriya caste. A few from the Brahmin and erstwhile Shudra castes.

The Brahmins, Kayasthas, Anglo-Indians, Parsis, Muslim educated elite dominated the bureaucracy.

The British also legally constituted classes notified as landlords (other than Vatandars or Inamdars) tenants and labourers. Though the Zamindars, Khotedars, Talukdars mostly come from the upper castes, the smaller landlords and rich peasants notified as Tenants came from the erstwhile Shudra castes. The Ati-Shudra, Adivasi, and nomadic tribes constituted the bulk of the landless and agricultural labour forces. Also a large section of the impoverished Shudra peasants became labourers and landless.

The new classes that arose in this period were thus born as multi-caste classes. The modern proletariat in particular was created with both the 'Savarnas' and 'Dalits' within its fold. However the most significant change was that many castes ceased to exist as single-class entities as in the earlier period. Class differentiation had resulted in the break-up of castes into various classes in particular, small but influential sections of the former Shudra castes were rising to take positions among the ruling classes. Small petti-bourgeois sections grew in most castes. And even some sections of the uppermost castes had entered the proletariat.

However, overall it was sections from the higher castes mainly who continued to own and control the means of production and continued to be the main section of the ruling classes. On the other hand over 95% of the Dalits remained as agricultural labour, poor peasants and working class.

Post-47 India saw even more changes, especially in rural India. Semi-feudal and semi-colonial India saw the rise of new caste-class configurations,

due to the expansion of capitalist relations and blows delivered by the people's movements. In the rural areas especially, the pre-dominance of the Brahmin Kshatriya castes has been reduced and their place has been taken up by the upper sections of the erstwhile Shudra castes. The ruling elite in the country side now composes not only of the Brahmin, Rajputs, Vellalas, Bhumi-hars etc., but also Patidars, Patels, Marathas, Kunbis, Jats, Yadavas, Kurmis, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, Kamma, Reddy etc.


The bulk of the middle peasants come from the erstwhile Shudra castes while the small, landless and agricultural labourers are composed of the erstwhile 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-caste unity along the lines of the non-Brahmin movements, against the feudal elite.

Today unity along caste lines can only lead to class collaboration and making the toiling masses of the oppressed castes into the 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.

Thus today the correspondence between class and caste has reduced even further, and almost all castes have become multi-class entities. The caste system however continues to perpetuate itself due to the continuing semi-feudal relations and the need of imperialism to maintain these relations.

The needs of electoral politics and the rise of Hindu chauvinism has given new life in different forms to the caste system. The ruling classes are trying to use the caste system to build multi-class organisations along caste lines under their leadership. There are however also some organisations of oppressed castes under petty-bourgeois leadership.

It is in this scenario that the party of the proletariat has to present its alternative that will fight caste oppression and smash the caste system. This is presented in the following chapters. 

CHAPTER-V

ERRONEOUS TRENDS ON THE ISSUE OF CASTE ERADICATION

CPI's Understanding :

The CPI did not understand the caste question in India. Not only did it not give importance to the questions of caste discrimination and inequality and the fight against Brahminical ideology, questions which are part of the superstructure, but it did not understand that caste existed in the realm of production also i.e., in the base.

It only saw imperialism as a target, did not see its alliance with feudal and comprador classes, which, also in League with imperialism, had an interest in keeping India backward with all its age-old systems and even the caste system intact - changing them only to that extent which suited their needs.

It did not give importance to the mobilisation of peasantry in which the interests of the small and landless peasants and agricultural labourers are upheld. It did not connect up the 'land to the tiller' slogan to the question of seizure of political power, thus paving way for the destruction of feudalism and also the caste system.

Thus on the question of caste the CPI had an extremely erroneous and reformist understanding and practice.

Present day Erroneous Trends :

Today, there are mainly two wrong tendencies on the issue of caste eradication, among those who claim to be practising Marxism-Leninism-Mao Thought.

First that caste is a factor related to only the superstructure; since caste, like all other factors pertaining to the superstructure, will be eradicated once the system is changed, there is no need to take up any programmes (struggles) on this issue and, even if we do, there would be no benefit. This is a very mechanical understanding. ML groups supporting this line argue that struggles should be taken up only on clear-cut class demands. It is clear that these groups have not understood the concrete conditions in India and are merely postponing the caste eradication struggles for the

post-revolutionary phase with a mechanical perspective. This tendency of the communist revolutionaries, their sincerity notwithstanding, will not only fail to contribute towards mobilising the oppressed masses, but also help divert the oppressed castes against the communists.

A different, but equally erroneous trend, is the one which does not distinguish between caste and class and distorts the caste struggle as class struggle. Though some ML groups claim class struggle to be primary, by creating caste associations and giving undue prominence to caste struggles, they are rendering the class struggles unimportant in practice. On the other hand, some 'dalit' groups, who declare that they are applying MLM thought to the concrete conditions of India very creatively, go a step further, and claim that classes in India are actually in the form of castes only and hence, all the oppressed castes should be united to install a 'dalit' state. By theorising that the contradiction between the higher castes and lower castes is the principal contradiction today, they are preaching that taking up anti-caste struggle is the immediate task of the revolutionaries and not recognising this is the cause of the failure of the communist movement. Moreover, they are arguing that a 'new type of proletarian party' should be built and also that comrades from the higher castes should be banned from entering the higher level committees. They are also circulating the strange logic that if the country's president is elected from the SC/ST, it would curb the casteism to some extent and opposing such a demand would be tantamount to casteism.

The essence of all these arguments is nothing but saying that social revolution should precede political revolution, and class struggle can progress only after caste revolution. In the name of creative application of Marxism to the concrete conditions of the country, these 'dalit Marxists' are side-tracking the class struggle. By depicting the higher castes as the principal enemy, they are keeping the masses from learning who are their real enemies and who are their friends. They are creating illusions among the masses of this exploitative society by asserting that caste eradication is possible through social struggle within the framework of the present system.

Though it is true that class and caste are inter-linked in India to some extent, it is important to appreciate that they are not one and the same. However, in the case of dalits (SC), both are almost combined. Barring a few intellectuals and bureaucrats who serve the cause of the ruling classes, the majority of dalits (over 95%) belong to wage labour, poor peasant and other revolutionary classes. However among the backward castes, class polarisation has been very sharp and a considerable section among them have transformed into landlords, rich peasants, industrialists and business-

men to become a part of the ruling classes. Some castes among the backward are in a pathetic condition while some are relatively better off. On the whole, majority among the BC are of proletarian character and are desirous of revolution. However, they should be mobilised not on caste basis but on class basis.

It is also not proper to say that all the people among higher castes should be treated as exploiting class. Though it is true that a majority of the repressing class belong to the high castes, all higher castes are not exploiters. A considerable section of them can come into the new democratic revolution. It is imperative, and indeed possible, to unite them with the oppressed masses of the other castes to conduct struggles on various issues. Especially, we should try to unite them in anti-caste struggles. It is not possible to unite all the downtrodden people without waging a struggle against the caste prejudices prevalent among the higher castes.

Anti-caste struggle should be turned into an integral part of the new democratic revolution by recognising that only a successful democratic revolution can provide the material base for a complete eradication of caste.

Relation of Caste to Base and Superstructure :

Due to wrong understanding prevailing in various ML groups on this question, it is necessary once again to state our understanding. Firstly we must understand that it is un-Marxist and mechanical to see caste as only part of the superstructure or as only part of the base of society, as some groups do. While caste has its superstructural aspects like Brahminical ideology we must recognise that caste is also an integral part of the production relations, i.e., the base of society. As we have shown earlier the role of caste in the base which was the strongest under caste-based feudalism, has now decreased with the development of semi-feudalism and the growth of capitalist relations. However caste will continue to play a role in the base as long as semi-feudalism exists and as long as the caste system is used by the bourgeoisie to facilitate its exploitation and rule.

The main tactical principle that flows from the above, is that caste cannot be tackled only at the base or only at superstructural level. The eradication of caste is only possible through an all-round attack on caste at both base and superstructural levels, from the very beginning till its final elimination.



CHAPTER-VI

CASTE ISSUE-OUR PARTY'S PERSPECTIVE AND PRACTICE

Right from the beginning, our Party has treated the caste issue as one peculiar to Indian situation. Our documents in 1974 and 1976 clarified that just as the people were divided into different classes, they are also divided into different castes and so, we should have a clear approach towards the issue generally as well as particularly.

“Caste system is not immune to change. Like everything else in nature, caste system also must have a beginning, development and end.

“Though feudalism is still a strong force in the country, though we still remain primarily an agrarian country with a weak capitalist structure, we are living under conditions of commodity production in a semi-colonial country. So it can be said that the caste system today lost its role as a tool to facilitate production. Though caste-based occupations still remain in form, in the face of onslaught from the capitalist market, they are gradually dying. Hence, caste system today became an obstruction for social progress. It is not an exaggeration to say that it has become a hindrance for mobilising the downtrodden people. Also, caste has become a potent weapon in the hands of the exploiting classes to divide the oppressed masses by provoking the prejudices.

“It is not proper to distinguish between social and economic problems mechanically and treat only those dealing with economic problems to be class struggles. As per the character of the caste system, the issue of caste is in essence nothing but a class issue. According to our understanding, among all the present contradictions in our society, the one between feudalism and the vast masses is the principal contradiction. We can see how this contradiction manifests in the shape of castes. Among the peasantry, not more than 6-7% would be feudal landlords or comprador landlords. Today more than 90% of the landlord families belong to the higher castes like Brahmin, Vaisya, Kshatriya, Reddy, Velama and Kamma. Similarly over 90% of the people among backward castes like Yadava, Chakali, Mangali, etc., and scheduled castes like Mala, Madiga, Dekkali etc are poor peasants

or wage labourers. Especially among SCs, more than 95% families live as agricultural labour. So, if seen from the point of view of caste, it is clear that the agrarian revolution, which is the axis of the democratic revolution, will advance through struggle between higher castes and lower castes. Hence, just as the nationality question world wide is nothing but a class issue, the caste issue in our country is also a class issue.

“If so, why not theorise that democratic revolution or agrarian revolution is nothing but a revolution to be achieved by backward castes against higher castes ? We should not make such a mistake. Though 90% of the landlords are of high caste, a majority of the higher caste people are exploited in some form or the other by the landlords. Similarly, while more than 90% of the backward castes are poor peasants and labourers, a handful of them belong to feudal class or comprador or bureaucratic bourgeois class. So agrarian revolution is not struggle between higher castes and lower castes.

“While it is wrong to consider agrarian revolution to be against higher castes, it is even more wrong to show reluctance in facing the social atrocities perpetrated by the higher caste landlords on the lower castes. Though, a lot of the poor have been living by succumbing to social customs due to age-old practice, as class and revolutionary consciousness grows, they will not be satisfied with token increases in wages, but will realise that they also have a right to live like others in the society. This is a symbol of their growing self-confidence. Without such growth, revolutionary consciousness is not possible.

“Almost all the scheduled caste people are landless labourers. Among the backward castes, too, majority people depend on agriculture and live in precarious condition. All of them are victims of the feudal exploitation. Without eliminating feudalism completely, that without completing agrarian revolution on the basis of ‘land to the tiller’, it is impossible to provide them justice.

“For the success of democratic revolution, our Party has developed the following programme.

1. The evil designs of landlords to divide the masses by exploiting the caste differences should not be allowed to continue.

2. Considering that more than 95% of the dalits and backward castes are labourers and poor peasants, all of them should unite to fight for hiking

wages, facing social injustices, reducing share-cropping rates and preventing the landlords from throwing out share croppers.

3. A majority of the higher castes are also poor peasants who must unite with dalits and poor peasants. We should strive to mobilise labourers and poor peasants from all castes against the landlords.

4. Agricultural labour associations should be built with labourers from all castes. Similarly, peasant associations should be built with peasants from all castes.

5. We should expose the hollowness of the caste reforms of Congress and Janata governments and propagate among the masses that the land reforms and other reforms would not improve the conditions of the oppressed masses.”

All the above things were published in the 1974 document entitled ‘Road to revolution’, and the question-answer column run in the magazine ‘Red Flag’.

As part of the above perspective, we have taken up several struggles against social oppression and physical attacks on dalits in the rural areas. Large scale propaganda and protest movements were taken up when incidents like Karamchedu and Chundur took place. Where necessary, higher caste landlords who led these attacks were annihilated. Even if they are deceitful reforms of the ruling classes, we supported reservations and stood at the forefront in the struggles to achieve reservations. We took up propaganda struggles against BJP, which epitomises caste prejudices and Hindu parochialism. As part of this, we mobilised more than 2,00,000 people to attend the meeting held in Hyderabad in September 1990.

Deciding that Communist Party should be strengthened among the basic classes in rural areas, and our activities should be concentrated among the dalit castes, we built mass struggles with focus on these castes. We took up the number of days stayed in a ‘dalit hamlet’ as an indication of success in the ‘go to village’ campaigns. By conducting struggles on socio-economic issues like abolition of bonded labour, enhancement of wages, retrieval of fines collected by landlords, occupation of lands belonging to government and landlords, etc, we could achieve unity among poor of all castes. Members of the dalit castes were consciously developed into leadership positions of the peasant-labour associations. The role played by these leaders with the support of the Party and the squads had to be accepted even by

the higher castes. Like this, the increasing unity among all the castes is gradually transforming into a democratic struggle being fought for caste eradication.

One of the significant achievements of our revolutionary movement is that the leadership from oppressed people is not only limited to village level committees but has also entered the higher level committees with increased consciousness.

In the process of uniting the dalits, we could fight the higher caste prejudices in various forms and imbibe the self-confidence among the dalits. In the areas where we worked, insulting in the name of caste and addressing people with caste-based names could be curbed to a large extent. The age-long inferiority complex among dalits could be removed. Efforts were made to inculcate the social consciousness of equality. Untouchability and caste discrimination were reduced considerably and oppressed classes identified with the revolutionary movement.

However, given the magnitude of the problem, it is clear from experience that our efforts are not enough. It is also true that our efforts have not been commensurate with the depth of the problem. Though generally we have the right perspective in Party, there are certain shortcomings in specific understanding and practice. Due to this, we have fallen behind in taking up special programmes for caste eradication, continuing the programmes that were taken up and in selecting new struggle forms. We can enhance the consciousness only by concentrating on social struggles along with economic and political struggles. As a result of this only the dalit castes who are the backbone of the revolution will develop revolutionary consciousness.

So far we have conducted struggles against caste discrimination through mass organisations built to mobilise revolutionary forces into the new democratic revolution. But our experience has shown that it is not possible to eradicate social inequalities through these mass organisations alone. This is not only an anti-ruling class struggle but also a socio-cultural struggle to be waged among the masses. The higher, backward and dalit castes are divided into hundred and thousands of sub-castes. Within dalits, there is untouchability between Mala and Madiga etc. Cross-caste marriages are not allowed. Their houses are grouped separately. Temples and Churches are separated. Similar conditions exist in the backward castes, also. In these circumstances, our struggle should strive to remove caste

distinctions among people, achieve equality and give no room for untouchability of any kind, with the aim of eradicating caste.

Everyday, the atrocities on dalits are increasing. According to government figures, 2911 cases were registered in 1955-60 which went up to 75, 681 cases during 1981-85. During 1986-90, nearly 48, 950 cases were filed in which only 538 cases had convictions. Thousands of cases occur which do not come into government records. There is no count of the victims. In today's situation where dalits would not stay docile against oppression, higher caste bigots are adopting murder as a method. In order to keep the ever-growing consciousness of the dalits, higher caste feudal forces are resorting to mass rapes, arson and murder on a big scale. In these circumstances, several opportunist parties like BSP, who are nothing but pro-ruling class parties, have emerged with the avowed aim to 'uplift' dalits. By utilising the helplessness of the masses, and their consciousness, these parties are trying to divert them into reformism. By conducting unprecedented caste conferences, Congress and BJP are also trying to keep the people under their leadership. Without defeating this pro-ruling class opportunist leadership, it is not possible to succeed in the social revolution. Thus, we must lead them in the direction of the fact that the downtrodden can be free from not only social oppression but also economic and political oppression by integrating the anti-caste struggle with the class struggle.

Even in the areas where the class struggle is intense, there is a need to develop a concrete programme for caste eradication and implement it with special focus. In areas where we are weak, we should actively participate in the movement on special demands of dalits and other backward castes, take up their leadership and gradually expand these movements to include all the sections of the people in the society.

In order to integrate caste struggle into class struggle, it is not sufficient to just realise the political aim that 'caste issue is in essence class issue'. It is necessary to build an organisation to achieve the aim.

Similarly, we should oppose the age-old institutions built by the higher castes to perpetrate their class-caste domination.

Already proliferating, caste organisations are helping to increase caste hatred, prejudices and subvert the thoughts of the people. We should discourage development of such caste-based organisations.

Dalit and exploited castes have some organisations for safeguarding

their rights. Though some of these are democratic in nature, they are often subject to ruling class influences in absence of proper direction. We should attempt to give them a proper direction.

It is the need of the day to build 'anti-caste' organisations which fight to remove caste system as part of the new democratic revolution.

All downtrodden castes (SC/ST/BC) should be united to achieve this goal. At the same time, friendship should be fostered with the sections of those higher castes who do not practise caste discrimination.

We should fight against feudalism and imperialism which are safeguarding the caste system. Those feudal forces which are preserving feudalism and casteism should be targetted as main enemies. Hindu fundamentalist forces should be fought against.

Unity should be established with all organisations and individuals fighting against feudalism and imperialism.

Efforts should be made to propagate anti-caste attitude in all forms, to resist social oppression perpetrated in the name of caste, and to enhance the socio-cultural consciousness of the lower castes.

Activities to encourage inter-caste marriages, combined feasts, construction of common wells, allocation of residential plots for cohabitation etc., should be taken up.

Night schools and cultural programmes should be conducted to increase the educational and cultural levels of the downtrodden. Cultural programmes highlighting the superiority of labour and exposing the putrid caste system of the Hindu religion should be performed.

Even in areas like North Telangana and Dandakaranya where the class struggle is intense and the guerilla zone formation has entered the primary stage, these organisations should be developed to consciously work towards removing these caste distinctions among people. Specific programmes relating to caste should be formulated in the mass organisations already functioning among students, youth, peasantry etc. Cultural troupes and organisations should develop special cultural programmes on caste issue to be propagated in the struggle areas. ➡

CHAPTER-VII

SPECIFIC PROGRAMME

The anti-caste struggle should have as its aim the completion of the New Democratic Revolution and the overthrow of feudalism, comprador bureaucratic capital and imperialism which are the protectors of the caste system in India. The following specific programme should be taken up to achieve the above.

1. Must create awareness among the people about their backward ideology.

Wage ideological struggle against casteist ideology and all other forms of casteist thinking. Expose the casteist ideology in the scriptures like Manusmriti, Gita, Vedas etc.

Fight against symbols of caste identity and degradation, language and culture having a caste slang.

Oppose Gohatya Bandi. Fight social stigma against certain occupations and customs of lower castes like beef eating or pork eating. Fight to end caste-based menial labour.

Must struggle against blind beliefs, untouchability etc.

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.

Should educate the mass organisations against casteist beliefs and thinking.

Must dispel the false consciousness and illusion among the poor people belonging to the upper castes that they are socially equal to the rich people of their castes.

2. Unite the oppressed castes in anti-state struggles.

Oppose housing schemes based on caste segregation.

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.

Fight to properly implement the policy of reservations.

Fight for reservations in the private sector.

Fight bureaucratic delays and corruption in loans and subsidies for sheduled castes and OBCs.

Fight against the repressive acts of the government, which acting on behalf of landlords, is attempting to snatch back the rights won by the dalits in rural areas.

3. Support the struggles of the dalits for self-respect.

Form caste eradication organisations to fight caste discrimination and pogroms against lower castes.

4. Expose and fight against the reactionary nature of the caste associations particularly upper caste associations.

Fight against the casteist leadership of the oppressed castes that obstructs the unity of the oppressed masses.



CHAPTER-VIII

CASTE AFTER NEW DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

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

In fact, it is not only that after the seizure of power that castes shall cease to be in the realm of relations of productions. Even before, we shall have to recognise it as a reality and struggle against it. Wherever they exist, even remnants of caste system have to be fought against.

The other fact is that problems of superstructure cannot be postponed till after the seizure of power. Even during the revolution we shall have to struggle against caste-discrimination and prejudice.

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).

Big private property held by Caste institutions or temples shall be seized.

Caste discrimination shall be fought against. Untouchability shall not only be abolished, but punishment shall be meted out to any one practising it.

All caste-based inequalities shall be done away with. Reservations in jobs 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 training and skills to enhance their knowledge. In the rural sector caste-based occupations shall be ended and alternate employment shall be given by teaching new methods and techniques. Localised Agro-

based industries shall be promoted, handicraft industries shall be gradually mechanised. Caste-based menial labour should be abolished.

Agriculture should be developed. Agriculture should be industrialised and industry shall be based on Agriculture.

Reservations and preferences shall be continued in the educational sphere for the lower castes.

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

At the ideological and cultural plane the fight against Brahminical practices, Pujapat, superstition, blind belief, religious and caste prejudices shall continue, while upholding one's right to practise one's faith.

The gap between mental and manual labour, urban and rural divide, and all gender 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.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE
CPI (M-L) (PEOPLE'S WAR)

