

# **Communists Against Caste**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The CPI (M) as a Communist Party pledged to fight for and achieve an exploitation free society through revolution, is duty bound to confront the different exploitations that exist in the society it seeks to transform. While primacy must be given to fight against class exploitation, the battle for People's Democratic Revolution cannot be won unless this task is combined with the fight against myriad social oppressions, the most prominent of which is that of caste. The caste system and all that it entails represents a major weapon of exploitation in India. From this arises the need to fight against it as an integral part of the struggle for revolutionary transformation.

Caste is a phenomenon found only in the Indian sub-continent. It has several complexities, including proliferation of sub-castes, and differs in its specific form and detail in different regions. It has not been static and has undergone several changes, which continue till date. Its essence however, has been the same through the centuries and in all regions i.e., as an instrument of bolstering class exploitation and social and gender oppression. It represents one of the most cruelly oppressive systems in the world. It subjects the lower (oppressed) castes to daily insults and humiliation. It relegates women of all castes to an inferior status. Women of the oppressed castes, however, are subjected to the most inhuman brutalization, including rape. As Communists, as fighters for a just and humane world, we cannot but be revolted by this exploitative and oppressive system.

No ruling class can ever rule on the basis of brute strength alone; it must rule over the minds and consciousness of the majority. The caste system, more than anything else, has provided this handle to the Indian ruling classes over the centuries. This is the reason why rulers have come and rulers have gone, but not one of them has ever dealt a decisive blow to the caste system – on the contrary, all of them, including the medieval and the colonial ruling classes and bourgeois-landlord ruling classes of independent India have used the caste system to divide the people and blunt their class consciousness. It is therefore a matter of direct concern to the working class movement both with regard to fighting class exploitation as well as from the viewpoint of forging the unity of the working class and other toilers, needed to achieve this end. The exploitative and divisive nature of caste and its role in blunting class consciousness can only be ignored at the cost of jeopardizing the fight for revolutionary transformation of society. In other words the fight against the caste system is not just a matter of immediate tactical concern but has strategic implications as well.

## **CASTE THROUGH HISTORY**

### **Origins of Caste:**

While classes existed in the pre-Aryan and highly urbanized Indus Valley civilization, there is no proof of existence of caste in it. The origins of caste are linked with advent and development of Aryan society in India. Their advent is dated to begin around 1750 B.C.

The period between 1750 and 1000 B.C. is called the Rigvedic Age or the period in which the Rigveda was compiled. This society was a tribal and primarily pastoral, though agriculture was also known and practiced.

Rigvedic society had strong traces of egalitarianism given its limited social surplus. Gradually distinctions arose in it as a result of the division of labour, specialization and strengthening patriarchy. Certain people began specializing in trying to understand nature which affected the community. In such societies Gods represent elements of nature. Indra, the rain and lightning God and others like Surya, Vayu, Varun, Agni etc., represent natural phenomenon. Mother goddess worship was prevalent as a fertility cult. Gradually, the above specialists got divorced from the productive processes setting them apart from rest of the tribe.

Given low production levels, different tribes warred between themselves. Though the entire tribe went to war, over a period of time specialists, who led the tribe in battle emerged. This two-fold specialization within the tribe formed the seeds of inequality within the tribe which was to manifest in class divisions once agriculture with its accompanying stable and larger social surplus emerged as the main mode of production.

Rigvedic society was divided into three varnas-brahmins or priestly class, kshatriyas or the specialists in war and the vis or

vaisyas, the general tribesmen engaged in pastoralism and agriculture. The sudra varna is mentioned only in the last chapter or the 10<sup>th</sup> “khand” of the Rigveda. This varna was composed of those either enslaved in war or pushed down to penury, slavery or semi-slavery from within the tribe. Varna at this stage represented a proto-class division, not based on heredity and endogamy (i.e. marrying within one’s own varna) as its hallmark.

In the later Vedic period (1000-600 B.C.), the Aryans extended their control to the Ganga valley. Agriculture now became the main mode of production. This led to the emergence of a stable surplus produce which made the emergence of full-fledged class divisions possible. The ritual specialists and war specialists of Rigvedic times allied (though there were frictions between them) to dominate rest of society consisting of agriculturists, landless semi-slaves and petty shopkeepers and traders or the sudras and the vaisyas. The brahmins were to emerge as the highest varna, based on their control over rituals, interpretation of rights and duties of society and study of natural phenomenon, which gave them a grasp over the calendar, essential for regulating agricultural operations. Gradually, with the further division of labour the original four-fold varna system saw the proliferation of jatis or sub-castes, with different craftsmen emerging as separate jatis. Caste came to denote fairly well marked, separate communities whose individual members were bound to each other by endogamy and often by hereditary profession or duties to a great extent.

The emergence of agriculture as the main mode of production also saw final and historic defeat of women and their subjugation. This manifest among other ways in taking away of whatever choice they had in matters of marriage. This was in turn used to strengthen endogamy, which was essential bedrock of the varna system.

#### **Caste as a weapon of economic and social exploitation:**

What began as a class division in society was superimposed on by caste- a phenomenon, which corresponded to class on several occasions but which had an autonomous space of its own. Thus whereas large sections of peasant cultivators and the landless were at the receiving end in class terms while simultaneously being

bracketed as sudras, other sections of the peasantry facing the same class oppression were placed in the vaisya caste. This implied that sudra peasants were exposed to greater social discrimination and oppression than vaisyas from the same class.

In ancient and medieval India, the sudras were subject to ruthless exploitation and oppression. The Manusmriti (written between 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) denied the sudras the right to education, the right to property, the right to carry arms, and even access to religious observances. It declared that if a sudra acquired any property, any Brahmin or Kshatriya had the right to take it away from him forcibly. Sudras were not allowed to draw water from common water sources. They were forced to live in a separate part of the village or at times even outside it. Inter dining or inter marriage with them was socially prohibited as was their entry into temples. Lower caste women were subject to sexual oppression at the hands of upper caste men. If a brahmin had sexual relations with a sudra woman there was no punishment prescribed in law for him. But if a sudra man had sex with a brahmin woman the punishment was death. The whole purpose of these injunctions regarding chaturvarnya was to reduce the sudras to the status of subsistence labour, close to that of slaves, and generate a huge surplus value through its productive labour for the enjoyment of a parasitic ruling class.

#### **Ideological Justifications:**

In order to provide sanctity to varna, over time, the theory of rebirth and karma was propounded which argued that a person’s caste status was divinely ordained and based deeds, in past lives. Divine sanction also implied that different castes were assigned particular roles in society, which could not be changed. Caste thus came to provide a justification for the class division of society. Added to this were the notions of the ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’. This was probably the result of the process of assimilation of indigenous tribes. If the concerned tribe was already an agricultural community it simply turned into a peasant caste. But as more and more food gatherers and hunters were subjugated, they were reduced, either to the status of sudras or to that of chandalas, the lowest stratum

that was outside the four varnas and was barred from agriculture. They became a large reservoir of un-free and servile landless labour. These included those practicing certain “impure” professions like skinning of dead animals. Similarly, the ideal of ahimsa was propounded which was also used as a justification for subjugating food gathering and hunting tribes, who were considered ‘violent’. Ahimsa also rationalized denigration of the peasantry. The use of the plough was seen as ‘violence’ against insects and germs. Large sections of the peasantry thus came to be part of the sudras rather than the vaisyas. Ironically animal sacrifice by the upper castes as an integral part of Vedic religion was not seen as violence.

Initially there is evidence of caste mobility but this became restricted over time. Clear cut injunctions regarding caste status and obligations were laid down. The Manusmriti sought to justify the varna system by claiming that brahmins were formed from the head of the primeval god - Brahma, kshatriyas from his arms, vaisyas from his thighs and sudras from his feet. The vaisya was described by him as one, “to be eaten at will (i.e. exploited at will)” and the sudra as one, “to be killed at will”. The approximations to this “ideal” varied from time to time, given the concrete circumstances obtaining; the intention however, was unambiguous.

The Manusmriti also made the change of occupations a serious and heavily punishable offence. It enjoins upon the king the duty of preserving the four-tier social hierarchy and to inflict severe punishment on those who attempt to change their occupations. Further, it advises the brahmins and kshatriyas to form an alliance in their common class interest. The absence of such an alliance, it says, would lead to perishing of both these varnas. The Bhagavadgita says that it is better to die in the performance of one’s own swadharma rather than change one’s varna and occupation. It also cautions the kshatriyas against the non-performance of their swadharma of fighting, lest such an example inspired the ‘lower’ varnas to change their occupations.

### **The First Revolt Against Caste:**

The 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. saw the first revolt against Vedic religion and caste in the form of Buddhism and Jainism. Around this time

iron came to be used in a big way to clear forests of the Gangetic Plains and help the eastwards spread of Aryan settlers. Iron also came to be used on ploughs enabling ploughing of the heavy soils of this region. The consequent expansion of agriculture enabled peasants to produce more. This in turn helped the growth of towns. Simultaneously, this period saw the growth of trade and use of metallic coins. The growth of towns, trade and money economy led to development of diverse crafts and certain specialisation in the field of commodity production. There was a marked expansion of the trading and artisan classes. The use of money also gave rise to money lending and usury. The countryside in the same period saw emergence of wealthy peasant proprietors called gahapatis. In both the towns and countryside there was increase in social disparities and old tribal notions of kinship and equality were being liquidated.

The prevalent Vedic religion did not suit the interests of the gahapatis, traders and artisans. Its ritualism and senseless animal sacrifice hit at the basis of plough agriculture. Similarly it disapproved of production and trade in certain commodities like liquids, perfumes, cloth, butter, food-grains. Working with substances considered impure was also restricted. Some Vedic texts condemned voyaging by sea as sinful. The traders, artisans and gahapatis required religions that catered to their needs. Buddhism and Jainism fulfilled these needs. Both religions stressed on ahimsa and decried animal sacrifice. Unlike brahminical texts they had a favourable outlook vis-a-vis trade and artisanal production. Hence they did not look down on production and trade in commodities mentioned above. Buddhists also approved of sea voyages for trade. Similarly, unlike the writers of the Dharamshastras, Buddhism did not decry money lending and usury.

As caste was inexorably intertwined with Vedic religion, it is natural to expect that that Buddhism and Jainism would attack it. This proved to be true in a limited sense. Thus both these religions admitted people from all castes into their monastic orders. Even chandalas could gain nirvana. Matanga the son of a chandala is said to have attained nirvana which many brahmins and kshatriyas could not attain. The Buddhist Sangha was open to prostitutes. Unlike

brahminical religion, Buddhism and Jainism permitted their monks and nuns to accept food from all the four varnas and even eat in their houses, if invited. Both religions repeatedly emphasised that caste was irrelevant for gaining nirvana or salvation.

However, in spite of this neither Buddhism nor Jainism waged a powerful struggle against the caste system and untouchability. The karma doctrine, or the belief in the transmigration of souls which formed the bedrock of Buddhist philosophy, was an ideal rationalisation of the caste system. Further, Buddhism recognised untouchability. This can be seen in its recognition of chandalas and nishads (originally aboriginals) as untouchables. Buddhist Jataka stories portray chandalas as being the meanest beings on earth and regard even contact with the air that touches their body as pollution. Buddhism and Jainism did not question the role of caste in shoring up class exploitation. It is true that both religions forbade their followers from trade in human beings and appealed to slave owners to treat their slaves well. They however, did not question slavery itself. Further Buddha stated that debtors and slaves cannot be given diksha, i.e. they cannot join the Buddhist Sangha. In brief Buddhism and Jainism did not in any fundamental sense confront the caste system and the existing class exploitation.

#### **Caste from the Maurya Empire to the Advent of the Turks:**

The 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. also saw the emergence of territorial states at a pan-Indian level. Three centuries before Christ emerged the first big empire spanning large parts of India- the Maurya Empire. The Maurya dynasty did not belong to the upper castes, which implies that individuals from lower castes could become rulers provided they could muster the requisite military strength and capture political power. This however, did not entail any change in the status and condition of the lower castes in general. Thus, the Maurya Empire saw large scale use of servile sudra labour to extend cultivation. Even Ashoka did nothing to lessen class and caste exploitation. It actually intensified with indigenous people being brought into the fold of the empire and being accorded sudras or chandalas (outcaste) status. Ashoka's edicts recorded on stone pillars banned hunting and fishing. This strengthened the existing practice

of according such people the status of outcastes.

The 4-5 centuries following the Maurya Empire saw a series of foreign invasions by the Kushans, Sakas, Satvahanas and Hunas from Central Asia. They were initially called chandalas or those outside the pale of Aryan society. However, their attainment of political power led to their being accorded the kshatriya status. The Rajputs arose from a mix of these elements and indigenous tribal peoples. The "agni kund" myth and suryavanshi and chandravanshi lineages were invented to give them kshatriya status.

The Gupta Empire from 4-6 century A.D. saw the emergence of feudalism. Caste played a big role in its consolidation. Its notions of social hierarchy and their role as a tool of economic exploitation were quite akin to similar notions of unquestioned acceptance of given social status within feudalism. The basic point to be kept in mind is caste played the role of a weapon for maintaining and strengthening class and social exploitation.

#### **Caste under the Delhi Sultans and Mughals:**

The period prior to the Turkish invasions, which began around 1000 A.D. saw greater rigidity developing within the caste system. This is graphically borne out by Al-Beruni's Kitab-ul-Hind. The discontent against caste in this period is reflected in rise of the Yogi and Nathpanthi orders which attacked caste and chose renunciation as a form of protest. Their method was bound to make their impact limited.

The rulers of the Delhi Sultanate did not attack the caste system. Several lower castes were attracted towards Islam which promises formal equality of believers. But the Sultans and later the Mughals actually sought the support of erstwhile rulers and feudals coming primarily from the upper castes in their endeavor to effectively control India. Jiziya or the religious tax levied on non-Muslims was not applied to the brahmins. Besides, maintaining of caste which damned large sections of the peasantry and artisans to the lowest social status also helped in extracting greater surplus from them.

Caste shored up feudalism in another way as well. Though land was abundant, the sudras could not own it because of their

caste status. This helped maintain a large class of agricultural labour to till the lands of the feudals, zamindars and chaudhris.

The role of caste in aiding class oppression is also seen in the context of peasant revolts for which there is evidence from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Caste prevented the large scale unity of the peasantry which could be achieved in Europe by peasant rebellions in medieval times.

The Sultans and Mughals brought new crafts and technology with them from the places of their origin. These included the “charkha” or spinning wheel, the “pinjna” or carders bow, paper making, new architectural skills like those of building the true arch and vault, the use of lime as mortar, shodding of horses etc. These led to the development of new artisan castes which also developed on hereditary and endogamous lines.

### **The Bhakti Revolt against Caste:**

Medieval India also saw the Bhakti movement, the 2nd large revolt against caste (the first being Buddhism and Jainism). This corresponds to the growth of trade and commerce and reflected the needs of the trading castes as well as the aspirations of the peasantry for a religio-social system which would not discriminate against them on account of their caste status. Many ‘bhakts’ came from lower castes. Kabir was a weaver, Namdev a cloth printer, Raidas a scavenger and Dadu a cotton picker.

Nirguna Bhakti rejected Vedas’ authority, ritualism and the caste system. The sects or panths formed by these monotheist saints were open to people of all castes. Some among them made specific appeals to those from the so called lower castes. Thus the fifth Guru of the Sikhs (Arjun), in a verse composed in the name of Dhanna Jat, insists on God’s special grace for lowly worshippers.

The Satnami sect (which arose in the seventeenth century, with some allegiance to Kabir), contained goldsmiths, carpenters, sweepers and tanners, according to one account, and peasants and traders of small capital, according to another. The Sikh community in the seventeenth century consisted in bulk of Jat peasantry; early in the next century, the complaint was being made in a Persian text

that authority could be given among them to ‘the lowliest sweeper and tanner, filthier than whom there is no race in Hindustan’. The practices of these panths forbade caste distinctions within the community, and, there was a tendency in the communities, as with the Satnamis, amongst whom this was prescribed by scripture, to become endogamous. The net result was the creation of religious communities which drew their following from the caste framework but which ultimately returned to that framework though usually at a higher ‘rank’ than at the time of their departure from it. This also happened in the case of the Lingayats in Karnataka; and these movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries similarly made necessary adjustments in the caste system, without however subverting it.

Thus while appreciating the attack on caste by the Nirguna bhaktas, it is necessary to record its limitations as well. Like Buddhism and Jainism they asserted that caste was irrelevant for salvation. However, they did not target caste as a weapon of economic exploitation and essentially accepted the rationality of the existing feudal set up. Some among them also believed in the doctrine of karma that in essence had always provided a major ideological justification for caste. Given these limitations, the Nirguna bhakts could not entirely free themselves from caste consciousness. One example of this is of Nanak identifying different vices with women belonging to lower castes. The Bhakti movement also included another trend reflecting a counter affirmation of brahminical values. This was represented by the likes of Tulsidas and Surdas who upheld the caste system. The statement of Tulsidas bracketing together sudras, women and cattle as those deserving punishment is well known.

### **Limited Caste Mobility in Medieval India:**

Limited caste mobility existed in the medieval period too. Thus the Jats, described as chandalas in the Chachnama in the 8<sup>th</sup> century are called sudras by the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Al Beruni’s Kitab-ul-Hind and vaisyas by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in Mohsin Fani’s Dabistan-e-Mazahib consequent upon their becoming a landowning caste. The opposite example is true for the Meenas of East Rajasthan. In Sultanate

times they are considered to be a non-sudra land owning caste. By Mughal times they are dubbed sudras, after being dispossessed of their land. Today they are a Scheduled Tribe. This, points to the linkages between ownership of means of production and caste status. Similarly examples of the acceptance of rulers from the lower castes after their acquisition of political power are also found in medieval India. Shivaji represents a classic example of this.

### **Caste under British Rule:**

The impact of British colonial rule on India was dual and dialectical. On the one hand, it did nothing to upset caste. The feudals, especially after the First War of Independence in 1857, came to form the domestic bulwark of British rule. Thus there was no question of attacking caste, which played an important role in maintaining feudal rule and values. Later faced with the national liberation struggle, the British took steps to strengthen caste identities and utilized caste divisions as a means to subvert unity of the Indian people against their dominance. The British Colonial State started census in 1871 as an attempt to enumerate castes in a hybrid framework of non-uniform local knowledge and the European preconceptions and misconceptions that were marred with biological and racial connotations. The Census reports played a definite role in competitive demands of various caste groups for higher status and hence led to heightened caste tensions.

On the other hand, with capitalist development (though limited) under colonial rule, the hereditary division of labour was bound to get weakened. When brahmins and sudras work together in factories, rigid caste rules cannot be fully maintained. But this should not be exaggerated, as a large part of the initial working class came from upper castes. Besides, outside the factory a number of factors helped maintain caste exclusiveness and discrimination.

### **Modern anti-caste movements:**

Along with the development of capitalism came new ideas and rationalism. This played a role in encouraging social reform movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, not all social reform movements were progressive or modernizing. Many of them were deeply conservative, communal and sectarian. Some even

promoted caste and religious identity and quite a few fed powerfully into the rise of a variety of communalisms and revivalism that harked back to some mythical 'golden age.'

Yet, there were social reform movements like those in Bengal and Maharashtra in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in Kerala in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which attacked caste. Many of these anti-caste reform movements arose much before the rise of the bourgeois nationalism, and have a common thread running through them of using the traditions of anti-caste social egalitarianism of the Bhakti-Sufi movements. Though progressive in nature, most of these movements did not argue for the whole scale rejection of caste. They targeted specific features alone. Very few reformers argued for the unity of all oppressed and none attacked the exploitative system of land relations that bolstered the caste system.

Their main weakness lay in their alienation from the anti-imperialist movement a feature due also to the compromising approach of the Congress party vis-a-vis caste. The Congress sought to fight caste-domination not by advocating agrarian revolution which could have altered the relations of production in agriculture that sustained the hateful caste system, but by an upper-caste approach of reformism. This was exemplified later on by Gandhism, with its reliance on preaching against untouchability and advocacy of inter-caste dining, inter-caste marriages, and of course reservations, accompanied by acceptance of the varna system, that forms the bedrock of caste and casteism.

Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar were the tallest figures of modern anti-caste movements. A brief assessment of their work and contribution is given below.

### **Jyotiba Phule:**

Jotiba Phule, in Maharashtra, was one reformer who rejected the caste system in its entirety. He forthrightly opposed brahminism, caste oppression and exploitation by the colonial rulers and bureaucracy and aimed at unifying sudras, ati-sudras (untouchables) and women. He believed that all women were victims of caste oppression. He organised a strike of barbers in Pune against the practice of shaving off brahman widows' heads. He demanded

complete equality for Dalits, Muslims and Christians and opposed the economic exploitation of the peasants and poor. He never compromised his principles despite facing great social opposition. He also taught his wife Savitribai to read and write. She in turn, became the first woman teacher of Dalit girls (in 1848), as well as the first woman writer in journals and newspapers of her time. The first workers' organization in Bombay was formed by one of his followers, Narayan Meghaji Lokhande. But within two decades of his death in 1890, his movement (Satyashodhak Samaj) went into the hands of the Kohlapur raja and degenerated. From a rejection of caste it began by 1910 to merely demand a higher position for Marathas within the caste system. It also lost its thrust against British imperialism.

#### **Periyar:**

Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy was the leading voice in Tamilnadu against the caste system and the social oppression and inequality it entailed. He forthrightly opposed caste based customs, untouchability and the obscurantist beliefs and practices that helped sustain the caste system. He worked to develop self-pride among the dalits and established the Self Respect League to advance this purpose. He was successful to a great extent in creating anti-caste feelings in Tamilnadu. He was undoubtedly the tallest leader of the Dravidian movement that represented another strain of the anti-caste movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To begin with he was in the Congress. But he soon left it due to his revulsion against the casteism of Congress leaders. After initially attacking the prevalent land relations, he gave up this plank. He succeeded in creating anti-caste feelings but didn't attack feudal land relations that formed one of the major pillars sustaining the edifice of the caste system. He also stayed away from the anti-imperialist movement.

#### **Ambedkar:**

Ambedkar was the tallest leader of the anti-caste movement among the dalits. He was also the architect of the Constitution and champion of women's rights. He did not aim to reform the caste system or Hinduism as many of his contemporaries sought to do. He sought to annihilate caste and towards this end he denounced

both caste and Hinduism that provided divine sanction to the varna system. In March 1927 he organised the Chavdar Lake satyagraha at Mahad in Maharashtra in which he led thousands of dalits to drink water from the lake. In December, 1927 he organised "Manusmriti Dahan Din" when he publicly burnt the Manusmriti in Mahad. He also organised several temple entry movements, including one at Nasik in 1930. He was a tireless fighter against caste oppression and exposed the hypocrisy of the Congress. He saw Gandhi's anti-untouchability campaign as a device to serve the interests of the upper castes and to maintain the varna system.

Ambedkar was not merely a liberal or a "Constitutional democrat." His radicalism broke the bourgeois liberal boundaries. He warned that the Constitution and political democracy that was established will be superficial unless there was economic and social equality. His economic programme was far ahead of the conventional bourgeois norms. When there was opposition to his advocacy of State control of the economy on the grounds that it would curb 'liberty', he responded, "To whom and for whom is this liberty? Obviously this liberty is the liberty to the landlords to increase rents, for capitalists to increase hours of work and reduce rate of wages".

Ambedkar was a consistent fighter for women's rights. As law minister in the first cabinet after independence, he piloted the Hindu Code Bill that provided for property and inheritance rights to women. Faced with resistance from within the Congress and Hindu conservative forces, Ambedkar chose to resign rather than compromise on this issue.

The BJP and Sangh combine have been actively trying to appropriate Ambedkar. They seek to portray him as a Hindu social reformer and an implacable opponent of Islam. His renunciation of Hinduism and conversion to Buddhism is glossed over. The purpose is to convert Ambedkar into a dalit icon in the Sangh pantheon of Hindu heroes. There can be no greater travesty of the truth. Ambedkar was totally opposed to the ideology of the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS. He wrote, "If Hindu raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for the country". For



Ambedkar, liberty, equality and fraternity were the most cherished principles for a civilized society. *Varnashrama dharma* and the Hindu shastras were, according to him, antithetical to these principles.

There were other aspects of Ambedkar's work that brought out certain weakness of ideology, approach and practice. Initially, he demanded land and separate colonies for dalits. The idea to get land for dalits was correct. But this could be got only through the concerted struggle of all the landless against landlordism and the British colonialists whose allies were the landlords. Unfortunately, Ambedkar failed to understand the role of agrarian revolution in the emancipation of the dalits. Had he mobilized them on the question of land and sought to co-operate with the movements of the landless, he would have struck a blow at the basis of the caste system and for the real liberation of the dalits.

Instead he demanded reservation for the dalits from the British. The British, in their attempt to divide the national movement, gave reservation to both dalits and Muslims. Ambedkar and the movement led by him tended to keep away from the national movement. His revulsion to the casteism of the Congress leaders is understandable but this approach of his did not help the dalits in any tangible way.

He was not favourably inclined toward the slogan of the Communists for class unity of toilers from all castes. He believed that this slogan did not help the dalits. Later, he and his followers embraced Buddhism as a means to escape the caste oppression of brahminical society. This didn't change the position of dalits and it is ironical that neo-Buddhists went on to demand reservation on the basis of their caste status. Despite the differences in outlook and ideology of the Communists and Ambedkar there were objectively large areas of commonality as both strove in their own way for economic and social emancipation.

Ambedkar must be rescued from being an icon denuded of his radical emancipator vision. Many dalit leaders have been guilty of placing him on a pedestal while reducing his legacy to reservation and quota politics which makes them adjuncts of ruling class politics. The broad emancipatory sweep of his message should infuse dalit

and anti-caste movements. Social emancipation is integral to class struggle in India. This is the abiding relevance of Ambedkar for Communists in India.

### **Reform Movements in North India:**

In Northern India the number and scope of social reform movements was even more restricted. The Arya Samaj movement founded in 1875 rejected jati but upheld the sanctity of the 4 varna system, which forms the kernel of the caste system. Another trend in these states argued that the caste system was alright; what was wrong was the position accorded to a particular caste within it. Examples of this are the Gwal, Ahir and Yadav Andolans in Bihar which tried to raise their caste status by even adopting practices of the thakurs like the thread ceremony. The strong hold of feudal land relations in the Hindi speaking region was a barrier in the way of emergence of genuine anti-caste movements.

### **Attitude of Bourgeois Leadership of National Movement towards Caste:**

The Congress leadership of the national movement represented the bourgeoisie. It was unwilling to forthrightly confront feudalism on the plea of unity of all Indians against the foreign oppressor, despite the fact that the feudals formed the chief internal bulwark of British colonialism. This compromise with feudalism naturally meant a compromise with feudal ideology, including caste. Without attacking feudalism and fighting for land to the tiller, there was no question of improvement of the actual status of the sudras. Most leaders of the national movement accepted the caste system. Some like Tilak were overtly casteist. Ambedkar records bitterly how Madan Mohan Malviya refused to accept a glass of water from him at the Second Round Table Conference in 1931. The bourgeoisie's approach to the issue of caste in this period is best represented by Gandhi. He accepted the varna ashram but opposed jatis and untouchability. His paternalist attitude toward the sudras is exemplified by the word he coined for them i.e. Harijans. This word is correctly resented by the dalits today. The unwillingness of the Congress to attack caste and the casteist behaviour of many of its leaders played an inhibiting role in involving the largest sections

of the dalits in the national movement.

### **British Exploitation of Caste for “Divide and Rule”:**

The British took full advantage of this alienation of the dalits from the national movement led by the Congress. Thus, whereas the dalits were shown as a part and parcel of Hindus in the 1871 Census, in the Census of 1901 they were recorded separately. Similarly the British acceptance of reservation for the dalits was inspired by the attempt to “divide and rule”. Limited capitalist industrialisation under British rule provided dalits opportunities of employment in the factories, army, railways, ports etc. They however, had still to live in separate colonies and were not permitted employment in the weaving section of textile mills. Besides, they normally got work, which involved the maximum physical labour. These opportunities, however limited they were, represented an improvement over previously existing ones. Given this and the casteist approach of Congress leaders, sections of the dalits tended to keep away from the Congress led freedom struggle.



## **CASTE IN POST - INDEPENDENCE INDIA**

### **Co-option of caste by independent India’s ruling classes:**

Since independence, the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes have sought to retain caste. There has been no forthright attack on antiquated pre-capitalist, feudal, semi-feudal relations that sustain caste and caste ideology. This is the result of the compromise of the bourgeoisie with landlordism. But this does not represent the entire picture. As the CPI(M)’s Programme states in Para 5.12: “The society under capitalist development has compromised with the existing caste system. The Indian bourgeoisie itself fosters caste prejudices.” This is the result of its need to keep the working class and other toilers divided for upholding its class rule as well as the deep influence on it of retrograde ideologies rooted in thousands of years of history. It also needs to be underlined that the development of capitalism in India has been intertwined with its compromise with the caste system so as to facilitate intensification of extraction of surplus value from the dalits who form substantial sections the working classes and the rural proletariat. Besides this, caste is a useful political tool for shoring up electoral fortunes of ruling class parties.

### **Caste Oppression Today:**

Given the Indian bourgeoisie’s compromise with caste and its cynical use of caste as a political weapon, it is hardly surprising that caste oppression in its worst form persists till today in several parts of the country. This is especially true of those areas like Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh etc., where the old form of land relations hold sway and capitalism in agriculture has made limited headway. This takes the form of mass killings, burning down hamlets and rape. It is also linked to the landlord attempts to suppress by force the movements of agricultural workers and other rural poor.

However, caste oppression of a violent nature is not absent in areas where capitalism is the dominant mode of production in agriculture. Thus, Haryana and West U.P. have seen killings ordered by caste panchayats for the “crime” of inter-caste marriages or violence directed against those dalits who dare to ride horses on occasion of their marriage. Women as so-called repositories of “honour” of their community are made special victims of this oppression. Dalit women have been and still are prey for sexual assaults of landlords. There have been cases of disrobing women of lower castes and making them parade in public. Other forms of caste discrimination manifest in: separate utensils for dalits at public eating places, prevention of dalits from filling water from community wells, entering temples, using common/waste-lands for defecation as well as refusal to inter-dine and social boycott. Untouchability is also practiced despite laws against it. In many rural schools dalit children are seated separately from upper caste children. Caste discrimination in urban centres is not that direct, though it persists in several forms. This manifests in under-fulfillment of reserved quotas in Government jobs and in institutions of higher learning, discrimination at the work place, casteist remarks, refusal to let out houses to dalits by landlords, avoiding inter-dining, etc. Thus, while the process of capitalist development does tend to loosen caste ties and ideas, the interests of the Indian ruling classes act as a contrary force to maintain and even, in certain instances, strengthen the caste system.

Besides being a potent weapon of social oppression, caste is also used as an instrument for bolstering, even intensifying class exploitation. Thus, agricultural labourers from dalit castes are often paid lesser wages than those belonging to other castes for the same work. In this manner caste becomes a means for maximizing appropriation of social surplus. The most demeaning and low paid jobs like those related to manual scavenging are virtually reserved for the dalits. Governments, both central as well as those of most states show no interest in implementing “The Prohibition of employment as manual scavengers and their rehabilitation Act, 2013”. This has led for example in Delhi to deaths of 22 persons while manually cleaning sewers in the period from January to October, 2018.

### **Reservations:**

The Constitution provides for reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for SCs (15.0%) and STs (7.5%). The C.P.I. (M) supports reservations for dalits and adivasis as steps which yield limited relief to these sections who have faced the worst kind of social oppression and discrimination for centuries. However, the CPI(M) does not consider reservations as a panacea for all their problems. The fact that they continue to face myriad forms of social oppression and discrimination, referred to earlier bears this out. The solution to their social oppression is intrinsically linked to the question of land and economic empowerment. This is borne out by our experience in West Bengal where under thoroughgoing land reforms conducted by Left-Front state governments, 56% of the beneficiaries are from SC/ST sections. Besides empowering them economically, this has also translated, into the incidence of caste discrimination and oppression in West Bengal being among the lowest in the country. It also needs to be underlined that for the ruling classes reservations are but a tactic for keeping dalits and adivasis under their political-ideological hegemony and to advancing their vote bank politics.

Another issue is that of reservation for the other backward castes which came to the fore with the granting of 27% reservation in Government jobs and educational institutions to them under recommendations of the Mandal Commission in 1990. The frenzy against the dalits, adivasis and backwards accompanying the anti-Mandal movement was reflective of the deep casteism pervading Indian society. The Party’s position was in support of the reservation of backward castes, with the provision that their affluent sections or the “creamy layer” be excluded from its benefits. Over seven decades of socio-economic developments and growth of capitalism since independence have led to class differentiation within the caste structure. In the case of OBCs it is well known that there are a few castes in different states like the Kurmis and Yadavs in Bihar and U.P., the Vokkalingas in Karnataka and the Thevars in Tamilnadu, which contain influential strata who own land and other means of production and are well represented in the political power

structure as well. These strata of OBCs are often landlords and rich peasants, who actually repress the dalits. They do not deserve the benefits of reservation. However, there are substantial sections of the OBCs who are both socially discriminated against as well as poor. It is these sections who should get the benefits of reservations.

The C.P.I. (M) is often asked about why it doesn't advocate economic criteria in reservation for SC/ST sections, as it does in the case of OBCs? The C.P.I. (M) is of the view that no economic criteria is justified in implementation of SC/ST reservation because they continue to be the most exploited, socially oppressed and discriminated sections of Indian society. The SCs and STs have historically denied access to property and education. This situation prevails to a great degree even today and reflects in significantly lesser class differentiation, ownership of means of production and education among them as compared to all other castes. The SCs and STs have also for centuries been the most socially oppressed sections of society. Till today they are subject to untouchability and numerous other forms of social discrimination, despite these having been declared unlawful. Even those sections of SCs and STs which occupy posts in Class I Government services are never accepted as equals by their upper caste colleagues. In light of these objective conditions, the C.P.I. (M) upholds blanket reservation for SCs and STs without application of any economic criteria for eligibility.

The C.P.I. (M) also supports the demand for reservation in jobs for dalits belonging to the Christian and Muslim communities. The discrimination and oppression faced by them is the same as that of dalits among the Hindus. Blanket reservation without any economic criteria should therefore also be applied in extending benefits of reservation to Christian and Muslim dalits. Sikh dalits are already eligible to reservations in jobs and education.

Ever since 1990 when the Mandal Commission recommendations regarding OBC reservation were first brought to the fore for implementation, the C.P.I. (M) has maintained that those among the non-reserved categories who come from weak and poorer backgrounds should also be extended benefits of reservation in jobs and

education. This should be done through allocation of a separate quota and the Constitution should be suitably amended to encompass this provision. For 29 years since 1990, central governments whether led by the BJP or Congress did not take any steps in this direction. Suddenly, at the very fag end of its term and on the penultimate day of the Parliament session in January 2019 the Modi government introduced a constitution amendment bill to provide for 10% reservation in jobs and educational institutions for economically weaker sections among the General category. This bill was introduced without any consultation with opposition parties. The timing of the measure and the haste with which the Union Cabinet decided to push it through, completely exposes the Modi government's intentions of using this issue just to get electoral dividends.

There are several flaws in this bill. Chief among them is that of the criteria to determine the beneficiaries. As per the criteria set out, those having family income of less than Rs 8 lakh per annum (Rs. 66,667 per month) or, who have less than five acres of agricultural land, or, have a residential flat of less than 1,000 square feet, or, a residential plot of less than 100 yards in notified municipalities, or, 200 yards in non-notified municipalities will be eligible for reservation. This would mean 95 percent of the general category of people will come under the purview of reservation. This would defeat the very purpose of giving reservation for the poorer sections.

Besides, given large scale privatization of public sector enterprises and the virtual ban on recruitment in government services, this measure will be meaningless unless the private sector is brought under its purview. The CPI(M) voted in favour of the bill in accordance with its principled position in support of extension of benefits of reservation to the poor among the upper castes. It will however continue to demand changing eligibility criteria to ensure that the poor among the upper castes are the real beneficiaries as well as demand extension of reservations of all kinds – SC, ST, OBC and General to the private sector.

### **Caste Hierarchies in non-Hindu religions and among the Dalits:**

Caste pervades believers in Islam, Christianity and Sikhism as well. Among Muslims, three caste blocs are visible – ashraf (upper caste elite), ajlaf (middle caste) and arzal or kamin (lowest caste, Dalit). The Sikhs have replicated the Hindu caste system and have well delineated groups of upper castes, backward castes and dalits (called mazhabis). The same is true for the Christians. Even among dalits hierarchies within the caste operate.

### **Caste and Gender:**

Another aspect of the fight against caste that needs to be noted pertains to the linkages between caste and gender oppression. The traditional caste system besides sanctioning the subordination and exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes, also upholds the servile status of women who are “given away” in marriage within parameters of endogamy. Increasing participation of women in the process of social production can form the basis of greater freedom for them in matters of marriage and weaken endogamy, a major hallmark the caste system. The advance of the fight for emancipation of women thus also helps the fight against caste.



## **CONDITION OF DALITS UNDER THE MODI GOVERNMENT**

The fight against caste and casteism today must entail exposure and forthright opposition to the anti-dalit policies being pursued by the Modi government at the centre and several state governments, especially those led by the BJP. The main features of the anti-dalit record of the Modi government over the past 4- 4½ years are given below.

**Education:** Dalit students in institutions of higher learning face humiliation and are being ‘failed’ in internal examinations. The enormity of the situation can be gauged from the alarmingly high number of suicides by dalit students studying in higher educational institutions. Sharp increase in fees due to creeping privatization of higher education institutions and delayed payment or non-payment of scholarship money is forcing lakhs of dalit students to abandon their educational careers.



**SC Sub-Plan Scrapped:** The Modi government has scrapped the SC Sub-Plan that provided for budgetary allocations for dalits based on their proportion in the overall population. This has been replaced by department wise allocations that have no relation to the criteria of allocations laid out in the SC Sub-Plan. The net result is that as compared to the 16.6% requirement, the average yearly allocation for dalits under 4 years of Modi's rule was only of 7.59%.

**Jobs:** The Government has also done everything to reduce dalit access to reserved seats in educational institutions and in government and public sector jobs. Relentless privatization has virtually put an end to the constitutional provision of reservations. The Modi Government has refused to extend reservations to the private sector. There continues to be a huge backlog in reserved quotas in government and public sector institutions. At the same time traditional forms of income generation are under attack. In the name of "gauraksha" dalits are now deprived of their traditional work by the restrictions on cattle trade and slaughter and closure of slaughter houses.

**Land:** Dalits have been historically denied and deprived of land rights. Even today with dalits are the largest landless social community. At an all-India level 58% dalits are landless. The demand for land for dalits has been ignored by the Modi Government. There has not been a single programme for distributing land to dalits either through a central initiative or in the BJP ruled governments in the states.

**Deprivation:** The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 had identified 14 parameters of exclusion from being categorised as "deprived" families. These include: payment of income or professional tax by any member; having any member who is a government employee or earns over Rs 10,000 per month; owning a 2/3/4 wheeler, or refrigerator; staying in a pucca house with three rooms; and farming over 2.5 acres of irrigated land. As per the extensive data collected in this survey, 73% of rural dalit households were "deprived". A small improvement in the last decade due to non-farm wages from MNREGA has now been eroded due to assault on it by the Modi regime.

**Attacks and Atrocities against dalits:** Under the Modi government attacks on the dalits, both by private armies and by the State machinery have intensified. Following the Bhima-Koregan violence, many dalits across the country have been slapped with false cases. On the other hand, the culprits who unleashed violence against the Dalits are being exonerated. The Maharashtra BJP-Shiv Sena government has withdrawn at least six cases against the main perpetrators of this violence. The anti-dalit stand of the RSS-BJP is also visible in the nationwide attacks on dalits after the April 2 bandh call. The dalits were victims of this violence, losing their lives, but no action is being taken against those who have conducted these violent attacks, even though evidence of their activities is publicly available. There is increasing use of the National Security Act and sedition against anyone opposing attacks and atrocities on the dalits.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data released in November 2017, crime against the SCs increased by 5.5% in 2016 over 2015. The highest number of crimes is in states ruled or till recently ruled by BJP. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of cases of atrocities against scheduled castes accounting for 25.6% followed by Bihar with 14% and Rajasthan with 12.6% in 2016. Conviction rates are low and most cases of such atrocities remain pending in courts for years.





## NEW AWAKENING AMONG THE DALITS

Recent years have seen a growth of democratic consciousness among the dalits to fight for their rights. This is a welcome phenomenon. As Para 5.10 of the C.P.I (M)'s Programme notes: "The assertion by the dalits has a democratic content reflecting the aspirations of the most oppressed sections of society." The contemporary manifestations of this assertion have been aptly described in Para 2.43 of the Political Resolution of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the C.P.I. (M), held in April, 2018. It states: "Discontent and resentment is increasing among dalits because of caste discrimination, daily oppression meted out to them and increasing marginalization as a result of government policies. Their anger is manifesting in growing resistance against atrocities and humiliations. Mobilisation in Mumbai against the demolition of Ambedkar Bhawan, widespread movement against the Una flogging incident, countrywide protest movement against the institutional murder of Rohit Vemula of Hyderabad Central University, the mobilization organized by Bheem Army against attacks on dalits in western UP, the bandh in Maharashtra to protest against the attacks on dalits attending the Bhima-Koregaon anniversary, the all India bandh against the dilution of the SC/ST POA Act, are some of the prominent instances of this growing resistance." Besides this, lately several organisations of dalits that are primarily Ambedkarite have developed in different states. Several among them are willing to work with the Left. The united protests against the Bhima Koregaon attacks are indicative of this positive trend.

### Limitations of Caste Appeal:

However, "At the same time a purely caste appeal which seeks to perpetuate caste divisions for the narrow aim of consolidating vote banks and detaching these downtrodden sections from the

common democratic movement has also been at work. Many caste leaders and certain leaders of bourgeois political parties seek to utilise the polarisation on caste lines for narrow electoral gains and are hostile to building up the common movement of the oppressed sections of all castes. They ignore the basic class issues of land, wages and fight against landlordism, which is the basis for overthrowing the old social order." (Para 5.11 C.P.I. (M) Programme) This sectarian approach is a reflection of identity politics that has to be forthrightly opposed.



## COMMUNISTS AGAINST CASTE

In the pre-independence period, the Communist Party was the only party to link the struggle against untouchability and the caste system with agrarian revolution and the end of imperialist domination. The CPI's Platform of Action of 1930 denounced untouchability and the caste system and linked their destruction to destruction of feudalism in India. It stated that, "As a result of British imperialism in our country, there are still in existence millions of slaves and tens of millions of outcast working pariahs who are deprived of all rights. British imperialism, the system of landlordism, the reactionary caste system, religious deception and all the slave and serf traditions of the past throttle the Indian people and stand in the way of its emancipation. They have led to the result that in India in the twentieth century, there are still pariahs who have no right to meet with their fellow-men, drink from common wells, study in common schools etc."

It also forcefully rejected the reformist approach of the Congress that treated these problems as being merely those of Hindu social reform in the following words: "Instead of putting an end once and for all to this shameful blot on the Indian people, Gandhi and other Congress leaders called for the maintenance of the caste system, the basis and justification for the existence of socially outcast pariahs. Only the ruthless abolition of the caste system, only the agrarian revolution and the violent overthrow of British rule will lead to the social, economic, cultural and legal emancipation of the working pariahs and slaves." It further stated: "The CP of India fights for the complete abolition of slavery, the caste system and caste inequality in all forms.... The CP of India fights for the complete and absolute equality of the working pariahs and all toilers of the country."

From the very beginning the Red flag has been involved in

struggles against caste oppression. The role of the Communists in different states against caste oppression and for social and economic empowerment of dalits is given below:

**In Kerala,** The anti-caste movements led by the Communists in the state were broadly for equality for depressed castes for civil rights like the right to education, temple entry and use of public roads before independence. Temples and the roads around temples in Kerala were not accessible to people belonging to the "lower" castes until the first half of the 20th century. These shackles were broken by powerful movements led by social reform leaders such as Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali and Chattampi Swamikal. Temple entry agitations, such as the Vaikom satyagraha (1924-25), the Guruvayur satyagraha (1931-32), the struggle in Kandoth (1931) and the Paliyam struggle (1947-48), took place demanding that people of all castes be allowed to enter Hindu temples.

A.K. Gopalan, who rose to become one of the most prominent communist leaders later, was among those who led the satyagraha in Guruvayur. P Krishna Pillai, who later became the first State Secretary of the Communist Party in Kerala in 1939, also played a significant role by ringing the bell in the Guruvayur temple which only Brahmins were allowed to ring. The struggle in Kandoth was led by A.K. Gopalan and K.A. Keraleeyan (who became a major communist leader in the subsequent years). The Paliyam struggle was led by the Communist Party – the committee which organised the struggle, the Paliyam Road Struggle Committee, was led by communist leader T.E. Balan. Leaders like A.K. Gopalan and Krishna Pillai were also physically attacked by casteist goons. The Temple Entry Proclamation issued by the ruler of Travancore in 1936 was the result of protracted struggles such as these. Another significant intervention against the prevalent caste discrimination took place during the Koddakad Conference of the Kisan Sabha in 1939 when over 15,000 people participated in Panthi Bhojan or collective dining by people of all castes. Communists played a prominent role in organizing this programme.

The post independence trajectory increasingly saw the coming to the fore of various economic demands around the axis of



comprehensive land reforms. Meaningful land reforms were first undertaken by the first Communist ministry (1957-59) in the state led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad. Under land reforms in Kerala between 1957 and 1993, carried out by Communist led state governments about 28 lakh tenants were given ownership rights and about 14.82 lakh acres of land accrued to them. The majority of the beneficiaries hailed from the backward Ezhava community. Nearly 5,28,000 dwellers mostly from the scheduled castes community were given house sites upto 10 cents out of the ceiling surplus land. This broke the back of the *Jenmi* (consisting mainly of upper caste brahmins) landlordism and made available land to the lower castes. It became the basis for the further demand for equal wages, better public education, health and PDS of the working population majorly from the lower castes. The struggle to capture ceiling surplus land was continued even in the 1970s by the Kisan Sabha in the state with AK Gopalan leading from the front.

The Tribal Sub Plan for STs in 1974 and Special Component Plan for SCs in 1979 were two major development strategies initiated for their all round socio-economic development. The record of the Left led governments in SCP and TSP allocation in the state has been always more than their proportionate representation within the state population. The figures for 2017-18 were 9.8 and 2.8 percent of the total budget outlay with corresponding population figures of SC and ST of the state being 9.1 and 1.45 respectively. This is at a time when the Modi government at the centre allocated much lower funds for the first three years than the population proportion and has done away with the practise of committed share of allocations to welfare schemes since 2017-18. The Left and Democratic Front governments could not only stop the practise of 'notional' expenditure of plan funds for SC/STs but implement schemes targeting individual beneficiaries with the help of the Panchayati raj system in the state as well. The appointment of trained social activists, from SC/ST sections to oversee plan implementation added to the full utilisation of the earmarked funds.

For the first time in the history of the state the Left and Democratic Front Government has appointed 36 non-brahmins,

including six from the dalit community as priests in temples under the Travancore Devaswom Board in 2017. The government has given strict instructions to follow reservation for SC/ST/OBC for priests, which was a long pending demand of the dalits and backward castes. In fact the appointments from the backward castes were more than the quota as a few could compete their way through the general merit. The LDF Government successfully faced up to the stiff resistance from certain orthodox sections close to the Sangh parivar opposing the appointment of dalit priests.

In the **Telugu speaking areas** – Andhra, Telangana and Rayalaseema – right from the beginning, struggle against caste discrimination was part and parcel of the Communist movement. For the cadre who started organising class struggles in villages, the question of opposing caste discrimination and oppression was integral to organising the masses. Gandhi's Harijan upliftment had a great influence in Andhra region. As a result, youth participating in the national movement decided to work among the dalits. P Sundarayya, who went on to become the first General Secretary of the CPI(M) was one among those thousands of youth. In his autobiography he has described some of the means adopted by them to combat caste discrimination. These included organizing common meals for agricultural labourers from dalits and non-dalit castes and starting libraries and primary schools for children belonging to agricultural labourer families and dalit castes who were not allowed to study at main village schools.

With the spread of communist movement, the anti-caste movement departed from the Gandhian approach and took the path of struggle. Number of struggles took place for the entry into the temples, fetching and drinking water from wells and tanks, the right to burial grounds and to allow dalit children in village schools. Communists stood in the forefront of all these struggles. Many of these Communists who came from upper caste families faced expulsion from their caste and families.

Communists were in the forefront in educating dalits and other weaker sections. They had initiated the opening of adult education centres as a part of their mobilisation for building and developing

the struggles of agricultural labourers. Communists also took the initiative in the establishment of hostels for dalit students in the state. Many leaders of independence struggle and also the communist movement emerged from these hostels.

In the decades of 1930s and 1940s, communists concentrated on dalit hamlets to develop these struggles. Labour protection leagues were widely established. These leagues played a vital role in wage struggles. These are some of the ways through which communists attracted dalits towards the Communist movement. Number of leaders also emerged from dalits. In those days, Congress used to heckle Communists as a “dalit’s party”.

The Communists played a pivotal role in the Telangana People’s Armed Struggle (1946-51) that was fought against the oppressive rule of the Nawab of Hyderabad and the feudal landlords. About 3,000 villages covering a population of 30 lakhs in an area about 16,000 square miles were liberated from the yoke of the landlords. Ten lakh acres of landlords’ and waste lands were distributed to agricultural labourers and poor peasants a big proportion whom, were from dalit and backward castes. Vetti or forced labour as well as untouchability were abolished. As the people of Telangana worked and fought collectively, combating untouchability became easier. Equality and mutual respect were strictly practiced in guerrilla squads. Exorbitant rates of usury were drastically reduced or abolished. Agricultural implements were distributed to the rural poor; fair wages for agricultural labourers were ensured and illegal exactions and land evictions were stopped.

Over 4,000 Communists and peasant militants were martyred during this historic struggle, first at the hands of the Nizam’s Razakars and then the Indian army. Ten thousand Communist militants were put in detention camps for 3-4 years.

Communists’ work among masses got reflected in elections too. In Andhra region, in 1951-52 elections, communists gained 22% of votes. Dalits and agricultural workers voted massively for the communists. But, the Communist movement in the Telugu speaking regions was severely affected because of the defeat faced by the CPI in Andhra elections in 1955, and the ensuing ideological issues

and splits. This impacted adversely on the struggle for social justice as well. Small anti-caste struggles led by the Communists continued but it is only from the 1980s that issues of social justice were taken up in a big way in the backdrop of intensified attacks on dalits in Andhra and Telangana regions.

Involvement of the Communists in self-respect movement of dalits, against oppression, in defense of reservations and for representation, etc., increased. From 1998-99 a sustained movement has been going on. In 1999, October an extensive survey was carried out covering 11,000 dalit hamlets in 15 days to find out the forms of and extent of caste discrimination faced by dalits.

In 2001-2003, a movement for the formation of statutory SC and ST commission took place in the entire region of the then united Andhra Pradesh. As a result, a commission was appointed. In 2011-12 year, a widespread struggle for the implementation of a SC/ST Sub Plan took place. A legislation was enacted giving statutory status to SC/ST sub-plan in the state in March 2012. To galvanise the struggle against caste discrimination, in the year 2007, district wise padayatras and cycleyatras were organised throughout the state for more than one month by the CPI(M) and mass organisations led by it. These had covered 8336 villages and 41,000 kilometres. As a continuation of this, resistance movements were organised against caste discrimination in hundreds of villages. In Andhra the Kula Vivaksha Porata Samithi (KVPS) (Struggle Committee against Caste Discrimination) has successfully mobilized lakhs of people over the years on issues ranging from govt. policy to temple entry, from land for graveyards to ending two-tumbler system, and many such issues. In light of this many of those caste leaders who criticised Communists for not taking up issues of social oppression started appreciating the initiative and role of Communists and began to take part in the united struggles against caste oppression.

**Tamilnadu** has seen several Communist led struggles against the caste and class oppression of the dalits. The historic Keezhvenmani struggle in Nagapattinam district in which 44 dalit agricultural workers and their children were martyred by the landlords in 1968 is an outstanding example of these struggles. The

dalit agricultural workers of Keezhvenmani were virtually slaves bonded to the landlords and had to render services of the entire families of the landlords for a pittance. They were subject to untouchability, forced labour, prohibition from using the wells and tea shops, brutal punishments like whipping, force-feeding cow dung, sexual exploitation of women, denial of educational opportunities and prohibition of access to public places like temples. Dalits had to walk barefoot and dalit women were not allowed to cover their breasts. They continued to lead near slave-like existence as exploited daily wage workers with no rights over land. It is this oppressive system that the CPI (M) and the Agricultural Workers' Union openly challenged by organizing the agricultural labourers, shaking the very roots of the feudal landlordism. The landlords responded by perpetrating a gruesome massacre with the active connivance of the police and its political masters, the DMK. The Keezhvenmani struggle and the terrible toll of human lives it exacted did not go in vain. The aftermath of the massacre saw widespread struggles led by the C.P.I. (M) and the Agricultural Workers' Union that forced the ruling classes to increase wages and distribute land to landless Dalit families who became cultivating peasants owning small landholdings.

Not only did the red flag bring them land and better wages it also ensured their dignity by putting an end to untouchability, forced labour, sexual exploitation of dalit women and other inhuman forms of social oppression. In the process the Communist Party came to be called the Paraiyan Katchi or 'Party of Untouchables'.

Tamilnadu also saw the historic Vachathi struggle in which Kisan Sabha and Tamilnadu Tribal Association fought for nearly two decades to get justice to 18 adivasi women who were raped by forest officials. This struggle led to the conviction of 269 people.

Many areas in Tamil Nadu experienced police atrocities in which the police entered dalit villages and brutally tortured women, children and the old; their houses and possessions were wantonly destroyed; hundreds of dalits, including women, were arrested on framed-up charges and put behind the bars. Such dalit villages as Kodiankulam, Nalumoolaikinaru and Sankaralingapuram became

by-words for police atrocity. When Mancholai tea estate workers, majority of who are dalits, assembled at Tirunelveli Collectorate with their families for a demonstration to highlight their demands, they were brutally lathicharged by the police, who chased them into the Tamraparni river and killed 17 persons including a few children. The district secretary of the CPI(M), Palani, sustained severe head injury in the lathicharge and almost died. The Party and mass organisations waged a series of struggles against this police brutality on the tea estate workers. It also took up the cause of the dalit victims of police excesses at Nalumoolaikinaru. The issue was taken to the Supreme Court by the All India Democratic Women's Association and based on the court verdict, Rs. 23 lakhs was given as compensation to the affected dalits and 82 police personnel including DIG, SP, DSP and Sub-Inspector were suspended from service and punished.

The state unit of the AIDWA was the first to undertake a survey on the two glass system in 27 villages of Pudukkottai district. It was found that except for one village the two glass system was prevalent and dalits and agricultural workers were not allowed use of glasses in which upper caste people drank. The organisation went in for direct action against this practice in the face of strong opposition from the landlords.

The Party, and different mass organisations including the kisan sabha, AIDWA, and agricultural workers union evolved a plan for direct action in the villages where untouchability was prevalent. Direct action was carried out in different districts. Dharnas were conducted before the tea stalls where the dual tumbler system was practised. Dalits were taken to the temples where they were forbidden entry and they were made to draw water from common village wells and taps. Further they were encouraged to wear footwear and walk on the roads and ride bicycles. These actions were carried out in the face of stiff resistance by the upper castes and anti-social elements.

Besides this, the Tamilnadu Untouchability Eradication Forum (TNUEF) that was formed in 2007 with the backing of the CPI(M), has launched several struggles and gained success on issues relating

to abolition of the two-glass system, right of dalits to haircut, use of common pathways, washing rights in places meant for the purpose, use of general toilets and general cremation grounds. Another significant struggle of the TNUEF was for demolition of the Uthapuram Caste-Wall in Madurai district leading to breaking a part of the wall despite police atrocities and strident opposition of the upper castes.

**In Karnataka** the CPI(M) along with dalit organisations launched struggles against Pankthi Bedha (practice of maintaining separate lines for 'upper castes' and 'lower castes' while serving food in temples) and Made Made Snana (the practice of 'lower caste' devotees rolling over plantain leaves containing remains of food partaken by 'upper caste' persons). Gains have been made like the banning of Made Made Snana in Chikkaballapur district. There has also been a massive and consistent struggle in the state against eviction and for land rights of over 30 lakh Bagair Hukum cultivators that has successfully protected these farmers, a sizeable number of whom are Dalits and Adivasis. The Devadasi Vimochana Sangha for liberation of Devadasis has been fighting against the oppressive practice. Hasan district has seen successful struggles against caste oppression and for temple entry. Under the leadership of the C.P.I. (M) occupation of land by landless has also taken place. Most of them are dalits.

**Maharashtra** has also seen many struggles against caste oppression. The Chavdar Lake satyagraha of March, 1927 at Mahad in Raigad district of Maharashtra in which Dr. Ambedkar led thousands of dalits to drink water from the lake and the burning of the Manusmriti at Mahad on 25 December, 1927 were the first two struggles led by Dr Ambedkar against untouchability and the obnoxious caste system. Both these struggles had R.B. More who became an important Communist leader in Maharashtra as one of the main organisers.

Communists supported the agitation of Dalits for entering the Kalaram Mandir at Nashik in 1930 that was led by Dr Ambedkar. R B More and another Communist, Baburao Garad, led a batch of Communist workers to participate in the Kalaram Mandir

satyagraha in 1931.

The Communists and their Girni Kamgar Union (Mill Workers' Union) launched an agitation against the system of separate public taps for dalits in BDD Chawls in Mumbai and demanded common public taps for all communities and castes. After prolonged agitations, the demand was accepted. One of the demands of the famous 1934 mill workers' general strike was allowing the untouchables to work in the weaving sections of the mills. In course of time, this was conceded.

Two of the most prominent Communist leaders of Maharashtra, Shamrao and Godavari Parulekar, led the famous Adivasi Revolt in Thane district from 1945-1947 under the banner of the AIKS against landlordism and feudalism of the worst type. It became known as the Warli Adivasi Revolt, Warli being the name of the dominant tribe in the district. This revolt succeeded in abolishing bonded labour, which was replete with several inhuman practices like sexual exploitation of adivasi women by the landlords, and also the obnoxious practice of 'marriage slaves'. In subsequent decades determined struggles in Thane district led to achievement of land rights and better wages for the adivasis.

The massive statewide satyagrahas of the landless in 1959 and 1964 were launched jointly by the Communist Party and RPI. Thousands of peasants and agricultural workers, the overwhelming majority of whom were dalits and adivasis took active part and courted arrest. This struggle forced the Congress state government to give some government land to the landless.

Cultural renaissance was a major component of the Dalit emancipation movement. The Communist balladeer Anna Bhau Sathe, who was himself a Dalit, wrote and staged many plays drawing attention to the evil practice of caste. Several creative cultural and literary figures from the dalit community were drawn to the Communist Party. The most prominent amongst them were Shahir Annabhau Sathe, founder of *Dalit Sahitya*, Baburao Bagul and progressive poet Shankar Shailendra. The Dalit literary renaissance saw efflorescence during the nineteen seventies. Narayan Surve and Baburao Bagul were major litterateurs of

communist persuasion who wrote influential poetry and fiction respectively. Both of them were Dalits.

The Communists in Maharashtra participated in various struggles initiated and conducted by the Dalit Panthers during the nineteen seventies. The Dalit Panthers manifesto had a distinct Left orientation. A Dalit Panther activist Bhagwat Jadhav was killed by the Shiv Sena. Communists came out on the streets against this cold-blooded murder.

The renaming of Marathwada University after Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar generated huge turmoil all over the state in the late 1970s and 1980s. It was staunchly opposed by upper caste elements, who even led gruesome attacks on Dalits in Marathwada. The Communists were at the forefront of the struggle for renaming the University after Dr Ambedkar and hundreds of CPI(M) activists participated in militant protests in Mumbai, Aurangabad and elsewhere in the Marathwada region, which led to their arrest. Eventually, the Congress state government led by Sharad Pawar renamed the university in 1994.

In the last one decade Communists have participated in several protest actions against atrocities against Dalits at Khairlanji, Sonai, Kharda, Bhima Koregaon and many other such incidents in the state. In the case of the large-scale atrocities on Dalits by communal Hindutva elements at Bhima Koregaon on January 1, 2018, the BRP led by Prakash Ambedkar and the Communists together immediately organised a massive Maharashtra Bandh on January 3, the birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule. However, the BJP-led state government has let the RSS leader Manohar (Sambhaji) Bhide who was responsible for the Bhima Koregaon violence go scot-free. On the other hand it has lodged cases against hundreds of Dalits, and has now also targeted and arrested many human rights activists under the charge that they are Maoists.

In 2013, the CPI(M) Maharashtra state committee took the initiative in forming a statewide platform called the 'Jati Anta Sangharsh Samiti' (Struggle Committee for the Annihilation of Caste) at a state conference in Nagpur. This platform has been taking up several issues related to caste atrocities and caste discrimination.

**In Bihar** the CPI(M) and Kisan Sabha have led many struggles against social and economic exploitation of dalits and for occupation of land illegally held by the landlords. Some district-wise examples of these struggles are given below:

**Bhagalpur:** In the beginning of the 1970s, under the leadership of the CPI (M) farmers of Gangaut caste living along the banks of river Ganga in the Naugachhiya region of North Bhagalpur began their struggle against social and economic oppression. Most of them were sharecroppers and agricultural workers who worked on the lands of Bhumihar landowners. Apart from economic exploitation, caste oppression, humiliation and sexual exploitation of the women from these most backward castes was the main reason of the revolt.

Peasants & agricultural workers occupied homes built by landlords' goons in the riverine area. They also cut standing crops and occupied the land. The attempts of feudal landlords to mobilize upper caste poor peasants against the struggle were not successful. In one such struggle, CPI (M) activist Ambika Mandal was murdered by feudal armed gangs. This struggle which lasted for several years led to a major change the behavior of the upper castes towards the most backward castes. Atrocities on women and workers have reduced to great extent and peasants have been able to secure their rights over the land.

**Begusarai:** The Bachhwara block of Begusarai was notorious for the atrocities and injustices by the feudals. Militant struggles against the social oppression began here in the latter part of the 1970s under the leadership of the CPI (M). Several comrades were martyred during the course of this struggle. To commemorate them a 'Shaheed Mela' is organized every year there that continues for 10 days.

There have been militant CPI(M) led struggles in the Nonpur Pakththaul region of Barauni against the social and caste oppression in which Rajendra Sahni, Ramwilas Sahni and Rampukar Mahto were martyred. In this struggle, Mallah and other backward castes played leading role. In this area, people from upper castes used to barge into the homes of backward castes at the pretext of putting colours on the occasion of Holi and indulge in sexual harassment of

women. The Party intervened and stopped this shameful tradition.

**Samastipur:** The Vibhutipur block of Samastipur is the centre of CPI (M)'s movement. This region has also been the citadel of feudal oppression. The entire region was affected by social discrimination, atrocities against dalits and harassment and exploitation of women. CPI (M) played a leading role in the struggles against these forms of social and caste oppressions. Scores of comrades including Uday Shankar Singh, Birendra Singh, Gunshwar Singh and Ramnath Mahto were martyred in these struggles. Today, the old and neo feudals have united against the CPI (M) and this struggle has taken the form of class struggle. Recently caste tension picked up in the area after marriage between a dalit girl and a boy from the upper caste. The Party intervened immediately and after a prolonged struggle was successful in ensuring that the couple could live together.

**Darbhanga:** The mass base of the CPI(M) in Darbhanga is among the dalits, minorities and the extremely backward castes. The Party has consistently waged movements against the social oppression along with the land movement. Scores of our activists have been martyred in these movements. The social oppression against the dalits in Hayaghat block of Darbhanga has been taken up mainly under the banner of Dalit Shoshan Mukti Manch and Party has been successful to some extent in stopping the social discrimination and physical attacks on the women.

**Madhubani:** There have many a struggles on the issues of social oppression in the last one year. This includes movement against the rape of dalit girls and the movement against the demolition of a basti of Mushars in Moglaha by the feudals. The Party was successful in ensuring rehabilitation of this basti on government land and forced the administration to give monetary help to the residents to rebuild their homes.

**Nalanda:** Barabigha village of the Hilsa block of Nalanda is dominated by feudals of the Kurmi caste. In this village dalit and extremely backward castes were served food at the end in community dining on the occasion of either marriage or death. The CPI(M) opposed this tradition which led to a violent backlash.

There were bloody clashes; however, in the end this tradition was stopped. In another village in this district, Dalits had built a Hanuman temple in which the priest too was a dalit. This temple was demolished. The CPI(M) intervened to rebuild this temple and handed it over to the dalits.

In Rajgir in Nalanda half a dozen bastis including Marxwaadi Nagar and Konar Nagar have been established on land occupied in land struggles. Dalits from the Rajbanshi community are living in all these bastis.

**Gaya:** The main base of the CPI(M) in Gaya district is among the dalits. Since the inception there the Party, has been fighting against the feudal and caste oppression. In one of the regions of district, upper caste people used to organize 'matka fod' (breaking earthen pots). Dalit youth of the region too began organizing this programme. This was met by stiff upper caste opposition. The Party successfully intervened in support of the dalit youth. On one occasion a musical band accompanying a dalit wedding function which was passing through the upper caste area was attacked. Party organized resistance against this and the upper caste people were forced to retreat.

### 1993 Land Movement

In 1993 the CPI (M), CPI and CPI (ML)-Liberation started the land liberation struggle to occupy land illegally held by the landlords. In effect this movement was led by the CPI(M). The CPI announced the end of movement by symbolically putting red flags at few places and the CPI (ML)-Liberation distanced itself from the movement by giving the slogan of nationalization of land. The movement under the leadership of CPI (M) started from Purnea and spread to regions of Bhagalpur, Khagaria, Begusarai, Samastipur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, East and West Champaran, Gaya, Nalanda and Nawada. In Jharkhand which was then a part of Bihar; land was occupied in parts of Chatra and Ranchi (Sonahathu). More than 30,000 acres of land was occupied in this movement and distributed among dalits, tribals and minorities. Over 100 men and women cadres of the CPI(M) and the Kisan Sabha were martyred during this struggle as well as while defending the occupied land against

attempts of the landlords to reoccupy it. The reason behind the murder of big leaders of the Party and Kisan movement like Comrade Ajit Sarkar and Comrade Ramnath Mahto was also this very land movement. Even till this date *bastis* (dwellings) of homeless and poor continues to exist on the land that was occupied in the course of this movement. The state Government is making attempts to evict the occupants of this land with the help of local feudals and neo-feudal elements. The Party has prepared a comprehensive plan of movement against these evictions and on the demand of housing for the homeless through a state level convention.

### **Communists, Land Reforms and Empowerment of Dalits:**

Class and caste oppression overlap to a significant extent in our society. The control over land has been linked to caste hierarchies as well. The Communist movement in India always recognised this fact and has been of the opinion that thoroughgoing land reforms are indispensable for ensuring annihilation of landlordism as well as caste. Communists believe that economic empowerment of the dalits and tribals is an essential ingredient in their liberation. A large part of these sections are landless or poor peasants. For them any kind of empowerment is linked to the question of their getting control over land. Keeping this in mind, the Communists have been involved in a variety of land struggles from before independence to the present day. State governments formed under leadership of the Communists have paid special attention to enacting and implementing genuine land reform legislations. Under land reforms in Kerala between 1957 and 1993, about 28 lakh tenants were conferred ownership rights and about 14.82 lakh acres of land accrued to them. A large number of landless agricultural workers received ownership rights over the plots of homesteads. Between 1957 and 1996, about 5,28,000 households were issued homestead ownership certificates.

West Bengal having only 3.5% of agricultural land in the country accounts for 22 % of the total ceiling surplus land distributed in the country. 29.85 lakh acres of land has been distributed to 29.84 lakh beneficiaries under the Left Front rule. SC and ST account for 56% of the beneficiaries though they constituted 27% of the State population. Taken together, Kerala and West Bengal account for

33.2% of all ceiling-surplus land distributed in the entire country. Practically all of this was achieved by Left-led State governments.

About 15 lakh share croppers have been recorded through Operation Barga in West Bengal, thereby protecting them from eviction by landlords. 78% of land in West Bengal is owned by small and marginal farmers, as against 35.52 percent nationally.

In Tripura the Left Front government gave priority restoring illegally transferred lands of tribal people back to them and to distribution of land to landless families. Till September 2005, almost 9,000 cases of restoration had been handled and 7,147 acres had been restored to tribal families. Between 1997–98 and 2004–05, a total of 34,598 acres were distributed to 37,349 landless families. From 2012–13 to 2016–17, a total of 3,447.91 acres of government khas land was allotted to 25,426 landless and homeless families.

The glorious record of the Communists in implementing genuine land reform measures was not just a function of laws made by Left led state governments. Mass mobilisation and struggles of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and the All India Agricultural Workers' Union (AIWU) backed by the Party also played a vital role in the actual accrual of benefits of such measures to the landless and poor peasants.

**Dalit Shoshan Mukti Manch:** The CPI(M) is committed to fight for the abolition of the caste system and the myriad oppressions it entails. To make the struggle against these evils more widespread and effective, the Party in 2014 took initiative to help form the Dalit Shoshan Mukti Manch, that is a broad-based all India, anti-caste platform. The Dalit Shoshan Mukti Manch is working with different Ambedkarite groups and has been an active participant in the massive Dalit Swabhiman rallies, held in the recent past as well as the united protests against the Bhima Koregaon attacks. There is ample scope for building stronger unity between the Left and organisations of dalits. This solidarity cannot be built by negating the committed struggles of the Left or those of dalit organisations. It has to be built on the basis of mutual recognition that all of them are seeking to liberate the dalits from caste oppression.

**Gaps in understanding and their correction:** Despite the above record of fighting against social oppression and for

empowerment of the dalits, there were gaps in the overall understanding of the Communists regarding caste. One such gap reflected in the tendency which argued that the fight against class exploitation per se would take care of caste oppression as well. The Party made a self-critical analysis of the shortcomings in its understanding and made necessary corrections. Thus, the CPI(M)'s Programme (updated in 2000) notes in Para 5.12 that, "Working class unity presupposes unity against the caste system and the oppression of dalits, since the vast majority of the dalit population is part of the labouring classes. To fight for the abolition of the caste system and all forms of social oppression through a social reform movement is an important part of the democratic revolution. The fight against caste oppression is interlinked with the struggle against class exploitation."

#### **Impact of casteism on the democratic movement:**

The pervasive influence of casteism in Indian society and polity impacts adversely on the general democratic movement. Work among peasantry and agricultural workers is hampered by caste divisions. The caste divide hinders building of class unity of peasants even on immediate issues. The dominant castes in every area do their best to prevent class unity of the toilers, using their economic power, caste appeal and reactionary social customs. The Left led peasant movement is not immune to effect of such machinations as is evident from the experience of states like Bihar. Similarly, there are instances of trade unions being organized on purely casteist lines which disrupt class unity.

It also needs to be recognized that members of our Party and mass organizations come from existing society and carry with them the influence of its retrograde social practices, including caste. Besides, even after joining the Party or democratic movement they are constantly exposed to the influence of such ideas, which form an essential part of their social and political milieu. This problem requires constant vigil and ideological struggle to rid our members of the pernicious influence of such ideas and ideologies.

#### **The C.P.I. (M)'s Basic Approach to Caste:**

The C.P.I. (M)'s views caste as being fundamental to the

existing system of exploitation. Further it believes that, "The problem of caste oppression and discrimination has a long history and is deeply rooted in the pre-capitalist social system" (Para 5.12 of CPI(M)'s Programme). Hence, annihilation of caste requires elimination of landlordism and pre-capitalist relations of production. To attain this goal the unity of all toilers- especially that of the working class, agricultural workers and poor peasants, a large proportion of which belong to SC/ST sections, is essential. This will necessarily require involving these sections in the common struggle for land, wages, food, employment, education, health etc. But this by itself is not enough. To draw the SC/ST sections into the general democratic movement and the movement for social transformation it is essential to fight for the abolition of the caste system itself. In the interim, specific issues of caste oppression and discrimination will have to be raised and fought against. As stated earlier, the CPI(M) views the struggle to abolish the caste system as being integral to the achievement of the People's Democratic Revolution. In other words, the fight against caste oppression is interlinked with the struggle against class exploitation.

Similarly, the CPI(M) believes that it is also essential to expose and fight against the co-option of caste by the bourgeoisie in all its manifestations. As Para 5.12 of the Party Programme notes that, "The society under capitalist development has compromised with the existing caste system. The Indian bourgeoisie itself fosters caste prejudices." Hence elimination of landlordism and pre-capitalist relations of production alone won't suffice to overthrow the caste system. It will also require determined battle against the system of capitalist exploitation and dislodging of the big bourgeoisie that heads the Indian state.

Chapter VI of the C.P.I. (M)'s Programme, dealing with the policies that the Party will implement after the success of People's Democratic Revolution states in Para 6.3 (xiii) that, "Abolition of social oppression of one caste by another and untouchability and all forms of social discrimination shall be punished by law. Special facilities for scheduled castes, tribes and other backward castes shall be provided in matters of service and other educational facilities." The earlier simplistic notion that revolutionary



transformation and building of a new society based on socialism will by themselves lead to eradication of caste is erroneous. This evil has deep roots running for centuries. Its eradication will require sustained and patient political-ideological struggle against it even after the success of the People's Democratic Revolution, as ideological remains of the past do not automatically vanish with change in material conditions and the capture of state power by the working class and other toilers.

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**\* This note has used material (verbatim in many cases) from the following sources:**

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