

**The Prospects of Dalit Culture  
Among the Forms of Social Power**

**by Richard Z. Duffee**

**25 September, 2002**

# The Prospects of Dalit Culture among the Forms of Social Power

## Contents:

1. Terms and Background for Analysis of Culture and Social Power	1
2. A Sketch of the Position of Dalit Culture	7
3. The Vulnerability of Dalit Culture: the Opposition of Cooperation and Accommodation to Fear	16
4. The Current Political Problem of Dalit Advancement	28
5. Dalit Politics and the Reality of Dalit Life	51
6. Note on the Graphic Estimate of the Distribution of Overall Social Power of Minority Groups by Percentage of Population	55
7. Graphic Estimate of the Distribution of Overall Social Power of Minority Groups by Percentage of Population	58
8. Bibliography	59

## 1. Terms and Background for Analysis of Culture and Social Power

This analysis of social forces bearing on Dalit culture is based on a theory of social power and culture developed to reconceptualize the Marxist theory of the base and superstructure of culture. It uses seven essential terms. Four of them come from the theory of culture consolidated by Carl Gustav Jung<sup>1</sup> and his successors, but I accept only broad Jungian descriptions of forms of culture, and do not share Jungian assumptions about psychology. My own general understanding of culture and personality is in manuscript, *Culture, Personality, and Social Power*. The other three terms come from the unified theory of social power formulated in different versions by Max Weber<sup>2</sup> and Bertrand Russell<sup>3</sup>, reformulated by John Kenneth Galbraith<sup>4</sup>, and partially applied to the theory of oppression by Iris Marion Young<sup>5</sup>. My own understanding of the general relationship between the theory of power and the theory of oppression is in *Differential Social Power Flow*.<sup>6</sup>

To understand this paper it is sufficient to define the seven terms succinctly. The Jungian theory of culture is that culture has four phases. The original basis of all cultures is called Dionysian after the Greek god Dionysius, a god of energy and group celebration of life whose worship unified the group in an egalitarian way that facilitated the cooperation needed for

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *The Theory of Psychological Types, Collected Works*, Volume 6, (Princeton, New Jersey, Bollingen, 1954/67.)

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 2, Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968/1978)

<sup>3</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Power: A New Social Analysis*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1938/1998)

<sup>4</sup> Galbraith, John Kenneth, *The Anatomy of Power*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983)

<sup>5</sup> Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990)

<sup>6</sup> To be submitted as an LL.M. dissertation at the National Law School, Bangalore.

mutually accepted labor in a harsh environment. Dionysian culture respects individual perception, which it does not regard as conflicting with communal need.

The second phase of culture is called Epimethean after the Greek general Epimetheus, notorious for his rigidity authoritarianism. Epimetheanism is the phase of culture developed by a conquering people when it consolidates the gains of victory by oppressing the losers and extracting from them surplus value, blind obedience, apparent admiration, and some apparent adoption of Epimethean norms. The basis of Epimetheanism is simple command and obedience. Because the power of an occupying army can only be maintained by systematically shaping perception to the categories by which authority would judge events, Epimetheanism is the source of oppressive stereotypes that serve hierarchical oppressive behavior.

The third phase of culture is called Apollonian after the Greek god Apollo, a god of light, reason, and abstraction. Cultures in which Dionysian laborers are oppressed by Epimetheans develop Apollonian layers to convert simple command and obedience into general rules that be considered abstractly, ideals that can be shared, and artistic forms that ameliorate the harshness of Epimethean rule without directly challenging it. Its intellectual basis is reason, but the concepts reasoned about tend to derive from Epimethean stereotypes, and are arranged and applied by feeling, understanding, or interpretation (“erwissen” in German) rather than analytical thought (“erkennen” in German).

The fourth phase of culture is called Promethean after the Greek god Prometheus, a god of human freedom and energy who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humankind to make humans able to develop technologies to give them some advantage in the struggle with nature. The basis of Promethean culture is articulated as scientific method. Individual perception is again respected, but on an abstract communicate plane open to verification or disconfirmation by others. Prometheanism analyzes concepts and judges them against experience, developing concepts that fit experience better than pervious concepts, and abandoning those that fit less well.

While Epimetheanism aims at concrete stasis and Apollonianism at abstract stasis, Dionysianism originally sought continuous social readjustment by cultural creativity and Prometheanism seeks change by abstract analysis of regularities of experience. Dalit culture is Dionysian. Because all dominant modern cultures have strong Epimethean layers, all of them denigrate Dionysian cultures and misunderstand them. In particular, modern cultures conceive of Dionysian cultures as traditional on the model of traditional Epimethean and Apollonian cultures, and therefore fail to perceive that, before they were suppressed, Dionysian cultures had a dynamism sharing elements of Promethean dynamism, as well as its own Apollonian forms of abstract understanding embodied in the original language that normally survives only piecemeal

as dialect, slang, and argot, and as esoteric doctrine. The traditional forms of suppressed Dionysian culture rigidified in order to resist the onslaught of the cultural imperialism of Epimethean and Apollonian cultural forms.

The basic conception of the unified theory of social power is that people exercise power over other people by three different means, economic, political, and social. Those terms, however, have two misleading implications, first that the forms of power exist in isolated institutions and practices, whereas all three forms of power shape all human actions, and second that human action can be adequately understood by isolating it in three different studies, whereas human beings are unified creatures whose actions cannot be understood by isolating the three forms of social power. Galbraith's terms for the three methods, though unfamiliar, are more accurate. Economic power he calls "compensatory" because power exercised through the medium of exchange is expendable and compensates the laborer and giver of value. Political power he calls "condign" because its effectiveness in producing action ultimately depends on the threat and use of force. Condign power is thus the domain of the state's monopoly of force in the military, the police, law, and administration; and the activity directed to control the state's monopoly of force is politics. Social power Galbraith calls "conditioned power" because it acts by conditioning the recipient. One subject to the conditioned power of another is persuaded by the other by a wide variety of subtle and complex means including admiration, modeling or emulation, identification, and avoidance and acceptance of the manipulation of the threats of humiliation, embarrassment, shame, and guilt, and exclusion. Different institutions and people specialize in the three forms of power, but the forms of power are convertible by different means, so possessors of any one form tend to acquire at least one of the other two, and those denied one form tend to lose the others.

Iris Marion Young argued there are five "faces of oppression." The first two are "exploitation" and marginalization," both the results of exercises of economic or compensatory power. Marginalization is exclusion from access to productive resources. This is a downward pressure exerted by those with property rights. The threat of marginalization makes it possible for owners of property to exploit others because to survive laborers without property have no choice but to accept less compensation than the value their labor has produced. Marginalization and exploitation are thus two phases of a circular flow of compensatory power. Those with more compensatory power marginalize and exploit those with less. Those with less compensatory power have less compensatory power either because they have given much of their compensatory power to those above through allowing themselves to be exploited or because they have had no opportunity to acquire any because they have been marginalized.

The second two faces of oppression are “powerlessness” and the “normalization of violence,” both the results of uses and abuses of condign power. Violence and the threat of violence against a person or category of persons produces the expectation that timid and obedient behavior is necessary for survival and consequently the belief that one dare not, and perhaps *cannot*, represent oneself. Belief in one’s incapacity to represent oneself is powerlessness. Its consequence is blind obedience. It is blind obedience that gives the possessors of condign power their power. In order to maintain this power they use the threat of force, periodically demonstrating the actuality of the threat through the use of actual force. Thus condign power too is a circular flow. The powerful are empowered by the powerless.

The fifth face of oppression Young calls “cultural imperialism.” Young did not analyze cultural imperialism completely because she did not clearly understand that social power is a circular flow, and so did not see that the oppressiveness of social power must be understood as a circular flow. What Young calls cultural imperialism is a downward exertion of social power. Celebrities, the famous, the esteemed, the prestigious, high status people in general are exhibited as models for their supposed inferiors, who are tempted to imitate them, but are rejected if they do in order to keep the supposed purity of the supposed superiors intact. The upward flow of empowering social power is dependant apparent assent, the power of admiration, imitation, and attention that makes the famous famous. The upward flow, which Young ignores, is as important as the downward flow. I will return to it in a moment.

The threat behind cultural imperialism is humiliation and exclusion if one does not give assent to the supposed superiority of the models presented to one, and social exclusion if one rebels, fails to be impressed, imitates in a way that is considered to be a usurpation of social power, or draws attention to oneself in a way that distracts or denigrates the models. Cultural imperialism thus makes culture uniform, makes people reject themselves, their authenticity, their own culture and heritage, their own feelings, perceptions, thought processes, and imaginative capabilities in favor of imitating what is presented as a superior culture. Because cultural imperialism produces psychological alienation, it also produces self-hatred. Because it produces self-hatred, it also produces difficulties in obtaining self-knowledge. Because it produces difficulties in obtaining self-knowledge, it produces inability to act in one's own interest and in the interest of those with whom one shares actual bonds of mutual interest, love and affection. Cultural imperialism therefore breaks down communities and destroys common and shared consciousness.

It is only the upward flow of social power that drives cultural imperialism that the oppressed have any control over. Cultural imperialism is extremely diffuse; it is conducted by a

multitude of people in a wide variety of situations. Consequently attempting to exercise that potential control is difficult and frustrating and takes determination and perseverance. But one can devote more energy to one's native language than to an imposed language, honor and enjoy one's own traditions and add to them creatively, ignore denigration of oneself and one's group, inquire into the past experience of one's elders, examine one's memories of childhood to resurrect suppressed and forgotten perceptions and desires, empathize with others in one's group, research the past, understand the points of view of the actors in critical events that have shaped one's experience and the experience of one's group, and adopt projects that have been abandoned because they seemed to have no prospects at the time or received no response. If one has a television set, one can turn it off. All of these actions are more fruitful than accepting cultural imperialism.

More than any other group in India, Dalits have suffered cultural imperialism. They have suffered it from the time of the original Aryan invasions, and perhaps even before that. Yet, in a paradoxical way, they were partially protected by the dominant culture's practice of untouchability from suffering it directly under Muslim and British rule, for attempts to rise out of their position were regarded as usurpations of social power and were severely punished. So as their supposed social superiors were supposed to ignore them, Dalits were supposed to be ignorant of what was happening at the social top of society. They were not, of course, but they were to give the appearance of ignorance. The British gave some extremely limited opportunity for a few Dalits to escape some of the cultural imperialism of Hindu society, but the cultural imperialism of the British themselves is notorious.

Since Independence India has opened itself to the cultural imperialism of more of Western Europe, but especially of the USA. American cultural imperialism is a force on a scale the world has never seen before, because it purveyed through the high technology of television and computers. At this point the primary temptation in the effort for Dalits to escape traditional Indian cultural imperialism is to yield to American cultural imperialism. Technology and the use of English may give some means and scope to Dalit culture, but is a hindrance to its substance. The substance of Dalit culture lies in local languages and dialects, in direct observation, contemplation of reality, assessment and sometimes celebration of the physical, biological, and social world, of the universe itself as a whole, and of whatever spirit the mind apprehends in its activity.

A few more basic facts should be noted. The capacities to learn culture and language are as innate to humans as “instincts,”<sup>7</sup> for which they are largely a replacement.<sup>8</sup> There are no primitive cultures; all cultures rely on the same capacities. There is no language on earth of which the average speaker uses more than twice as many words as the average speaker of any other language. Difficulty of grammar and syntax, moreover, has no correlation with any level of technology that is supposed to signify “advancement” of culture; all languages are basically equal in difficulty and complexity. Therefore there is no such thing as a primitive language. Because language is the primary medium of culture, cultures must be regarded as fundamentally equal.

In the broad scale, both physically and mentally, basic equalities of persons and peoples hold also. Physically humans are so similar that 98.7% of our genes are shared with the great apes and only 1.3% make us specifically human. We also share so many of those specifically human genes that *any* group of 1,500 people has 98% of those genes<sup>9</sup>. These two estimates together imply that all racial and ethnic differences are only 0.026% of what we are, one part in four thousand, that the Epimethean phase of culture has used to artificially create differences that can be used as markers to direct social power differently towards different people. The quantity of information in the human brain is equal to ten times the amount of information in the largest library on earth<sup>10</sup>. Like the relative difficulty of languages, this quantity does not vary even in individuals by a range larger than a doubling or halving, and those differences average out in any group. Consequently all groups of people have roughly the same quantity of information in their heads.

Differences therefore cannot be accounted for on the basis of *quantity* of information, but only on the basis of what the information is information *about*. If one lives in a restricted and impoverished environment, one has much information about few things; one knows those things far better, and over a far longer period of time than if one lives in an open and variable

---

<sup>7</sup> Ethology, the study of animal instincts, has shown that the emergence of instincts in mammals and birds depends on “imprinting,” particular timed events that call them forth. Human learning represents a weakening of the rigidity of imprinting, its replacement by more flexible forms of imitation.

<sup>8</sup> Ashley Montagu, in *Growing Young*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Granby, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1989) identifies the species character of humanity as neoteny, the maintenance of infantile characteristics in adulthood. Human neoteny involves birth at a stage of development which, relative to other mammals, is 30 months premature. The only explanation for the survival advantage of this extreme disability of infants is that it allows an enormous increase in the flexibility of behavior by making behavior more dependent on social learning than on instinct. Our neoteny developed in tandem with the development of language and culture, and our basic capacities for both were fully developed at least 25,000 years ago, if not 60,000 years ago. During historical times, that is the time in which writing has been used, this has changed very little. Literacy and technology facilitate the enlargement of the *effectiveness* of human capacities, but are no measure of them and do not create them.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Lowenthal’s analysis in the 1970’s.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Sagan’s estimate in *The Dragons of Eden*.

environment. What changes in gaining access to the social power needed to live in an open and variable environment is not *quantity* of information, but stimulation to develop facility in skills of verbalization, comparison, and contrast so that a more complex environment can be handled with ease on the basis of *less* information about it. Dalit aspiration is to gain access to a broader environment without losing authenticity. This can be done. I offer this essay in the hope it might be of some assistance in that effort because I believe that understanding social power for what it is assists greatly in developing the capacity to stay open without losing authenticity.

## 2. A Sketch of the Position of Dalit Culture

Dalit and Adivasi cultures are both basically unitary single phase Dionysian cultures. But they are quite different in that they were originally different and have been impoverished, disempowered, and denigrated in different ways by different means. Adivasi cultures are still the original hunting and gathering, (and sometimes the herding) Dionysian cultures they always were, but they have been excluded from their original territories and resources, rendered powerless in relation to outsiders, and degraded in their ability to organize themselves culturally and socially. Dalit cultures, on the other hand, derive from earlier cultures that had a variety of forms, and were conquered by Epimethean-Apollonian Aryan cultures. Some of those cultures, like Adivasi culture, were probably single phase Dionysian cultures, but were more likely to have been either herding cultures or agricultural cultures than hunting and gathering cultures. Others were two-phase cultures with an Epimethean layer overlaid on the primary Dionysian phase. Others may have been three-phase cultures with an Apollonian third phase. But when Aryans conquered the Dalit cultures, they cut off and suppressed the Epimethean and Apollonian phases of Dalit culture, subjecting Dalits to Aryan Epimethean and Apollonian rule. The subjection was never *complete*; some elements of the earlier Dalit culture survived its subjection, such as competing Apollonian notions of order and religion.

The *form* of subjection of Dalits was different from the *form* of subjection of the Adivasis and Shudras. While the Adivasis were excluded *spatially*, but sometimes acquired specific religious roles, the Dalits totally excluded *socially* and were specifically denied religious roles on grounds of ritual impurity. The Adivasis were totally *marginalized*: they were totally excluded from all productive resources of the dominant culture. The Dalits were *alternately marginalized* and *exploited*. The Shudras were *exploited*, but only *marginalized* when disobedient.

The distinctive position of the *Dalits* arises from the systematic nature of the three forms of oppression they have suffered. Their *economic* oppression has always been an alternation of exploitation and marginalization.

Dalit *political* oppression has always been the inculcation of belief in their absolute speechless *powerlessness*, *their supposed inability to represent themselves*, and the expectation of absolute and universal *obedience* because all *non-Dalits* had power over them. There was no one over whom *they* could have power, and no one was obligated to listen to them.

Their *social* oppression has been unique and exceedingly complex. The central features have always been disgust and contempt that was supposed to result in total physical isolation except when some obedient act required presence, at which times touch was absolutely forbidden on the grounds of a doctrine of a supposedly infectious supposed impurity. Features that were supposed to give rise to contempt and disgust were required to be maintained at all times. Evidence of the *feeling* of self-disgust was required to conform to the dominant culture's Apollonian norms. Whether the *display* of self-disgust was real or feigned, of course, could not be totally controlled because the dominant culture excluded *itself* from the private realm of Dalit culture *nearly* as totally as it excluded Dalits from its own private realms. Dalits were *totally* excluded from religion, theology, and education. They were expected to *conform* to the religious norms that were supposed to effect them in so far as they were *visible* to members of the dominant culture, but because they were not allowed to hear religion discussed, and were to have no explicit *knowledge* of religion, there could be no check on conformity of *belief*. Therefore elements of the *original* Dionysian Dalit cultures could survive to some extent in Dalit privacy, in oral tradition, in dialect, in traditional thought patterns, and in some art forms, particularly drumming, which must have been a dominant feature of the socially organizing rituals of original Dalit cultures before their subjugation.

The survival of Dalit culture has depended on the three forms of social power, the three forms of social oppression exerted upon it, and on the level of surviving energy and vitality available to individuals and groups to organize their own experience and their mutual activities in isolation from the dominant culture. The current resurrection, recreation, and new creation of Dalit culture now depends both on the level of energy individuals and groups are able to establish and maintain and on the degree to which the three forms of oppression relent, can be resisted, and can be pushed away.

Dalit and Adivasi cultures offer a unique opportunity for India and the world. In India, only Dalits and Adivasis have remnants of the original unitary cultures that have in themselves no Epimethean phase. In the case of the Adivasis, there never was an Epimethean cultural phase: before they were excluded from their original territories, they were primarily unconquered groups that had not conquered other groups. Though they may have lost in warfare, they had never been subjected to exploitation by conquerors, nor is there evidence that they had subjected other

groups to exploitation after victory in warfare. Therefore their cultures never adopted the Epimethean norms of conquering groups, either by way of needing them to cooperatively control another group nor by way of needing to assimilate themselves to the demands of an exploiting group. Adivasis therefore have been able to keep the highest level of internal cohesion of any groups in India, though that cohesion and the resulting relative integrity and unity of their culture has given them no economic or political power in the dominant culture, and precious little social power. Yet the Adivasis have the best prospects for re-establishing and reinforcing their cultures. Their problems in doing this are solely ones of gaining some social power as groups in the culture as a whole.

The problems of reestablishing Dalit culture are more complex because they have been far more influenced by the dominant culture, with which they have been in continuous contact. But because their oppression has excluded them from political and social power as well as economic power, they have adopted fewer of the Epimethean norms common in the dominant society, and far fewer of the Apollonian norms common to the rest of Indian culture. The result is that, though they are the most oppressed groups, they have the second highest level of maintenance of elements of original unitary Dionysian culture. This gives them, with the Adivasis, the unique opportunity of being in a position to create and recreate Apollonian and Promethean cultural phases directly linked to Dionysian culture without the interference of the normally juxtaposed Epimethean phase.

The “Shudras”<sup>11</sup>, on the other hand, have traditionally been committed to the Epimethean phase of culture by their right to exclude the Dalits and Adivasis and their right to exploit Dalits, and, in absorbing some of the norms of the Epimethean phase, have also tended to absorb more of the norms of the traditional culture’s Apollonian phase. Shudra culture is basically a two-phased culture, with Epimetheanism affecting it Dionysianism. So the Shudra Dionysian phase of culture is far more mixed with Epimetheanism than Dalit and Adivasi cultures are.

But the Dalit and Adivasi cultures are primarily Dionysian, though Dionysian cultures in very different conditions because the modes of exclusion were different. In Dalit culture, the primary element of dominance is patriarchy. This has happened because the only social power available in Dalit society has been power *within* the family. Little as it has been, Dalit *men* have always had more economic opportunity than Dalit *women*, and caste political and social power, meager as it has been, has always gone through the men, not the women. So Dalit women have always been more dependent on men than the men on women.

Patriarchy is thus the main Epimethean element in Dionysian society, but it was not integrated with the surrounding patriarchy because traditionally the lowest Shudra woman was still supposed to be superior to the highest Dalit man. So Dalit patriarchy has not shared in the general patriarchal Epimetheanism of the dominant culture. It has its own character. Though lacking in power, Dalit women feel generally more able to be forthright than upper caste women: their *opinions* are not controlled by the social power of the dominant culture. In Dalit culture as a whole, moreover, internal freedom of *opinion* has always been valued because the dominant outside culture always silenced and rejected Dalit opinion outright. Opinion had to be maintained against the full force of the dominant culture for any Dalit community at all to survive. So the ability to maintain opinion in the privacy of the Dalit world was a source of cultural strength and unity Dalits could not afford to weaken.

Consequently Dalit culture has internally and privately maintained a certain mental vitality weakened in the more socially powerful layers of culture. What is unique about Dalits is that they can become Apollonians or Prometheans, if they have the resources and choose to use them, with a direct connection to the Dionysian basis of culture. Dionysian culture respects direct perception. One acts on what one sees. In Epimethean culture, one acts on the basis of what one believes *an authority* would perceive. An Epimethean exerts social power downwards in the direction he believes an authority would want it directed. In order to do this, he must learn to shape his perceptions to the categories he believes matter to the authority. To convert perception into the standard perception of authority, some features of perception have to be edited out and others have to be supplied. This results in stereotyping. Epimetheans stereotype their experience of the world in order to be able to serve power. Dionysians do not have to do this. They *may* do it for a variety of reasons, but they do not have to make it a *norm* to do it. The laborer does not need to adopt his master's point of view as the foreman must. The laborer only needs to learn what to expect the foreman or master to do. This can be done in a variety of ways that do not necessitate the *internalization* of the master's and foreman's viewpoint, let alone *identification* with that internalized model. It is the *identification* that makes one Epimethean. Dalits have traditionally been *rejected* for *identifying* with their social superiors: a Dalit who *identified* with social superiors was traditionally regarded as trying to usurp a *Shudra* role, and was severely punished. So traditionally the furthest most Dalits have gone in accommodating themselves to their positions has been to *internalize models* of what different members of the upper castes are likely to perceive, think, feel, and do. These models have different degrees of sketchiness and fullness.

---

<sup>11</sup> The "Shudras" do not in fact exist as a self-identifying group, but are the traditional term for what has always been the majority of the society, the group left over when Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vysya, Adivasis,

When all that is modeled is upper caste *behavior*, there is no possibility of identification at all, and so no absorption of dominant Epimethean and Apollonian perceptions, norms, and desires. The result then is that the Dionysian respect for direct perception remains free of dominance.

Culture in the sense of art relies totally on directness of perception. Epimethean attempts at art are always rigid and standardized, devoid of individuality, originality, and expression, because Epimetheans routinely stereotype their perceptions in order to fit into their social niches. Apollonian art tends to idealize and abstract because it attempts to create images of ideal order needed to rationalize Epimethean dominance over potentially Dionysian laborers. Promethean art has abstract mediation and reflection but returns to respect for individual perception. There is thus some commonality between modern Promethean art and Dionysian art; there was good reason that Picasso, for instance, drew so heavily on Dionysian African art to vitalize modern Western art. The Epimethean and Apollonian rely on standardized perception, the first concrete, the second abstract; the Dionysian and Promethean on actual individual perception, the first concrete, the latter abstract. Coming from a suppressed Dionysian culture, Dalits have three basic unique opportunities in art and culture. They can, if they wish, resurrect and recreate traditional Dionysian art. If they wish, they can create new Apollonian images of feeling and order undistorted by the Epimethean need to maintain order by threat and force and directly connected to Dionysian perception and feeling. If they wish, they can create new Promethean art of thinking and perception directly connected to concrete Dionysian perception. All three are vital and historically new. This is true also of the purely Dionysian because expression has so long been systematically denied in the public realm that though many elements of Dalit Dionysian *culture* are intact, its artistic *expression*, even if wholly devoted to finding and recreating traditional forms, is new and creative.

The creation of culture in the more general Apollonian sense of a “high” culture, that is, with a strong abstract and public component that purports to have some universality, and that establishes general norms of law, religion, philosophy, and literature, is also open to great Dalit originality. Here the problem is that to get access to the abstract realm of culture, one usually has to go through the dominant culture. The dominant culture has oppressed Dalits. It usually does not allow admission to its resources without some show of conformity, submission, obedience, acceptance of inferior status, imitation, and intent to serve the dominant culture. Therefore most of the people who attempt this route to original creation are swallowed up by the dominant culture. One can turn, of course, to the resources of another culture that do not stigmatize one.

---

and Dalit groups are deleted from the whole.

This is what Ambedkar did. In Britain and the US, he was condescended to as an Indian, but not stigmatized as a Dalit. This release from stigma made him regard the Apollonian phase of Britain and the US as more benign than that of Hinduism, and led to his effort to replace Hindu Apollonian norms with Western ones. Yet his approach was practical, realistic, and analytical, that is, Promethean, not Apollonian; he never, for instance, adopted the Judaic and Christian *bases* of Western Apollonianism, but always sought ideas India could adopt from Western *civil* practices because he thought them more amenable to norms of social, political, and legal equality he thought more humane and productive than Indian custom. An outsider to British and American Epimethean and Apollonian phases almost as much as to Indian upper caste culture, and almost as purely Promethean in his approach to problems as Marx, Ambedkar was most attracted in Britain to the Promethean social thought of late Victorian radicalism, and in the US to John Dewey's form of pragmatism, also a Promethean understanding of society. Both late Victorian radicalism and Dewey's pragmatism were anti-imperialist and democratic; they were rebellions against the wastefulness and oppression that imperialism enforced through the economic and political hierarchies. Ambedkar has often been accused of being more British than Indian, but that is a vast overgeneralization; what he always advocated was rationalism, not the British systems of military and class domination. The British and American rationalism with which he identified was in fact the province of a beleaguered British and American intellectual minority.

Ambedkar's enormous intelligence, his self-possession, his incredible will power, and the leisure and backing the Prince of Baroda afforded him gave him access to a wide range of the resources of both the Apollonian and the Promethean phases of English-speaking culture. With that access he decided to devote his Promethean energy to the gigantic cultural feats of the creation of a partially new Apollonian order for India as a whole, to the opening up of Apollonian and Promethean opportunities for Dalits as a whole, and to the creation of a new Apollonian order for Dalits in his resurrection and reformation of Buddhism. In doing this, Ambedkar was not seeking to become a monument, but a catalyst and initiator. His present status as a sort of deity is simply the result of his not having had any company; in 1930 there was only one other Dalit in India who had a B.A., and none with a foreign education, so Ambedkar had no choice but to do his best alone and to leave behind what he could.

The possibilities that Ambedkar opened up have enormous untapped potential that beckons to others to develop. The impact of Dalits on India's Apollonian phase of culture, and on the world's, has still been relatively slight. But the only impediments to it are practical and psychological. Continuous efforts will be made to suppress and co-opt Dalit contributions to the Apollonian realm, in India to convert it back into the Apollonian world of the dominant culture,

and in the rest of the world to convert it into the forms of alien law, religion, philosophy, and literature. It is essential that Dalits resist these efforts because their potentially unique contribution lies in the development of attitudes, positions, expression, understandings, norms, means of conceptualization and analysis, that do not rely on Epimethean stereotypes and conceptions of order. The Dalit potential is for liberation of perception, feeling, and action. In this it may be expected to have more insight and originality than most of the rest of the world for the cultures of *all* modern nations have strong Epimethean phases.

For this reason Gail Omvedt has great hope for the Dalit Democratic Revolution. That hope is justified by the Apollonian phase of emerging Dalit culture, for it has no prior commitment to oppressive Epimethean norms. In this it is naturally allied to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. It must be remembered that such social movements, when combined with legal and political action, produce wide-ranging social change. The Civil Rights Movement affected not only Blacks, but also set the stage for and initiated the Women's Movement, the Peace Movement, the temporary reduction of oppression of the poor, the Gay Liberation Movement, and movements among Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Together those movements greatly reduced *social* inequality in the United States. When economic power is *also* changed, and to the *extent* that it is, the flow of power *as a whole* in a nation can be changed and perhaps a *permanently* less oppressive society produced. This is true throughout the world, not just India. For that reason *all* oppressed "minorities" around the world have much in common and Dalit Apollonian energy and creativity is one of the best hopes of the world.

Dalits are also in a unique position regarding the Promethean phase of culture. The development of Prometheanism in Europe required enormous effort to free itself from the strictures of the Apollonian phase of Western culture embodied primarily in the Catholic Church and, to a lesser extent, in various forms of Protestantism. It took hundreds of years for scientists to acquire the social power needed to protect the intellectual freedom necessary for their work, namely the freedom to disregard religious and philosophical presuppositions. They acquired that freedom, however, largely at the cost of having to prove themselves beneficial to the Epimethean phases of their cultures, the order of corporations and the state, particularly the military. The need to free themselves from religious assumptions was extremely costly to Western society as a whole, was caused by the power of the church, and was quite unnecessary. The church was wrong from the beginning in believing that beliefs about the physical world had to be controlled. By attempting to do so, it fragmented Western culture and made it exceedingly difficult for Westerners to unify their thinking and their feeling: they appeared to be forced to choose between

relying on thinking and relying on feeling. Endless stupid cruelty and incomprehension of themselves and others resulted from this. Because science could only gain social power through allying itself with money and power against the Church by producing technologies that allowed the rich and powerful to dominate and exploit the poor, and so made the rich and powerful protect them from the Church, Western science is almost entirely geared to domination, to enrichment of the few, and to destructive capacities. Dalits, however, are in a different position regarding science and technology. Their energy and creativity can easily be co-opted by military-industrial establishments, but it does not need to be.

First, Dalits have no prior commitment to Epimetheanism. Second, their commitments to Apollonianism are of a number of different statuses. There is Hindu, Christian (some Catholic but more Protestant), Islamic, Buddhist, and what might be called “nativist” or “indigenous” (the kind of religiosity Kancha Iliah describes in *Why I am Not a Hindu*, and what I am describing as Dionysian) religious influence in different groups, and there are also atheistic and agnostic beliefs. Because of the millenia-long exclusion from actual participation in Hinduism, and the systematic denial of education, Apollonian commitments among Dalits on the whole are far weaker than in the rest of the Indian population with the exception of some, but not all, Adivasi groups. Given the opportunity, therefore, Dalits can more readily approach science without Epimethean and Apollonian preconceptions than can people from other parts of the society, and have readier access to their own perceptions than others have. This gives Dalits the potential to be far more scientifically creative than other groups. The Promethean phase of culture is in a constant struggle to recover access to direct perception. Historically its biggest problems have come from unconscious bondage to Epimethean and Apollonian beliefs<sup>12</sup> that have made it difficult for scientists to formulate problems and to search out and categorize data in ways that could form the concepts needed to adapt thought more accurately to the demands of reality. The reason for this is that most scientists had been raised in Epimethean and Apollonian environments. Only recently have many come from Promethean environments<sup>13</sup> in which accurate perception, quantification, and adaptable conceptualization were valued. Accurate perception and adaptable conceptualization, however, have always been valued in Dionysian cultures. To become Promethean in the way that modern scientists are, Dalits do not need to struggle for those capacities. The main deficit is only skill in quantification. Even without the quantification, many Promethean personality traits are not uncommon among Dalits: willingness to formulate ideas, to pursue abstract goals, to act on the basis of analysis, to reserve one’s own

---

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Koestler, Thomas Kuhn, and Stephen Jay Gould are particularly good on this feature of the history of Western science.

judgment, to examine one's own perceptions and concepts. In the Dalit world, there is the possibility of direct passage from Dionysian ways of being and acting to Promethean ways, and the possibility of direct communication between Promethean and Dionysian ways of regarding experience. This is an enormous potential advantage to which the primary *cultural* inhibition is the accommodation to fear discussed in the next section.

What is lacking *practically* is access to abstract resources. Traditional education, nearly all the education actually available, is as horribly destructive of scientific ability as it is of artistic ability. Its burden of Epimetheanism and Apollonianism is almost impossible to get out from under. One is made to obey irrational commands. One is mystified with irrational and judgmental doctrines. Science requires conviction in direct perception combined with patience and the capacity for fine adjustment of attention. In nearly all education, both are intentionally crippled in the interests of order and conformity. To get better education almost always requires more money. Nearly all Dalits, if they can get any education at all, must rely on state education, which is always authoritarian and always underestimates, and is unresponsive to, Dalit students because its biases follow the lines of the dominant culture. If a Dalit family can get the money to send its children to a private school, nearly all available private schools are also authoritarian, thus involving them again in Epimethean stereotypes and norms; and most also carry the heavy cultural baggage of some Apollonian form, often a Christian religion, with all its moralizing and disregard for perception and imagination, for accurate thinking and deep feeling. The exceptionally rare school in which Dalit children can be treated with respect for their perceptions and ability to conceptualize is almost always very expensive, and only children of the Dalit elite are likely to gain access to it. The tiny Dalit elite, moreover, generally owes its status to devoted service to Epimethean norms, so Dalit originality is unlikely to prosper there. Yet only that small elite has any access to half-way decent scientific education. For everyone else, science is spoiled and forging the link between Dionysian and Promethean culture remains a struggle against enormous odds only undertaken by the most fortunate and hardy, like Ambedkar himself.

The potential for Dalit Prometheanism can now only be actualized through self-education. Just since Indian Independence, it has already become possible for a number of people to do things that, before the Renaissance, were considered absolutely impossible in the West, and, before the Nineteenth Century, so astonishing that they were not credited. That a man in Jashua's position, for instance, could become a brilliant poet confronting the whole of his society, was not something any European thought any Dionysian could do—though it was only because of their self-imposed *ignorance* that they could have been so mistaken. That a Dalit can *teach*

---

<sup>13</sup> In general, this is the advantage of second, third, and fourth generation scientists.

*himself* to read well enough to read the *whole* of *Capital* would not have been *believed* just eighty years ago. That a Dalit *woman* could build up such skill in speaking that she could *entrance* a large audience for an hour was unimaginable just *forty* years ago. Such things are being done entirely on *individual* initiative. Members of the *dominant* culture, of course, don't have to rely on individual initiative, particularly against such great obstacles and odds. Because they credit *themselves* with the results of the advantages of their positions and the work and encouragement of their families, they can't understand the labor, persistence, sacrifice, and devotion such accomplishments require. They try to imagine the world as having a "level playing ground" on which they just always happen to win, rather than seeing that the field is on the side of a steep mountain, and that they are always running downhill while the Dalit team is always running uphill. They want to imagine that somehow they can have the view from the top at the same time that social gravity doesn't assist them in their projects. The second belief, of course, is self-flattery, belied by the fact that the first thing they do when they have a project is to seek the assistance of powerful allies. In Indian society, it is *independence* that is forbidden; *dependency* is cherished. Forbidding independence in a "caste" society means that contests are never decided by individual *competence*, but always by the average power of the groups relied upon. Projects are thus controlled by groups of radically differential social power, so the powerful groups always win.

### **3. The Vulnerability of Dalit Culture: the Opposition of Cooperation and Accommodation to Fear**

Dalit culture has two great vulnerabilities. From inside, it closes down because it has had to adapt itself to fear ever ready to verge on panic. From the outside, it is shut out because its internal dependency relationships have had to become so strong that outsiders do not believe Dalits reliable and cooperative enough to depend upon. The dominant culture obviously has produced both these weaknesses. But Dalit culture bears their burden and will not be relieved of it from outside. Instead, Dalits will continue to be held responsible, individually and as a group, for the patterns created by the social injuries to Dalit culture, and will continue to be subordinated on their grounds.

For Dalits to throw their energy into the creation of an egalitarian society, the core ethic will have to be cooperation—genuine cooperation based on openness and mutual comprehension. It is in despair of the possibility of genuine cooperation that the combination of fear and internal dependency receive priority and are expressed in politics as *rage* against humiliation,

subordination, and dependency on the dominant culture. There is good reason for rage, and it must be expressed, but if the goal of Dalits is to rise in society relative to others and other groups, the necessary consequence is that Dalits must expect others in fact to depend upon them. Others will refuse to depend upon Dalits if they do not believe they can cooperate with Dalits and rely upon them. Therefore the necessary Dalit quest for social power forces them to face an unavoidable choice. If they seek relative social power within the caste terms of Indian society, they can only get it by reducing fear and hostility and increasing reliability and cooperation, in other words, by assimilating, and so ultimately accepting dissolution as a distinctive group. This is not apparent in Dalit politics because politics is group competition and does not regard the necessary consequences of the full range of economic and social power sought by political means. If Dalits seek relative social power within the possibility of the emergence of an egalitarian society, though the core ethic would have to shift from political competition to cooperation, there would be a better chance of developing Dalit culture, because if cooperation replaced dependency and openness replaced fear, greater articulation of consciousness would have to result, and culture *is* the shared articulation of consciousness.

In practice there is a complex dialectic between the development of group identity and assertiveness and the formation of shared ideals and practices that can serve as the basis for cooperation. The relationship between specifically Dalit politics and more general egalitarian politics will be examined in the next section. Here it is necessary to examine the implications of fear and cooperation in Dalit culture.

On the average, in the long-term daily experience of India, it is probably more frightening to be a Dalit than to belong to any other group. Certainly, with the current activity of the militant Hindutva organizations clustered around the BJP, at the moment it is more frightening to be a Muslim—in Gujarat terrifying—and many Adivasi groups are subject to harassment sometimes escalating to terrorism too. But for over two millennia, the harassment of Dalits has been greatest, so the expectation of fear is most permanent.

Fear is fear of a danger. Fear mobilizes energy to flee to a safe place. In doing so, fear heightens perception of potential danger. But when one fearfully perceives that there is no safe place that can be reached, panic arises. Panic is not merely fear of danger, but is a danger itself because it disorganizes thinking and so produces self-destructive behavior. Fear can be tolerated in a community, but panic cannot be. Panic must be suppressed. For millennia, the reality of Dalit life was that there *was* no safe place; Dalits always lived on other people's property and were always a vulnerable minority. The closest thing to a safe place was the forest, but escaping to the forest meant dissolution of the community and total loss of access to resources because Dalits did

not have the knowledge of the forest Adivasis had. So the forest could give only temporary safety; the group would have to return to the outskirts of the village to survive, so the problems that would await the group there would have to be suffered. Thus the *reality* of Dalit life *appropriately* gave rise to panic, yet panic had to be avoided. Consequently Dalit custom had to provide social means to avoid panic.

Panic disorganizes thinking. In the systematic oppression of Dalit culture, the expectation of fear is a given, so disorganization of thinking becomes subject to mutual confirmation. When the infant of a mother in a secure social position is frightened, the infant's fear is easily lessened by the mother's confidence. The confident mother can gradually introduce the terrified infant to the frightening thing or person and show teach the infant to perceive it with less anxiety, and so put the infant in a position to learn about it. But if the mother herself has reason to be frightened, she confirms the infant's fear. The infant then has reason to believe that the object of fear is indeed frightening, for the infant's believe is shared by the mother's relative authority. While the infant of a secure mother learns that there is a safe place in which thinking can reorganize itself before the novel, the infant of the insecure mother learns there is no safe place and that local authority, the mother, shares the belief that the object is frightening. The consequence is that the infant then believes he knows what there is to know about the object when he feels fear of it. But what he believes he knows is in fact a disorganized perception; he knows nothing about the object except that it inspires fear. Agreement that knowledge of fear is adequate to count as knowledge of the feared object forms a barrier against subsequent knowledge of the class of objects to which it appears to belong.

The systematic oppression of Dalits has made this dynamic go further than in other areas of Indian culture. Insecurity of Dalits is more systematic for several reasons. First, Dalits have had the least land ownership of any group. If one owns no land, one is always on someone else's land. So even one's hut is someone else's property, and its tenure is insecure. For most people on earth, the home at least is a safe place, and often some space outside the home—a yard and close neighborhood or field—is relatively safe. In Dalit culture, no area outside the home is safe, and often the home itself is not; certainly it does not have the kind of impregnability the upper class home has. When the home itself is vulnerable, the best safety for the child lies in the actual bodies of other family members. This creates overwhelming dependency. There is no safe place where one can go to be alone, to sort one's own thoughts without oversight or interference. The greatest safety lies in believing what others believe, and feelings are shared by immediate osmosis. The feeling belongs to the group, not to the individual. The feeling is *towards* something; it incorporates attitudes towards objects and expectations of events. From the child's point of view,

the qualities of the object towards which one has attitudes are not sorted out from the attitudes of the group. Knowledge is collective knowledge that typifies its object. What one can imagine about the object is controlled by what one feels the group feels towards it. Internal freedom and introspection under such circumstances are inhibited.

Dionysian culture before it is conquered exists under more benign circumstances. The group is capable of feeling as a whole in a way not possible in other phases of culture, as is quite visible in celebration, in dance and music. But communal feeling is open to the larger world itself, to the universe, so individual knowledge and action in the physical world is not impeded. The hunter who joins in group celebration has unimpeded individual awareness in the forest, and unimpeded freedom of action. But when there is no place to go where one can be independent, when the outside world is totally populated by potentially or actually hostile people, and when the family, rather than providing the necessary safety and refuge in which one can reorganize oneself, confirms one's apprehensions, both individuality and freedom of perception are threatened. The result is larger areas of reliance on superstition and vague perception than unoppressed Dionysian cultures have in benign environments.

Fear and insecurity produce different degrees and types of difficulties in the calm, detachment, and objectivity needed to think clearly about different things. Adults rarely lack the ability to think clearly about some things. The issue is one of range. When deep anxieties are touched, the tendency is to retreat from perception and to divert oneself with something more secure and pleasant. When a group's social position has been in jeopardy for many generations, it has been necessary to develop cultural adjustments to this that allow the majority of the group to escape the most dreadful of imaginings. It must become acceptable to say, "I cannot imagine it," or "I cannot think about it," and to let an issue drop; otherwise one risks pressing the vulnerable to panic. Therefore some things simply are not discussed. When those issues are raised, one draws a blank; there is too much interference from anxiety related to some part of the issue.

Adult irrationality is not normally the result of *inability* to reason, but *confinement* of reasoning to issues that do not arouse anxiety. It is the result of inability to bring to consciousness some topics that would have to be included in any clear reasoning about a particular issue. The apparent irrationality of some aspects of Dalit culture is therefore the result of anxiety, and of group acquiescence in avoiding anxiety. This has two apparently contrary meanings for the preservation and growth of Dalit culture. On the one hand, it means that some features of Dalit culture are adaptations to fear that must be abandoned for it to progress. For Dalit culture to progress, the Dalit home must become at least secure enough that it becomes a source of strength for the child rather than a place where fear is confirmed; otherwise perception and individual

strength cannot grow. Avoidance of communication regarding anxious topics must be abandoned. The whole apparatus of substitution of safe subjects for frightening ones must be abandoned. On the other hand, enlargement of grasp of the actual world, confidence in ability to conceive, adapt, and manipulate ideas without interference must be encouraged. Both of these are really increases of openness and authenticity, and so represent cultural growth. But which particular events and thoughts represent real growth and which represent abandonment of Dalit culture is subject to enormous debate and misperception.

When one is committed to one's culture, one is normally committed both to the elements in it that are functions of real perception and creativity and to elements in it that represent adaptations to fear and adverse circumstance. Traditionalists do not distinguish between the two and consequently close themselves off from both growth and recognition of the outside world by allowing the adaptations to fear and adversity to foreclose the possibility of developing the creative in present circumstances less terrifying than those that made the inhibitions traditional. In their hands, cultures ossify. Those who want to assimilate themselves to the outside society give up their shared group consciousness, abandoning their real perception and creativity in adapting themselves. In their hands, cultures die of ignorance and self-rejection. The people who actually bear the culture in good faith are cultural creators. Those people tend to be viewed as non-conformists by both the traditionalists and the assimilators. The traditionalists reject them because they refuse to be bound by the rules of anxiety avoidance. The assimilators reject them because they refuse to be bound by the rules of the dominant culture. For Dalit culture to survive and grow, Dalits need to appreciate these beleaguered people. *Both* traditionalism and assimilation must be rejected.

It must be accepted that there is good reason for Dalit culture now to exist in a condition of cultural revolution. It must be nourished. Jashua's writing of *Gabbilam* and Ambedkar's leadership in conversion to Buddhism just before his death in 1956 appear to have been the first harbingers of a genuine renaissance in Dalit culture. Dalit culture is necessarily multilingual and in some ways multicultural and multi-ethnic, but it has a shared point of view and vitality. Because it is multilingual, enormous work is needed to translate it into as many Indian languages as possible. Though English is the medium most relied upon for transmission past India's language barriers, English is an impediment to reaching the great majority of Dalits, so Dalit literature should be translated into as many languages as possible; first anthologies should be translated into a dozen or more Indian languages and published locally, then works of individual authors, then individual works. Publication in local Indian language newspapers should be sought. Multi-lingual Dalit poets should take on the task of translating other Dalit poets, and Dalit

activists take responsibility for translating and assisting in the publication of as much poetry, fiction, reporting, and essays as possible in local languages. There is nothing that can create greater incentive for illiterate Dalits to learn to read than to make such material readily available. Authorship and readership are mutually dependent; good readers create good authors, and good authors create active readers. Great authors, moreover, need competition and support from other authors; the more Dalit writing exists, the more some of it will reach greatness, as some of it already has. And when that happens, its effect on the dominant culture becomes irresistible, for some people in every culture recognize and seek out candor, vitality, and perceptiveness no matter where it comes from, for it assists their own growth.

The second major issue is reliability. In all three forms of social power, for millennia Dalits have been made to experience as near to absolute dependency as is possible for enough members of a group to survive to regard the group itself as stable and continuing. Because Dalits owned no land they were always dependent on people of other castes for temporary labor. To be a Dalit was to be disposable; that is the role of temporary laborers, to be laborers towards whom employers owe no obligation. Absence of obligation to Dalits was absolute in the political and social spheres. In the economic sphere there was token obligation in the realm of traditional caste labor, but that was never enough to provide a living. If it had been, it would have made Dalits unavailable for day labor, and it was that availability that was their essential function in a rural economy, with its fluctuations of seasonal work. Dalits could not rely upon other castes even for survival, as Sudra jatis often could. Therefore the basic Dalit perception, that to them, outsiders are absolutely unreliable, was entirely reasonable.

If outsiders were completely unreliable, survival was only possible if Dalits could depend on each other. Those who had to be depended upon were those who could bring the greatest earnings when there was anything that could be earned. These were Dalit adult men. They could attempt to offer a bit of protection against condign force, but very little, for any continued conflict would be met with overwhelming force. There was no protection from humiliation and exclusion from the outside world; for that there was only mutual understanding and scant comfort and the general rule in Dalit society that humiliation and exclusion from the outside would not count in Dalit mutual assessment, and that one could only be humiliated in Dalit society for violation of rules regarded as essential to Dalit survival. In the continuous jeopardy of Dalit life individual efforts to depend on outsiders represented some risk to the community. But dependency on other Dalits was essential for survival.

This dependency, however, could not demand reliability. Reliability was not possible because Dalits were far too subject to the power of outsiders. If higher caste people made

demands on individual Dalits, it was understood by the group that the individuals were compelled to obey because, if they did not, revenge could fall not only on them but on the group as a whole. Therefore one could not demand that persons one depended upon be reliable to oneself.

Whenever any promise was made, it was made with the understanding that innumerable events could intervene to prevent fulfillment. Therefore promises could not be taken seriously. It had to be possible for loyalty and dependency to exist without fulfillment of any specific promises.

Contract is the mutual fulfillment of promises. When it is understood that promises are subject to so many unstated conditions that they are reduced to mere statements of desire, contracts come to be viewed as fundamentally incapable of fulfillment. If memorialized on paper, they still are regarded as mere formalities. The reality is that one is ruled by command, force, and contingency. Within Dalit jatis, this is understood, so it is not an insuperable obstacle to cooperation *within* the jati. Thus the import of one member of the jati saying of another, “He is our man” is that no matter what the failures in particulars, yet he can be depended upon in the long run to do what he can, and this is true of no other category of person. Along with intrajati marriage and dining, it is this freedom from assessment by particulars that makes the astonishing durability of jati that has made it able to survive from agrarian theocratic origins through feudal, Muslim, and British rule, and now urbanization and industrialization.

But *between* jatis, inability to rely on mutual fulfillment of promises create nearly insurmountable difficulties. The member of each jati knows that the member of the other has prior obligations to his jati members that may at any time intervene in the fulfillment of a promise. Traditionally, jati members’ political and legal arrangements were *all* made through jati leaders, so individuals were never even in a position to contract as individuals. Agreements were between families and between jatis, but never between individuals of different jatis. Individuality was thus recognized within the jati, but not *between* jatis. Ambedkar was right to claim that India is not a society in the Western sense, but 6,000 societies in the same place. This exclusive structure is perpetuated now in legal and political arrangements; litigants find lawyers through their jati networks, lawyers negotiate through jati networks, and political associations go through them. In the general politicization of Indian life, it is no wonder that economic relations also go through jati networks. And because jati is conceived in status terms, the terms of caste, the original conditioned power of theocratic conceptions still maintains itself through the relative ranking of these networks, which correlate with access to wealth and political power. This explains the international oddity of India, that it is capable of maintaining theocratic features even in urban and industrial life—the oddity for which Marxism has given no adequate account.

It was crucial to Marxist analysis that working class consciousness would arise because capitalism atomizes the proletariat. The theory holds that the proletariat, having no property, is entirely dependent for life on individual contractual disposal of labor power to capitalists. Because of this, each member of the proletariat realizes he or she is similarly situated. All other mutual bonds are stripped by capitalism, caste into oblivion. Hence the new bond of being similarly situated replaces all others. All workers come to recognize that they have far more in common than whatever differences they had formerly recognized. What they have in common is a shared interest: the circumstances of their lives depend wholly on the amount of surplus value the capitalist extracts from their labor. It is therefore in their interests to unite in order to gain control of surplus value.

But what is class in the first place? George Bernard Shaw thought the defining feature of the British class system was intermarriageability: an unmarried woman is available to marry men of her own class, but not of another.<sup>14</sup> This is consistent with Marx's and Engel's views. The most essential feature of jati is that one must marry within the jati. Again Ambedkar was right: the West has a division of *labor*, but India has a division of *laborers*.

The Aryans were a herding society. The Indian division of laborers embodied in jati is the result of applying a basic concept of herding societies to human society, the concept of species. The jatis are supposed to constitute a number of species; this concept probably developed from an earlier totemistic system in which groups of people were regarded as having their origins in special relationships to particular animals, as in many Native American systems one may belong to the Bear Clan, the Beaver Clan, the Eagle Clan. The basic concept is that humanity is not a single species, but a number of species. This concept produces an ambiguity between description and prescription because in animal husbandry the distinctions between species, sub-species, and varieties is not clear. A horse *cannot* have offspring by a sheep but *can* by a donkey, though the offspring will be a hybrid mule, which is sterile, and so can continue neither line. Consequently the belief that two species *are* distinct can give rise to the belief that one must act in order *to keep them* distinct. The jatis represent these supposedly separate species of humanity, and the rule is that they must be kept separate and distinct in the same way that the cow of one breed cannot be allowed to mate with the bull of another because customarily "cross-breed" offspring are valued less than purebred offspring of either breed for they are unable to continue either breed. Hence when the species concept is applied to humanity, the preoccupation with "purity of blood" arises. A background presupposition, derived from the analogies like that of horses, donkeys, and mules,

---

<sup>14</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*, (London: Constable & Co., 1928) chapter 12, "Distribution by Class."

is that if lines are not kept “pure,” eventually they may not be able to reproduce, so the reasonable belief that the future depends on fertility enforces the idea that there is a need for group purity. The foreground presupposition is that if jatis mix, the offspring will be devalued and the perpetuity of the jati destroyed. The dominant jatis fear this most because they are trying to maintain dominance on the basis of their supposed purity as well as perpetuity. To give incentive to maintaining “purity,” the jati system gives no legitimate place to children of interjati marriages.

It is important to note that though jati arose on the basis of the economic relations of a herding society preoccupied with animal husbandry, the system has a durability that has survived enormous changes in condign rule and the mode of production. Jati is *not* feudal; it simply *adapted* itself to feudalism. The reason it could do this is that the concept of human speciation has a peculiar relationship to time, and therefore to change. What one believes one knows when one knows another person is a member of one’s jati is not only that one might share ancestors, but that one’s descendants will eventually become related because it is forbidden for them to marry outside the jati. So one perceives oneself to exist within a separate group with its own fate at odds with the fates of other groups. This is the most basic element of the concept of class consciousness.

When peasants became the proletariat in the West, they could perceive themselves to be similarly situated not only because they *worked* under the same circumstances, but because they had the same *social* circumstances in that their prospects for families were similar, and the same *political* circumstances in that politics were controlled by *class*. But in India, jati controls *all three* forms of social power: though its control of economic power can become more flexible as occupations are forced to change to adapt to technological change, it can continue to filter political power, and, most important, can continue to govern marriage arrangements. Western history forms the constant context of Indian Marxist theorizing, and so determines what is seen as foreground and what as background in the conception of society. If one reverses foreground and background, however, what one perceives is that the Western proletariat seemed to Marx to be becoming, in a sense, *one large jati*. That is not happening in India *because India already has jatis*. Marx usually spoke about the “Asian mode of production,” a concept that did not distinguish between China and India. He did not focus on Asian social structures, as Weber did, because he had consigned them to the category of superstructure, which he assumed was determined by the mode of production. Marxists await the emergence of class consciousness without realizing that jati already *does* perform all the functions of class, so what they expect of class consciousness does not emerge *because* the vacuum it is supposed to fill is already occupied by jati consciousness. If the sine qua non of progress in Marxist terms is class consciousness, then

the *single* most important programmatic issues for Marxist parties should be intercaste marriage and complete independence of jati relationships in politics. Without these two steps, Indian politics will always remain jati politics because jati politics *is* the Indian equivalent of class politics.

The atomization of the proletariat depends upon confinement to commitment to contract. It is a general feature of Indian society that contracts between jatis are not taken seriously, and are often not proposed, because prior jati commitments will pull the contractors apart. It is because of this that wealth has a high correlation with jati. That is, 1500 years ago, all power was concentrated in the hands of the top three castes. In South India there has been more change than in North India because the northern empires often did not extend to all of South India and so the social structures of more highly Dravidian South India were more often able to reassert themselves against the Aryan social structure. Among the 190 jatis of Andhra Pradesh, for instance, joint economic and political power is now concentrated in just four jatis comprising 17% of the population: the Velamas (3%), the Reddys (6%), the Kamas (or Chowdarys) (6%), the Brahmans (2%). Essentially, the first three groups, in ritual terms “Shudra” jatis, long ago supplanted the Kshatriya. The Komitis (5%) are a Vysya jati with relative wealth but excluded from political power. Relative to the rest of the population, this represents a dispersion of social power from approximately 10% of the population to approximately 22%, and a shift from dominance by conditioned power organizing condign power, which in turn organized compensatory power, to a condition in which condign power and compensatory power dominate through networks of conditioned power. The significance of *caste* is reduced, but not the significance of *jati*. Under these conditions, working class consciousness does not emerge because the precondition of individual dependency on *contract* has not emerged. The status of urbanites is still defined by *village* status, and their relationships with each other depend on village origins, with which relationships are still strong.

In this general condition, Dalit jatis have a special place. For them, there has always been a higher barrier to contractual relationships with other jatis than has existed for any other jatis. Members of other jatis have never believed they could rely on Dalits. For Dalits to seek an increase in social power in conventional Indian politics is to seek no longer to be on the bottom. But to seek no longer to be on the bottom is to seek to have someone below one. *The issue then is what one's relationship to those below one will be.* When one attempts to climb over others, they will resist. *No one* wants to be in the position Dalits have been in for the same reason that Dalits never wanted to be in that position: it is unbearable to have to depend upon people one cannot rely upon. That has always been the position of Dalits. No other group will allow Dalits to rise

unless they believe they can rely upon Dalits in *exactly* the way Dalits previously could *not* rely upon their own supposed social superiors. To rise, Dalits must gain a reputation for reliability.

The way other groups have gained reputations for reliability is first by conforming to Epimethean orders, then, sometimes, by establishing Apollonian orders that generalize the principles of Epimethean command. But Dalit identity, that is, the identity of one who has been broken but now asserts the right to wholeness, is formed in defiance of the Epimethean order that has oppressed them. If this identity is to be maintained, as it must be in order not to revert to acceptance of subjugation, it must find a way to assimilate Apollonian or Promethean principles without the self-subversion of accepting Epimethean regimentation. This is a difficult feat. Intellectually, it means going from a base of fixation of belief by tenacity to one of fixation by reason or scientific method without first accepting that one's beliefs are subject to refutation by beliefs of others in the way that most people do this, by mere recognition that superior force exists. Psychologically, the old norms of Dalit life included acceptance of exclusion from competition and loss in competition and an extraordinary willingness to compromise expressed as willingness "to adjust." One could "adjust" to anything, including things that meant slow, or even relatively rapid, death. The new Dalit political identity includes competitiveness and refusal to compromise. But the distribution of available goods in the world under even the best of circumstances is such that everyone is forced to learn to at times compete, at other times compromise without loss of integrity, and at other times cooperate. That is, some goods really are limited at any particular time and place, and can only be momentarily utilized as individual possessions, so that everyone cannot have equal access to those particular things. In that case, when more people want them than their possibilities for use allows, some competition is inevitable, so one must be *able* to compete, or one is *always* the loser in those situations, the traditional role of the Dalit. One must win *sometimes*. Other goods, however, such as public goods, *must* be shared, and must be shared among competing intentions. With those, one *must* be able to compromise. The old Dalit role was to accept compromise in *everything*. But in rejecting that role, there is a tendency to accept compromise in *nothing*, to stake one's integrity on the refusal to compromise. Other goods can only exist as a function of cooperation. If one cannot cooperate in group activities, one cannot be part of the group. The old Dalit role was to cooperate within the jati, but to expect for one's views so little regard that one's cooperation would never be sought outside the jati, only one's occasional but absolute obedience. The new Dalit role requires sufficient demand for respect of one's views and interests to gain mutual recognition of one's role in cooperation, but can veer easily into the mere expectation that others must cooperate with one while one need not understand the other's views and interests and need not cooperate oneself. All

three functions, the ability to compete, the ability to compromise without loss of integrity, and the ability to cooperate, are necessary to live among others. The actual experience others have of one depend largely on how they see one modulates the three modes.

War, said Clausewitz, is the extension of “politics by other means.” It is just as true that politics is “war by other means.” Politics is group competition for control over the state’s monopoly of force, that is, the social mechanism that is capable of war and systematic oppression. Politicians are the people who control and direct that group competition. Dalits, as a group smaller than 50% of the population, can never, by following the political rules of the country, win by simple and direct competition. *All* success they are capable of gaining through politics therefore depends upon coalition formation. Coalitions can *only* be formed through compromise. But the ability of a coalition to hold together depends its members’ belief in each others’ willingness to *cooperate*. If each does not believe that the other will cooperate in any way, each will believe that the necessary compromise is not worthwhile because the joint goals that result from the compromise will be defeated by the failure to cooperate in the context of the inevitable external competition—inevitable because politics *is* competition for control of the monopoly of force. It is understandable that Dalit perception of politics tends to hold that the primary issue is compromise and refusal to compromise. But this ignores the deeper issue, that in the long run it is not compromise, but cooperation that will always be the issue of Dalits because as a group they can only succeed in coalitions.

It is true that Dalits have always been required to yield in compromise and to cooperate without reciprocation. No group has thought it incumbent on them to cooperate with Dalits. The BSP is now demonstrating that Dalit compromise and cooperation can no longer be taken for granted. This *tactic* is designed to prove that for the first time Dalit representation is *actual*, that Dalits do not need to be only servants of other jatis’ interests and agendas. It is a salient and *necessary* lesson. Without this demonstration, because Dalits cannot obtain over 25% of caste-based votes nationally, they cannot *permanently lead* a coalition (of, necessarily, over 50% of the vote) until caste-based voting among the majority breaks down, coalitions will only take Dalit positions seriously if Dalits vote as an independent bloc, and an independent bloc can only be created on the basis of the perception that Dalit representation is actual and not co-opted. So co-optation must be disproven publicly. But as a general *strategy*, hostile coalition has to fail. A coalition can be *formed* on the basis of forced compromise without cooperation. But it cannot *succeed* on that basis. The ultimate basis *has* to be cooperation. What Dalit leaders now appear not to have thought out—or to be keeping secret—is *with whom* to cooperate and *what kind* of cooperation to offer. *Some* must be offered. If politics still must be conceived in jati terms, the

obviously sensible choice of whom to offer cooperation to is Shudra jatis and Adivasis. If politics can be conceived in class terms, it is with other egalitarian parties. If the question is the concern about what cooperation must be offered, the answer must be those kinds of public goods from which deprivation causes the most shared suffering for Dalit jatis, Shudra jatis, and Adivasis listed in the beginning of Section 5: land reform, public health, microcredit, and education. If the question is of what *kind* of cooperation to offer, the question is of what the Dalit community can be mobilized practically to accomplish. In the long run, it is the last question that is of the greatest importance, for it is Dalit mobility in the broadest sense that is actually sought. The *receipt* of benefits is a *means* to that end, not the end itself. *Transferring* benefits is a temporary measure, no matter how extensive one may believe the transfer *ought* to be<sup>15</sup>; the real goal is the ability to *produce* benefits. The prospects for Dalit culture depend on that.

#### 4. The Current Political Problem of Dalit Advancement

“Caste” is an ambiguous word. “Caste” refers to a theocratic conception of an arrangement among the social realities of “jatis,” but is used in English to refer to jatis as well because the theocratic conception entered the English language while the term “jati” did not. In India, actual contests are among *jatis* and their shifting alliances, not among “castes” in the theocratic sense. The abstract theocratic description of Indian society in classical texts is that it consists of a whole called the varna system with four groups inside the whole—Brahmans, Kshatriya, Vysya, and Shudras—and two groups outside it—Dasas (Sanskrit for “slaves,” now generally understood to be the groups now calling themselves Dalits, Ambedkar’s term meaning “broken men”) and Adivasis. The maintenance of the theocratic order depended on assigning ritual positions to the actual blood-related (or potentially blood-related) organized social groups,

---

<sup>15</sup> One can rationally justify devoting *any* percentage of the governmental budget, including 100% at the highest possible level of taxation for many years, to Dalit demands for redress of grievances by choosing different time periods as representing the scope of injury and different periods as that over which compensation must be made. It is *not* that the issue cannot be rationally decided, but that any rational decision on the basis of the *merits* of the case could stop *all* other functions of government. Consequently the issue is necessarily one of political compromise, and dominant groups misrepresent this necessity as implying that demands for reparation are irrational. They are not irrational; they are merely unappeasable. The irrationality is in the dominant group behavior that has created the demands. Reparation issues have arisen among American Blacks seeking recovery for wages not paid to enslaved ancestors, among Native Americans and Native Canadians seeking recovery for broken treaties, among South African Blacks confined to Bantustans and townships, and among Jews who lost family members and family wealth in World War II. So far the most successful claims have been those of the Jews’ because the claims have been made against successor governments to discredited Nazi states and because the losses were sudden, recent, and well-documented. See the author’s “Prejudicial Exploitation: the Issue of Caste and Race,” in *Indian*

which were *jatis*. The culture was local; the *jatis*, of which there are now over 6,000, varied from locale to locale, but in each locale were assigned a ritual order governing religious duties and privileges. The ritual order *was* what would now be called the *class* system of the society so long as theocracy was maintained (see 43-48 below), for political and economic activity was governed by conditioned power. Consequently all political and economic conflict was translated into theocratic terms. Decisions of economic and political issues therefore depended on the assignment of ritual order. Individual advancement was impossible because there was no independent access to resources and hence individual efforts in nearly all directions were regarded as attempts to breach ritual order, and so were suppressed by general custom. Consequently advancement was possible only through group action. The only method of *group* advancement possible was gradual shift in the ritual designations given to *jatis*. Social conflict was translated into struggles over whether a particular *jati* had a particular ritual status because political and economic possibilities flowed from and were legitimized by ritual status. In some areas of India ritual order was more fluid than in others; in the area that is now Nepal, it was more fluid than in the rest of Northern India, and it was more fluid in the South than in the North.

The current context that defines the political formulation of Dalit problems arises from how the Constitution construed India's problems of groups in terms of the three forms of social power. The preamble of the Constitution recognizes the need for social and economic justice as well as political justice. But the Fundamental Rights accorded to groups recognize needs of "Scheduled Castes," "Scheduled Tribes," and "Other Backward Classes" as distinct from the rest of the population and having special needs requiring remediation. The basic question is, "What *are* these three groups, and how are they distinct from the rest of the population?" The three groups are *collections of jatis*. The principle of collection is *ritual order of caste*, that is the order of *one* feature of *conditioned* or *social* power in India. But the means of addressing the problems of the groups so defined is in terms of *condign* or *political* power that are related to *other* features of social power. And the problems to be addressed include ones of *compensatory* or *economic* power as well as of conditioned and condign power. Finally, the *result* of addressing these problems is presumed to be an increase in *individual capabilities* or powers as well as *group* capabilities. So *four* issues are being addressed in *one* set of terms, a set of terms, moreover, that has an arbitrary relationship to the *means* of *political* power as well as to its *ends*.

The first thing to notice is that using terms of conditioned power to define the use of political power makes uses of political power dependent on conditioned power. *Who* is going to

---

*Journal of Human Rights*, (Hyderabad: Human Rights Programme University of Hyderabad, Jan-Dec 2000), pp. 25-68.

argue for rights as a member of a Scheduled Caste? A person of a particular jati. To exert political power by that means, one must be authorized by one's jati, the State must recognize that one belongs to that jati and that that jati is a Scheduled Caste. This increases the relative power of the jati system and the relative power of the Epimethean state system at the same time. The socially defined category of jati also has an incentive to assimilate itself to the notion of "the Scheduled Castes" because that is the available route to political power, and it is through political power that all four kinds of oppression are to be addressed. Politics thus becomes defined in *social* terms rather than political, economic, or individual terms.

But the social terms being used are mere verbal substitutes for the old theocratic ritual order. The "Scheduled Castes" are the former Untouchables, the main component of the "Avarna," those "outside the Varna system," originally the Dasas. The "Scheduled Tribes" are the original Adivasis, those outside the Varna system who were never laborers. The "Other Backward Classes" are essentially the Shudras. But the political implications of the terms depends not on the social status designations, but on the numbers and resources of the people as well as their status. The Scheduled Castes are now between 15 and 19% of the population, the Scheduled Tribes 7.5%, and the Other Backward Classes, the vaguest category, somewhere in the neighborhood of 60 to 65%.<sup>16</sup> The ambiguities are caused primarily by ambiguities in the status of Christians and Muslims, who are sometimes counted as religious groups which, by state definition directed by conditioned power are held not to be members of castes, but whom various castes count as members, so the counting depends on the parameters used.<sup>17</sup> But *however* they are counted, it is clear that the groups who are supposed to receive "special assistance" are the *majority* of the population.<sup>18</sup>

Whether or not the *groups* are special in social terms, it is impossible for the "assistance" to be "special" in political terms. The Tamil Nadu legislature, following the constitutional mandate, classified two thirds of its population as SC, ST, and OBC, with the effect that SC and ST reservations were watered down to meaninglessness, only to have the Supreme Court order,

---

<sup>16</sup> See appendix for a diagram of the distribution of social power among categories of jati minorities.

<sup>17</sup> Claims that Dalits are up to 25% of the Indian population, or up to 250 million South Asians, depend on including religious minorities the Indian government refuses to recognize as Scheduled Caste on the basis of the government denial, formalized by Nehru, that caste or jati are deeper structures in Indian society than religious affiliation. Religious affiliation is a matter of *self*-identification, but jati and caste are issues of identification by *others*. The fact that one identifies *oneself* as a member of a non-Hindu religion does not control identification by others, even others of the religion one joins. Dalit converts to non-Hindu religions receive the same treatment non-converts receive.

<sup>18</sup> If one counts only self-identifying Hindus among SC's, ST's, and OBC's, the majority is at least two thirds; if one counts all impoverished religious minorities as OBC's, the figure is at least 80%, and if one includes all "Shudra" jatis, it is around 90%. The basic distortion arises from the false assumption that

with basically sound logic but no clear *constitutional* basis, that the majority of the population could not be considered a minority. The problem is that the *constitution* has illogical results because SC and ST are clearly defined in *social* terms but nobody knew whether “Other Backward Classes” referred to an *economic* group or a *social* group. On the model of traditional thinking and of the constitutional reliance on social definition in the case of SC and ST, it was *assumed* that social and economic groups were the *same*. But that was exactly the traditional order the Constitution seemed to have declared itself to be trying to eliminate: for economic, political, and social justice to be delivered, one could not presume that economic goods must be distributed on a *social* basis. The fact that they had *previously* been distributed on a social basis was supposed to be the *problem*, not the *solution*.

But distributing economic goods on an economic basis, which is the only thing that could give reality to the Constitution’s claim to be socialist, is exactly what no one would do on any scale larger than what the USA does, the country that tolerates the greatest extremes of wealth among the 36 most developed countries.<sup>19</sup> In fact, in the four public functions that count the most for egalitarian public welfare—access to productive resources (in India, land), public health measures, access to credit, and public education—India is *less* socialist than the USA. This is true even though the USA makes *no* constitutional claim to economic justice and confers *no* rights on the impoverished by virtue of impoverishment, for these are held to conflict with constitutionally guaranteed property rights, as they do. Because India does not provide those four basics, by following the patterns of current US policy while ignoring the need to provide the basic public goods, a given in developed countries, India must expect to go the way of Brazil, Nicaragua, Honduras, Swaziland, South Africa, and Bolivia, the countries with the greatest differences in wealth on earth.<sup>20</sup> And India is in fact deteriorating in that direction extremely rapidly, the difference between the richest and the poorest 20% having grown from 4.2 times to 4.6 to 5.1 to 5.7 in the last four recorded years.<sup>21</sup> The differential of compensatory or economic power is growing so rapidly that the actual condition of Dalits depends far more on their being mainly in the bottom half of the economy than it does on the social discrimination exerted against them. The Constitution, by framing political action in social terms, focuses action on social categories,

---

economic, political, and social oppression can be measured by caste status and that the upper castes can tacitly be treated as the majority rather than the elite privileged minority they are.

<sup>19</sup> UNDP, World Development Report 2001, (Delhi: Oxford, 2001), Table 12, “Inequality in Income or Consumption,” p. 182.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>21</sup> UNDP World Development Reports from 1996 to 2001. The figures were initially reported for two years prior to the reports, but the 2001 report gives only figures for 1997, so the figures are now 5 years out of date. As attention to the figures increases and criticism mounts, reporting tends to become slow and reluctant.

diverting attention from the economic ones in which Dalits, Adivasis, and most Shudras have a great deal in common.

Because economic change is international, moreover, actual changes in the condition of Dalits depend far more on distant actions than on local ones. But the actual social groupings that make one qualify for SC status are local. SC's, ST's, and OBC's are entirely artificial categories made for government convenience. The social reality is the jati. The jatis collected in the three governmental categories recognized themselves as separate groups. Political power, using the renamed categories of ancient theocratic power, threw their interests together in a new way. Social reality is now trying to conform to the political mandate of the terms. So the multitude of jatis are trying to learn to think of themselves as SC's, ST's, OBC's. But in doing so, they are modelling themselves on the previous ritual hierarchy of conditioned power. Instead of priests being in control of the assignment of ritual order to jatis, now the government has taken over that role.

Until recently, benefits have been allotted solely by SC, ST, or OBC status according to the Constitution, not by jati. This means that one jati can monopolize benefits that are slated to go to a category as a whole. In Andhra Pradesh, for instance, SC reservations were monopolized by the Malas, who constitute roughly 40% of the Andhra population, leaving little for the Madigas, who constitute roughly 60% of it. The reason for this, of course, was that the Mala and the Madiga had similar *ritual* status, but not similar political or economic status, and not actually similar degrees of conditioned power other than ritual status. This was because their traditional occupational roles differed, the Madigas traditionally being leather workers, the Mala the lowest tier of municipal workers, responsible for such activities as opening irrigation ditches and delivering messages. Because of the differential skills that had to be reinforced for the differential roles required of them, the Malas and Madigas were compelled to develop different ways of functioning socially, the Malas being in constant contact with other castes while the Madiga were left in social isolation. This difference is reflected in typical mutual perception. Malas became accustomed to *regarding* Madigas as naïve, foolish, and provincial, Madigas to *regarding* Malas as wily, cunning, and expert in the usages of social power, and each side felt this traditional regard from the other unfair. But the attributed character traits reflected the *actual* differences in the circumstances on which their lives *depended*. Malas had social and political connections the Madiga lacked, and, consequently, as urbanization increased, economic opportunities the Madiga lacked. The legal and political assumption, derived from ritual order, ritual social status was the relevant marker of affliction, therefore benefited the Malas because they were *less* afflicted than the Madiga. This *increased* preexisting social, political, and economic differences between the

Mala and the Madiga. This in turn increased jati conflict because of the competition for new benefits. The result was that the reservation system, which was supposed to *alleviate* caste problems, by ignoring the difference between jati and caste and the difference between the forms of social power, actually initially *increased* caste conflict in a characteristically defined way. It focused the tensions at the *bottom* of the system rather than between the bottom and the top. The Malas and the Madiga became sharply divided, the Malas believing the reservation system was working very well, the Madiga believing the problems they experienced were due to the greed of the Malas rather than to the design of the system that makes all benefits depend on *one* feature of conditioned power alone. The Madigas first tried appealing to the Malas, then to the government for more reservations. The Malas had done nothing particularly *illegal* in monopolizing the reservations; they had merely taken advantage of opportunities *practically* more available to them, because of their higher levels of actual social power, than to the Madiga, so the Mala saw no injustice and no reason to concede anything. The government could claim it had given the required numbers of reservations, so *it* saw no unjust, illegal, or blameworthy *intentions* in what it had done: from the government's point of view, Malas simply made more correct applications than Madigas did because Malas happened to be better informed of the possibilities. But the Madigas *were* the most destitute jati in Andhra Pradesh, and they *were* receiving no assistance: the *result* was inequitable. Finally the Madiga Dondora Movement demanded assigning reservations proportionate to jati population. After mustering a gigantic demonstration, a show of social power with political implications, they received some political support at the state level. Then on general principles of equity, they succeeded in the Supreme Court, and the government of Andhra Pradesh implemented the splitting of the reservations. In this, the Dondora Movement was successful local activism with equitable results. Now that the Dondora Movement is succeeding, jati conflict caused by the issue *might* decline if both sides attribute the sequence to have been caused simply by changed government behavior rather than to aggression by the other jati. But such a result depends upon the ability and willingness to abstract the meaning of the sequence from the tensions of actual events.

The basic issue is that the reservation system itself is a counter-productive method of distributing economic, social, and political benefits because it is based on ritual designations that must be fought over in the same way they used to be, but before a different audience, the government having replaced the priests on terms set by the priests. Except now the political and economic stakes, relatively small in a traditional theocratic society with low surplus, are considerably raised. This does not decrease caste conflict, but *increases* it. It is one force that tends to make modern India *more* caste-bound, not less. Because it increases competitive activity

in politics on a caste basis, it in turn raises the stakes in government, making people more dependent on government decisions, thereby increasing the power of government officials and increasing the number of reasons for wanting to seize governmental power. The more the government distributes economic and political benefits on a caste basis, the more the forces mobilized around and in the government have a caste basis. The result is that politics as a whole becomes reduced to caste politics. The goods of social power, money, power, and respect, all become goods purveyed by caste through politicized channels.

There are two loci of partial resistance to this, the Marxist parties and the Bahujan Samaj Party. “Partial” because, though it is the *concept* of the parties is to resist it, group perception of the parties is that they too are caste-bound. Dalits draw away from the Marxist parties because the leaders are upper caste landlords who perceive them as ignorant but ambitious lower caste laborers. The official Marxist position is that caste will disappear with urbanization and industrialization because it is a feudal feature, and so can safely be ignored, the only significant issue being class. But this is a profound misunderstanding and misrepresentation of social power and history. Caste is not merely feudal, it is a theocratic feature that has survived through feudal times and is now surviving industrialization. It is not, moreover, *opposed* to class. Instead, it *is* the traditional class structure itself, the tacit class structure of the theocratic order. In a theocratic society, conditioned power in the form of ritual order is used to order political and economic activity. In such an order, perception of economic activity is systematically suppressed because one acts on the basis of religious duties without any notion of *exchange*, and so no notion of rights corresponding to duties. Actions are supposed to be mandated by deities, not as responses to other human actions. With the Islamic invasions, the political and military component of Hindu society was cut down and replaced by Islamic condign authority, but the structure of conditioned power was allowed to remain. Because Hindus felt the Muslims were alien, the caste structure was reinforced, because it was the sole source of cultural identity and resistance to Muslim rule. Though labor in Indian society had a feudal structure, its actual organization at the local level remained theocratic. So the theocratic feature of caste survived feudalism intact. Then when the British came, they adopted tactics designed to draw the maximum wealth from the country. To perform this, they increased the level of condign power, keeping that firmly under their control, in order to exercise maximum compensatory power. In doing this, they enlisted the aid of the upper castes, bidding them to exert conditioned power in concert with them to extract wealth and maintain order while doing so. Ideologically, the British seduced the upper castes with the myth of Aryan superiority. The British gave their assent to the idea that the British and the upper castes were similar in that they were both outsiders in a land of their supposed inferiors. The British

appealed to traditional caste distinctions to solicit upper caste support in dominating the country. This increased the distance between the upper castes and the Shudras, the Untouchables, the Adivasis, and non-Hindus *as a whole*. The upper castes still believed there was a basic distinction between the Shudras and the others, the Shudras being inside the Varna system, the others outside it, but for the British they had to extract enormous wealth from the Shudras, and so had to become deaf to their suffering. In ritual terms, this increased the distance between the “once-born” Shudras and the “twice-born” upper castes. The consequence was that the caste system was *again* reinforced, this time by making the most basic distinction become that between the roughly 10% of the population who were upper caste and the 90% who were not. Because the leadership of the country, with almost the sole exception of Ambedkar (and, initially, of Jinnah), were drawn from that 10%, in the negotiations with the British that led to Independence and the Constitution, they considered themselves as the people and viewed 90% of the country as an assortment of minorities. But the actual majority of the country were the “Shudras,” the “Other Backward Classes,” whom the Constitution caste as a *minority*. So Indian Independence, like American independence, was an elite arrangement, but while the American elite was an *economic* elite, the Indian elite conceived of itself as a *social* elite. Its most basic distinction was that it was “twice-born.”

Most Indian Marxist leaders misrepresent these facts. They hold that qualification for leadership depends on knowledge and commitment, a plausible belief. But the relevant knowledge depends on education, access to information, and ability to travel; and commitment to political work depends on freedom from having to earn a living by labor. All four are the prerogatives of the upper castes. Marxists down-play the implications this by arguing that caste is a rapidly withering feudal feature of society. But income in India is fairly sharply divided on caste lines even in cities: the upper caste 10% cluster in the top 20% of income brackets, very few below that, and dominate the top decile of income also. Their company in the top 20% is almost entirely the top range of Shudras, a small minority of Muslims, a scatter of Jains, Parsis, and Sikhs, and a few other relatively small groups. Dalits and Adivasis are almost entirely lacking, and most Shudra groups are. In different states, different Shudra groups gained power by different routes. In Andhra Pradesh the Chowdarys and Reddys gained power by occupying Kshatriya niches vacated under Muslim and British rule, and then again under Indira Gandhi’s land reforms. Virtually all capitalization has occurred on the basis of prior feudal land ownership, so industrialization, though it shifts the source of income from land ownership to industrial capital and then patent ownership, *does not change the owners*. Caste is essentially restraint on marriage, and is maintained by restraint on marriage. Because capitalization begins with funds from land

ownership, so long as arranged caste marriage is maintained, increase in wealth *increases* caste distance rather than decreasing it, for now it is augmented by differential access to a larger ratio of surplus value. Surplus value in agriculture is low, but in industry it rises, and escalates rapidly in international trade taking advantage of currency exchange rates, and hi-technology production taking advantage of exclusive intellectual property rights. So the crucial issue in the elimination of caste is not industrialization, but the propagation of inter-caste marriage, particularly marriage between the twice-born and the once-born.

Marxist insistence that caste is obsolete is belied by their own reliance on caste-based relationships and social goods. Moreover, the assumption that *because* caste is obsolete, it is *therefore* disappearing, is a vast underestimate of family and social structure in human life, and of the capacity of obsolete expectations to be passed down from generation to generation, particularly when embodied in the custom of parent-arranged caste marriage. Marxist expectation that peasants will become proletariat and will then organize themselves as a result of growing class consciousness supposedly not available to peasantry may also overestimate the capacity of India to industrialize under conditions of international exploitation. The result of these Marxist beliefs, with the partial exception of some Maoists, is that Marxism as a whole does not accept responsibility for dealing with Indian social reality as it is. To the lower castes, the appropriate question is, “Why should we believe you are serious about eliminating the emergent form of class when you are not serious about eliminating the traditional form of class, but in fact depend on it and continuously exert it?”

But the conventional Indian Marxist position is not simply a matter of conscious hypocrisy. The crucial fact is that there is no genuine international worker’s movement *capable* of drawing support from both the developed and the developing world—because objective conditions are so different that they cannot be subjectively grasped without extended residence in different countries. The highest Gini coefficients in any country are in the neighborhood of 0.6, but the Gini coefficient of the nations of the world, considered as wholes, is about 0.82, and of the actual people of the world must be above 0.9. That means that there is no place on earth where the total actual spread of wealth can be grasped. The actual extremes are virtually unimaginable: Bill Gates’ income, for instance, is 1.47 *billion* times the income of the poorest national decile of income, the poorest income decile of Swaziland. This, of course, is *visible* neither in the USA nor Swaziland. It can only be grasped conceptually, and it corresponds to *no* actual experience, and only to experience no one is able to acquire, for Bill Gates will not live for a year digging roots in Swaziland to gain the relevant experience of poverty, nor will he divorce Melinda Gates, marry an impoverished Swazi woman, and allow her to take over Microsoft so that *she* could gain the

relevant experience of manipulating wealth. Consequently in both developed and developing countries, the relevant concepts are wholly abstract. It is no wonder, therefore, either that Western Marxists should fail to understand the experience of India, nor that Indian Marxists who spend time in Europe should come back believing they understand reality better than people who have never left India, for they have in fact experienced a larger range of reality. This fact, however, leads many India Marxists to believe that Western theorizing is better than Indian theorizing, and should be more applicable to reality than home-grown ideas. Thus an element of realism and an element of cultural imperialism become irretrievably mixed.

Conventional Indian Marxist confusion because of this is therefore a largely *unconscious* form of hypocrisy set by the terms of *international* Marxism, which carries the theoretical assumption that world revolution depends upon the existence of a single working class that must inevitably emerge and unite. The singleness of the working class is supposed to depend on two conditions, the singleness of objective conditions and an emergent singleness of consciousness, which were to merge at the time that capital ceased being competitive and became merged in a progressively smaller circle of elite ownership. What the theory overlooked was that capital could merge *before* uniform objective conditions were produced—and even without producing them, which is a major purpose of the Bretton Woods Institutions. This was true because currency exchange rates could be manipulated, pitting labor in poor countries against labor in rich countries. This prevents the emergence of objectively similar working conditions. The result is that by the *standards* of poor countries, there *is* no proletariat in rich countries. Traditional pure Marxists in rich countries, however, believe revolution is to emerge from the industrial proletariat, so it is their job to work with the industrial proletariat of rich countries. But that proletariat is a minority, in the US, of only 17% of the workforce working at technological levels, and the majority is better paid than the majority of retail sales workers, who are 51% of the workforce in the US. To appeal to the industrial workforce of developed countries, Marxists are working with a minority of the population and by far from the poorest economic minority, who are marginalized. Thus by *international* standards, Western Marxism is now a middle class movement. Its social and intellectual norms arise from the academic knowledge of history necessary to keep the movement alive in such a context. When Indian Marxists seek education from Western Marxists, they are communicating with middle class intellectuals involved in the social issues of countries that have no proletariat exposed to the conditions of either the Indian proletariat or peasantry. The Indian Marxists return to India convinced that Indian workers are so hopelessly ignorant that their views need not be considered, and that they must be led to the historical knowledge Marxists possess. The result is condescension and manipulation. To Indian

laborers, and particularly to Dalits, the bulk of Indian Marxists so trained and led thus appear to have no essential difference from the leaders of other parties; such Indian Marxists appear to be almost as traditional as traditional Indian leaders, but merely to have a different intellectual tradition. So Marxism becomes just another school of traditional thought.

Because of this, in India there are three basic attempts to modernize and adapt Marxism to Indian reality. The first is a creative effort to purify Marx of later accretions and to develop Marx's original thinking from the points where he had to leave off because he was essentially working alone—Engel's assistance being more financial than intellectual until Marx's decline—and because there was far too much ground for any individual to cover, and circumstances were changing too fast to keep track of them all. This effort takes a great deal of intellectual energy and resources. People who attempt it are forced to become academics. However open-minded, generous, and egalitarian they are, they can only work through an intellectual elite, which inevitably has elements of social—and even political and economic—elitism because the necessary intellectual resources cannot be gathered without some wealth, some leisure, and some access to institutions. Despite its creativity, authoritarianism affects this effort because, in order for the effort to be communicated and to progress in group activity, respect must be demanded for superior learning. Though the conversation itself is generally intelligent and well-informed, if the authority of the learned is not accepted, the conversation can't continue. Authority of learning is easily confused with authority of doctrine because the distinguishing feature of the learning is not *how much* has been learned, but *what* has been learned.

The second is usually called Marxist-Leninism, but might better be called Engels-Leninism, for it assumes Engels' interpretation of Marx. The Leninism also often fades into Stalinism. The school is dominated by Russian interpretation of Marxism. It insists on doctrinal authoritarian conformity because the history of Russian Marxism is the history of Marxism in power, Marxism in the act of converting ideology into policy and judging the results against ideology. In that tradition, ideology became authoritarian because of power struggles over policy, the resulting actions, and their results. Marxist-Leninism therefore focuses on internal enemies as well as external enemies. To Leninists closer to Stalin, Trotsky is an internal enemy. To Leninists closer to Trotsky, Leninists have to be purified of Stalin. But there is always the threat of internal enemies who will mislead the people onto the wrong path. Thus, though Marxist-Leninism began as an effort to adapt Marxism to the realities of imperialism and the conditions of poorer countries, it lacks the flexibility to adapt itself to ongoing changes in the world because it will not listen to insight, to dissidents, or to outsiders.

The third major effort is Maoism. Maoism focuses on the peasantry, and so addresses the conditions of Dalits much more than the previous two. But Chinese society is quite different from Indian society. It lacks caste. Peasant organization is largely on the basis of *conditioned* power. Caste organization made conditioned power precede and dominate compensatory and condign power. Chinese society always *encouraged* commonality of belief and social practice. But Indian society *discouraged* commonality of belief and *punished* commonality of social practice. For a Marxist doctrine based on the conditioned power of the peasantry, the *most* important issue to be addressed in Indian society is caste. Yet the leaders of the Maoists too tend to be upper caste.

The net result is that Dalits feel themselves shut out from Marxist parties. The knowledge of the world that political leadership can access is certainly a real issue. Dalits on the whole, because of their oppression, do have one of the lowest *average* levels of literacy in India. But there is no reason to suppose that a low *average* level of *literacy* implies either a low average level of *intelligence* or absence of *leadership ability*, because leaders, by definition, are a small minority of a group. If Indian Marxists believed that their project depended on conditioned power, and believed that low average levels of literacy were the actual bar to spreading the leadership of Marxist parties among different castes, the *first* priority of Marxist parties would be universal literacy. Yet *only* in Kerala has universal literacy been a primary issue—and the result of making universal literacy a primary issue has had conspicuous success there. But Kerala has only 2.7% of the Indian population. Even witnessing this success has not much changed the policies of Marxism as a whole in India. So the fact that most of the leadership of Indian Marxist parties is drawn from the upper castes, the regionally dominant “Shudra” castes, and other regionally dominant groups cannot be explained by necessity. It can only be explained by failure to adopt the policies successful in Kerala and by continuing reliance on privileges of caste which, as discussed on pages 28-31 above, are class privileges in verbal disguise.

The Dalit problem with most Indian Marxism, therefore, is that it usurps leadership. This was the same problem the Dalits had with Gandhi and the Congress. Gandhi represented himself to the world as the champion of the Harijans, but he would never give Ambedkar or any other Dalit a place in his organization. Because of this, the rest of the world barely knew that Ambedkar existed. To Gandhi, the Dalits were to be led, not to be allowed to lead themselves. Most Dalits, of course, feel that if they must be led, they would rather be led into some form of socialism than to be led into the fold of Hinduism that had for millenia denigrated and excluded them.

But why should leading and being led be a Marxist principle in the first place? Intellectually, the idea derives from the assumption that economic power is the basis of

everything else, so those who understand economic power must lead those who don't, first to seize political power, then to seize and transform economic power. Yet this implies that the real issue is how much energy is invested in each form of social power. If it is possible to use conditioned power to arouse the desire to seize political power, and to do so successfully, then it must be possible to invest the necessary energy in conditioned power to do this. If it is possible to transform economic power through conditioned power and the condign power of politics, it must be possible to muster sufficient energy in the form of social and political power to do that. Marxist praxis therefore implies that not all human energy is invested in economic structure, and that this is the essential fact of human social dynamism.

Consequently Dalits are correct in perceiving that uses of conditioned power are highly significant in politics and cannot be overlooked in political theory and practice. So the perception that they are denigrated and excluded in Marxist parties has real political and theoretical import. When they therefore search for an alternative form of political action, it is not mere separatism. Their need for genuine political participation rather than mere followership, certainly legitimate and necessary in a Rawlsian sense, is also a necessary reaction to a genuine failure of Marxist doctrine and practice in India. It is the Indian Marxists who have been wrong in suppressing Dalit participation and leadership, for the Dalits are in fact an essential part of what Marx originally meant by the proletariat. Indian Marxists have been failing to lead large portions of the *actual* working classes of India, and this is primarily because, though some have various ties to the laboring classes, so much of the leadership actually *belongs* to the elites of agricultural land owners and the professional and academic segment of the middle class, not to the laboring classes, that, at least outside Kerala, they haven't understood India's social and economic structure and problems uniquely enough to adapt Marxist theory and practice to India in ways as appropriate as Lenin found for the USSR and Mao for China.

In India, of all influential Marxists of the last century, Nambudripad probably had the most accurate understanding of Indian society, and the relative success of Marxism in Kerala probably reflects this. But even in Kerala, where land reform was *most* successful, Dalits were still left out. Ambedkar does not merely appeal to Dalits because he was a Dalit, but because his social, political, and legal understanding of India was in fact more accurate, particularly in regard to Dalit problems, than Marxist understandings. Ambedkar's weak point was economics. His knowledge of economics, though extensive, was essentially an accountant's; he lacked a good theory of economic dynamism and lacked good designs for elimination of poverty—a goal that seemed so far away to nearly all Indians during Ambedkar's lifetime that Ambedkar too regarded it as part of a vague future that did not yet need to be filled in. There still seems to be no figure to

fill the gap between Namboodripad and Ambedkar. Since the *most* appropriate Indian Marxist intellectual framework Dalits could find was Namboodripad, the others tending to regard them in the contemptuous way that Marx himself regarded the “lumpenproletariat,” it is no wonder that so many Dalits have so whole-heartedly chosen Ambedkar. Yet the choice leaves Dalit *economic* thinking in limbo.

Because the peculiar situation of Dalits has always been absolute exclusion, the sine qua non of Dalit reform and revolution is political *participation*, not just followership. Therefore Dalits have focused much energy in the Bahujan Samaj Party, which recognizes the legitimacy of that need. Ambedkar’s tradition focused all energy into politics: that was to be the way around social powerlessness, conceived as caste *discrimination*. But this overlooked the *economic* function of the discrimination, which was to provide a pool of manipulable temporary labor, the default setting for the labor of all castes in agricultural India whenever the traditional caste occupation was not sufficient. For Dalits had never been confined to caste professions; their actual condition was that they pursued the caste profession when agricultural day labor was not available, then performed agricultural labor, then reverted to the profession when day labor was not available but means and market for the profession were. Caste ideology obscured this fact, though it is quite obvious in all the statistics available. So caste discrimination served the purpose of allowing the alternation of exploitation and marginalization. It is tempting to combine the ideas of discrimination and exploitation by coining a phrase like “exploitative prejudice,” but that is inappropriate because the prejudice is not the substantive, but the *means* to the end of exploitation, and so should be the *adjective*. So “prejudicial exploitation” is far better. But that too should be understood to be a shorthand for something more complex, which is “prejudicial alternation of exploitation, marginalization, and specialized lowly occupations, together functioning to preserve the possibility of exploiting Shudra jatis.” Though the poverty of Dalits is continually decried, this actual economic *condition* of Dalits has been addressed by *no one* in Indian politics—*neither* the Marxists *nor* Ambedkar—yet it is heart of the problem. For poverty itself, devastating as it is, is not the crucial issue for social change: even in Kerala, the position of Dalits changed the least because land reform did not extend to them, thus keeping them in their alternating condition. The issue is the cause of the relative *permanence* of Dalit poverty. And that can only be explained by the *role* that using Dalits as temporary labor serves in the rest of the economy. It is because of that role that social prejudice against Dalits has always been so high. The customary *justifications* of the prejudice are attempts to make the prejudice appear to have rested on some *other* grounds. Dalits have been pariahs because the economic system’s requirement for scab labor and marginalization mandated that *somebody* had to be given the

pariah role and its accoutrements to stabilize the system. The peculiar *permanence* of the Dalit role is a reflection of its alternating phases in exploitation, marginalization, and specialized occupation, which could then be blamed on the specialized occupations rather than on the alternation of exploitation and marginalization. Indian society will not change until the complex Dalit *role* changes, nor will Dalit poverty be eliminated so long as the powerful require keeping them available for day labor.

There is some hope, however, that the Dalit role will be addressed, if not by Indian Marxists—who could raise the issue at any time—then by the Bahujan Samaj Party or any of a number of Dalit groups in loose association with it. The BSP is the primary Dalit alternative to Marxism in their effort to resist caste-based dominion. The difficulties of the BSP are quite different from those of Marxism. Whereas the Marxist failure to gain the full cooperation of the lower castes is due to *internal* perception that Marxist parties are caste-bound and *upper* caste, the BSP's problem is that the *external* perception is that the party is *exclusively lower* caste. The BSP argues for a Rainbow Coalition, as Jesse Jackson did in the US in the 1980's; it declares that the "minorities," together, are the vast majority. This is true. But it has exactly the problem Jesse Jackson had: Whites looked at him and said, "That's a Black man saying he represents me." Dalits and US Blacks have approximately the same potential political strength, about 15% of the vote. Because neither can exceed that potential political strength, all benefits depend on coalition politics. But the possibility of leading a coalition depends on perception of intentions toward the majority. The leaders of the BSP, Kanshi Ram, and now Mayawathi, are conspicuously and assertively Dalit. Their policy is to form coalitions to seize power from the upper castes so that they can for the first time represent the country as a whole. The question is always with whom they form coalitions. They have repeatedly formed coalitions with the most conspicuously upper caste party, the BJP. Upper caste political power is not polarized in one party; if it were, the upper castes being only 10% of the population, it would be outvoted easily. Instead, upper caste political power is distributed among the leadership of virtually all of the parties except the BSP; the government is always formed by a coalition in which, in practice, the upper castes dominate, but now with increasing concessions to slowly accumulating upper class Shudra power. Everyone knows this. Yet the BJP appears as the stronghold of conservatism and the BSP appears as the leadership of the lower castes. What no one knows is what the alliance between the BJP and the BSP signifies. They are sworn enemies using each other. At times the BJP seems to be getting more use from the BSP than the reverse, at other times the opposite. Both meanwhile claim to be the proper leadership of the whole of India. To many observers this appears as power politics of the most cynical sort. Yet on the BSP side, it is an open cynicism: Kanchi Ram and Mayawathi

claim no respect or affection for the BJP, which is quite unusual in such power games. Mayawathi, whenever she gains the Chief Ministership of Uttar Pradesh, uses all available methods to wrench state power from upper caste hands to benefit the lower castes, to the fury of the BJP; and it is equally unusual to infuriate the enemy one makes use of. Only the *openness* of the cynicism is new in India, as is the persistent initiative of the actions. But no one knows what Kanchi Ram or Mayawathi would do if they believed they had accomplished the initial project of relieving the oppression of Dalits. The likelihood that the leaders of any other party would form a coalition with them that could gain power in the Center would depend on the other leaders' calculations of the likelihood that voters would take the claim in the party platform, that it is the party of the whole, seriously. This, in turn, depends on whether the "Shudras" and other groups can identify with Dalits.

All non-upper caste groups, but Shudras, Dalits, and Adivasis in particular, have enormous reasons to identify with each other if they regard their most serious problems as economic and political rather than social. The *most* serious problems of Dalits are not *unique* to Dalits, but are largely *shared* with Shudras and Adivasis, though somewhat more intense on the *whole* in different ways for Dalits and Adivasis than for a plurality of Shudras. The first issue to be acknowledged, however, is the political effect of the fact that Shudras, like Dalits and Adivasis, are *not* an organized self-recognizing group.

The group existence of "Shudras" is a myth convenient for the upper castes. Though extraordinarily complex in theological and *social* terms, what the theocratic interpretation of caste always meant *in political and economic terms* was fairly straight-forward. There are three forms of social power: compensatory (economic), condign (political), and conditioned (social). The classical description of the Varna system states that the Vysya are the merchants, the Kshatriya are the warriors, and the Brahmins are the priests. What that meant was the social power was divided among those three castes, economic exchange power being concentrated in the Vysya, the power of threat and force in the Kshatriya, and the social control of religion and traditional knowledge in the Brahmins. Those three castes normally *averaged* about 10% of the overall population, though varying widely from locale to locale. Since those three castes had among themselves all forms of social power, everyone else was rendered powerless, having neither money nor force nor prestige. "Everyone else" *included* in the Varna System were designated as "Shudra." In theocratic practice, a "Shudra" was a socially powerless person whom any of the top three castes could command. Hence the roles assigned the Shudras had the combined meaning of "servant" and "farmer" because if an upper caste person desired personal service, a Shudra was obligated to provide it but, if not, to revert to farming. The most important distinction in the

Varna System was therefore between having some power over other members of it and having none. The qualification for having any of the three forms of power was being “twice-born,” that is, having training from a Brahmin guru who indoctrinated one in scripture. The ceremony that signified completion of that childhood training was the Upanayana. In the Upanayana, the bestowal of the sacred thread gave one the right to own land. The fact that there could be no land ownership without the Upanayana meant there could be no land ownership by any woman or Shudra, let alone a Dalit or Adivasi. With land ownership went the ability to control access to productive resources. Hence India, in economic terms, was a two-class system. Those who could receive the Upanayana were the leisured upper class because they controlled all access to productive resources. All the rest were the laboring class. So in the theocratic framework, not only was caste a class system, it was the most rigid class system ever conceived.

Under the impact of Islamic condign power and the shifting contingencies of Hindu empires and states, the theocratic Varna System accommodated itself in various ways to shifts in the forms of social power. The power of the Kshatriya was vulnerable because Islamic rulership had to substitute its own condign power for Kshatriya condign power. The power of the Vysya was vulnerable to competition with non-Hindu merchants. As a result, in many places the Kshatriya were supplanted from their roles by “Shudra” jatis. In some areas the Vysya disappeared entirely. The relative power of Kshatriya and Brahmins varied from place to place, as did their absolute power. All of these changes occurred under basically feudal circumstances. But that does not imply that “caste” itself is a feudal conception. It is more accurate to think it a theocratic conception that survived feudal times because Islamic and British rule did not require conversion and so allowed the *conditioned* power of Hinduism to stay relatively intact, relating condign and compensatory power to it in different ways as an *organizing principle* for the *local* flow of condign and compensatory power. Thus theocratic conceptions survived, as they are now surviving industrialization and urbanization, carried by the rule of arranged intrajati marriages.

Marx and Engels, writing at a time when the thought shocked the middle class, were keenly aware of the economic function of marriage, but comparison of Indian Marxists’ thought on caste with the advertisements for spouses in any Indian newspaper would make one conclude that the Indian population is more aware of the economics of marriage than Indian Marxists are. India in fact has two labor markets, not one. The second labor market is for unremunerated labor, and carries just as much energy as the first. In analyzing labor under capitalism, Marx conceived of labor as only remunerated labor and relegated unremunerated labor to the category of “extended social reproduction.” In doing so, however, he underestimated human energy in that system, commitment to it, and investment in it.

Each jati has its own marriage market. Marriage is a contract for the unremunerated labor of the wife as an employee of the husband's family. Like the other employment market, it is heavily weighted in favor of the employer. Traditionally the wife's family has to give dowry to add to the fixed capital of the husband's family. The tacit assumption of the system is that the wife will be supported at the level of the husband's family. Marriage advertisements give information on wealth, income, education, and occupation of the prospective bride to indicate the level at which they expect her to be supported, and on the prospective groom to give information upon which he can be expected to support his wife if he leaves his parents' home. This is the equivalent of exchange of basic information on the prospective employer and employee. When an intrajati match of economic levels is found, an interview can be arranged and negotiations can begin.

Each man has a dual status. He may be an employee on the labor market, but he is an employer on the unremunerated labor market. Women may have dual status also, but their primary status is unremunerated employee, and their status in the remunerated labor marketplace is secondary, often temporary, and extremely unlikely ever to be as employer. Jati persists even in industry not only because most firms are closely held, and hence are inherited through marriage, but also because each man, employer or employee, has a prior commitment to his jati status, in which he functions as employer entitled to the services of his wife. His entitlements are enforced through the entire social system, so most men would rather lose employment than their jati status. If Marxism hopes to succeed, it must therefore be persistent in its support of feminist principles.

The peculiar *persistence* of caste is that, though designed on the theocratic conception of speciation derived from animal husbandry, the social realities of jatis, relying on priority of commitment that has an economic basis not only in traditional occupation but, more importantly, in the receipt of unremunerated labor in marriage, can adapt themselves to changing circumstances solely through persisting in required marriage arrangements. Those arrangements which can be quite independent of circumstances, theocratic, feudal, capitalist, or socialist, rural or urban. Ambedkar's perception of this was by far more accurate than Marxist perception modeled on Western society. Caste discrimination and social control, in turn, is built on the realities of jati contention created by complex patterns of all three forms of social power.

Before the Islamic invasions, effective political power, concentrated in the Kshatriya, consisted of negotiations among the males of the three upper castes; everyone else was excluded because they lacked the entry requirement of the Upanayana. Political power was exercised under religious auspices. It was conceived in theocratic terms and stated in them, the propagandists for the system being the Brahmins. It was the Brahmins' role to maintain the framework of this

agrarian class system in the terms of conditioned power. It was the Vysya's role to exercise the exchange functions that integrated one community with another. It was the Kshatriya's role to maintain order by force and threat of force—to evict tenants, to punish, to defend borders, to rule directly and indirectly over laborers. Among the three ruling castes, which constituted the ruling class, there had to be consensus. Consensus over ideology and policy was called religious doctrine, and was achieved through the Brahmins; consensus over particular actions was achieved by the Kshatriya. The negotiations involved in reaching consensus were totally sealed from the outside.

Because caste was in fact a rigid class system, it could not be contemplated and presented nakedly as pure and simple exploitation and marginalization, threat of violence and production of powerlessness, extraction of attention and cultural imposition. It was the work of the Apollonian phase of culture to mystify its character to make it acceptable. This was not for the most part done *intentionally*; children trained under Epimethean-Apollonian order genuinely believe it quite necessary, proper, and virtuous to continue and implement the order in their own behavior as they grow and attain power themselves. The primary method by which this was done was to divide laborers against each other. To gain the allegiance of the Shudras the upper three castes insisted the Shudras were also Hindu—though they were not allowed religious knowledge—and so had something spiritual to lose if they lost caste. What they had to lose in practical terms, of course, was essentially the “privilege” of being tenant farmers, for to be outside the varna system was to be either a Dalit or an Adivasi. That is, to be a Shudra was primarily simply to be a laborer who was routinely exploited. Shudras could be exploited because the option of marginalizing them, of totally excluding them from access to productive property, was ever ready. Whenever they failed to accept some degree of exploitation, they could be cast out to make their way among the Dalits and Adivasis. Or the Dalits could be temporarily moved in to take their places. The basic role of the Dalits was temporary labor; they were used whenever there was too much work for the Shudras, or when the Shudras were uncooperative. Whenever that labor was completed, the Dalits were moved out again and relegated to their former peripheral roles as craftspeople, scavengers, cleaners, and so on, and the obligations to them were minimal or entirely absent. So the operative difference between Shudras and Dalits was that Shudras were persons to whom an upper caste person could be obligated in some way while Dalits were persons who had no rights any higher caste person was obligated to respect. Consequently Dalits were essentially scab labor, temporary replacement parts in the agricultural human machinery. Because the Dalits were scab labor, the Shudras hated them; the presence of Dalits made it impossible for Shudras ever to organize effectively.

To vent their frustration and be allowed to feel superior, the Shudras were given tacit rights over Dalits. The Hindu institution of the supposed inferiority and impurity of Dalits made the Shudras able to show contempt for them, to victimize them, to exclude them, and to make them labor, that is, to make them suffer in the same ways, but in a greater degree, that the upper castes made the Shudras themselves suffer. These roles are exactly parallel to those that existed in the American South among plantation owners, poor Whites, and Blacks: the three upper castes behaved as the plantation owners did, the poor Whites as the Shudras did, and the Dalits as the Blacks did. Only the window dressing is different. The grand illusion was that this was not a class system. Of course it was. By denigrating everything worldly, Hinduism concealed what it was. Labor was supposed to be extraordinarily stupid, simple, vile and impure, and not worth speaking about; it was only religion and eternity that mattered. This was the ideology of a leisured class—and an extraordinarily effective one, one so effective that it continues to confuse many people about their actual status in society.

The system worked by exploitation, and the exploited were primarily the Shudra men, who were then allowed to exploit others to keep themselves going. The first thing that made them accept their exploitation was that marginalization was possible and gave much evidence of being worse. The second thing was that they learned to perceive themselves as not at the bottom of the system, but as on the second or third tier, and looking downwards into an awful abyss. The third was that Dalits and women had obligations toward them, and so they had rights over Dalits and women. The fourth was that they were not a group, but were a collection of jatis bound to marry within the jati. It is this fourth feature that is of dominant political significance now.

That the “Shudras” internal organization was not uniform, but was by jati, is the heart of the problem. The upper castes could refer to their laborers and servants as Shudras, but all the term really meant was that they were persons without rights. The “Shudras” did not refer to *themselves* as Shudras, but as members of jatis. The jatis were the political organizations of the Shudras; all group grievances and negotiations went through the jatis before being represented to the upper castes. The upper castes required this because they held the Shudras were not capable of speaking for themselves, but had to be represented by jati leaders. Because Shudra political power had to be mediated by jatis, the upper castes never had to deal with all Shudras at once. Instead, they only had to deal with representatives of a minority group of the laborers. Because of this, all potential strikes could be averted and all actual ones broken. By treating the jatis differentially, the upper castes could always keep them at odds with each other. Whenever there was trouble with one jati, the upper castes could threaten to shift one of their privileges to a

different jati, or impose one of the duties of another jati on them. The result was what is now called “industrial peace.”

The rule against intermarriage of jatis was the keystone of the system. Marriage could only be sanctified by a priest. A priest could refuse to sanctify a mixed marriage. So long as mixed marriages did not occur, in negotiations among jati groups, no member of one group had a relative in the other, and all members of each group believed that the group either contained all one’s relatives or all the potential ancestors of one’s descendants, or both. Consequently the jatis were large extended families. Because jatis were essentially extended families, a threat to a jati as a whole or to a jati member was peculiarly forceful, and an offered benefit peculiarly attractive. If a jati member was threatened, a whole family was threatened, and it would do all it could to reduce the threat in a way that would not lead to further threats. If a benefit was offered, a whole family stood to benefit and it would do all it could to put the relevant members in a position to receive it. Social pressure was therefore *encompassing*. Because one could not intermarry and could not voluntarily change caste, and there was no viable place to escape to, the pressure for conformity and compliance was overwhelming. This pressure created the customary norms of Indian life, its hostility to argument, its valuation of dependency, its apparent docility, its fatalism because individual dreams and aspirations had no latitude. It also made conspiracy a norm, for one had to consult with other members of one’s family and jati before initiating anything, and one had to expect that all non-jati members had prior loyalties that could obviate any promise they made to one, whereas one’s own family and jati members could be expected to be loyal no matter what other obligations they had undertaken.

It is in this context that the attempts of the BSP and Marxists to appeal to the “Shudras” must be understood. That a group exists that recognizes itself as “Shudra” is a myth. There are only thousands of jatis composed of the families of laborers, each jati traditionally at potential odds with every other. Dalits and Adivasis have a political incentive to unite among themselves. The strength of the incentive depends on the appearance of the possibilities for increasing the flow of benefits of reservations and the appearance of the possibility that benefits will be made to flow to members of different jatis fairly equally. Dalits and Adivasis thus have some incentive to become what the Constitution claims they are: the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. If the flow of reservations is cut off, presumably SC’s and ST’s will tend to revert to a collection of Dalit jatis and Adivasi tribes or, if surrounding conditions are different, will tend to reduce their interest in maintaining jati cohesion and seek whatever integration is possible among whatever “Shudra” and religious groups might accept them. If the flow of reservations is altered as the Dondora Movement has demanded, so that different SC jatis and ST tribes must be treated

equally, then Dalit unity and Adivasi unity will tend to increase as they perceive themselves as being increasingly similarly situated. So, with apparent paradox, movements like the Dondora Movement, that initially increase jati conflict, may eventually reduce it. The proportionate splitting of reservations may eventually produce more unified SC and ST movements.

But the position of the Shudras is quite different. OBC reservations are more meager fare, and the “Shudras” are dispersed over a much larger range of differential economic and political power, though a smaller range of differential social power because they did not suffer the extreme stigmatization of Dalits and the lesser stigmatization of Adivasis. “Shudras” lack the social drive to unite that comes from the desire to eradicate Untouchability and to stop atrocities. Because there are probably as many “Shudras” now in the top 20% of income, Shudra leaders, who come primarily from that upper group and can be little helped by economic reservations, lack incentive to exert great political effort to increase economic benefits, but instead have a disincentive because they would end up paying more in increased taxes than they would receive in benefits. Instead, the primary political incentive for Shudra leaders is to attempt to form a mass-based movement to increase benefits to the majority. There are several efforts at this. But Shudra leaders lack the strong incentive Dalits have to form a party directed against the upper castes, to form one that excludes the upper castes from its ranks or leadership, or to form one that aims to include *all* of the vast majority. Instead, Shudra leadership can choose among a number of goals, principles, and enemies. Because the “Shudra” jatis perceive themselves as jatis, not as Shudras, there are a wide variety of Shudra jati alliances that can be sought.

The BJP has found it most convenient to organize around Hinduism with Islam, Christianity, and the Scheduled Castes ranked as the enemies and potential enemies in that approximate order. In this way it can draw both upper caste and Shudra support and hopes to muster a majority to consolidate its present tenuous hold on power through temporary alliance with the BSP and other groups. Because the “Shudra” jatis are local, in Andhra Pradesh the Telugu Desam Party can offer the wealthy “Shudra” leadership of the two most powerful local jatis, the Reddys and Chowdarys, that appeals to other Shudra groups because the leadership is neither upper caste nor Dalit, Adivasi, Christian, or Muslim. Such regional parties led by wealthy and charismatic “Shudras” is the dominant pattern throughout Southern India. As such parties arise, the upper castes, who so long dominated the country through the Congress, need to make far more complex and tentative alliances.

This is the context that makes it possible for the BSP to form an alliance even with the BJP. The upper castes, in terms of voting power, are a smaller minority than Dalits. Having lost their previous hold on the country through the Congress, the upper castes have to assert power

through multiple parties. In doing this, their wealth, their prestige, their institutional political power, their mobility, their international connections, their accumulated knowledge, are all to their advantage. But the weakness of their numbers gradually tells on them. To them, the main threat comes not from the Dalits, whose wealth, power, and prestige are virtually non-existent, and whose numbers can never form a majority. But the Dalits are a crucial swing vote in close elections. Consequently the BJP has good reason to believe it can use the BSP as a temporary ally without suffering serious damage even though it is apparent both that the BSP intends to use the BJP and in fact succeeds.

The approaching contest, however, depends neither on the BSP nor the BJP, but upon relations between Shudra and upper caste leadership, for the Shudra jatis have among themselves over 50% of the votes and possibly as much as 65%. So what matters ultimately in Indian caste politics is what those jatis believe to be their common interest. For Dalit leadership, this fact has a paradoxical implication. The BSP can only come to power through coalition. The viability of such a coalition will depend on whether Shudra jati voters believe the BSP can represent their interests as well as those of Dalits. But because the voters can only effectively be asked that question through the emergence of a coalition, whether the question will ever be asked depends on the leadership of other parties. If the leadership of other parties believe that a coalition would receive popular support because the BSP was given its leadership, and that the result of that support would be to make the BSP grow relative to their own parties, then giving the BSP leadership would mean their own self-destruction. So they would not do it. But if they believe that giving the BSP temporary leadership would lead to the destruction of the BSP in such a way that the benefits would flow to their own parties rather than to their opposition, they would. If they believe the result would be the diminution of both their own parties and the BSP, they probably would not also. So the prospects of the BSP depend on judgments inimical to its success. If it appears that it can succeed, it is highly unlikely to be given the chance to succeed. If it appears that it will fail, it might be given the chance to succeed or fail, but once it is in power, it would have to expect that great efforts would be made to make it fail.

The BSP could only succeed politically if, upon gaining power, it immediately shifted its interest from improving the lot of Dalits to improving the lot of the great majority of the population. While this could mean an increase in the proportion of benefits flowing from the Center to Dalits around the country, it could *not* mean doing at the Center what Mayawathi has done in Uttar Pradesh. To gain the necessary Shudra jati support, the BSP would have to shift its basis for the allocation of benefits from alleviating the effects of *social* oppression to alleviating those of *economic* oppression. In other words, the BSP would have to emerge as either socialist or

communist, and it would have to be perfectly equitable because all the eyes watching it would be jealous. But the BSP's exact economic position is unclear because it has not before been at issue. In that situation, the BSP could turn out to act on basically fascist economic principles, as the BJP does, or it could try to be liberal or middle of the road, however that is construed. Fascism could maintain BJP support, depending on the direction it was turned in. Liberal or middle of the road policies would probably disappoint everyone very rapidly, and the BSP would lose power to some other coalition. Communist policy would immediately arouse enormous external opposition; the Bretton Woods Institutions and the G8 countries led by the US would do all they could to defeat it immediately. Only by enforcing the original constitutional mandate for socialism would the BSP have a real chance of productive success. That would consolidate left wing support, but still would face enormous opposition from the upper classes, the upper castes, foreign and domestic corporations, the Bretton Woods Institutions, the G8 countries and the US, NRI's and their families, and all the landlord-based state systems. One likely result would be loss of control of the military, probably resulting in a Fascist coup. The BSP would be in a political situation worse than Indira Gandhi's, for she had the total backing of the Congress—and of the USSR. Even with that backing, to survive Indira Gandhi instituted the most totalitarian phase India has passed through. How could the BSP escape the need to institute totalitarian measures to implement an economic program progressive enough to benefit the Bahujan in any quickly recognizable way?

## **5. Dalit Politics and the Reality of Dalit Life**

The most basic political fact of Dalit life is that Dalits are a minority smaller than 25%. Consequently Dalit *political* progress will long depend on coalitions in which Dalits cannot form the majority even of the coalition itself. Ambedkar believed absolutely that the only hope for Dalit progress lay in politics. He was right that the only hope at his time for *social* progress lay in political action. But one searches in vain in his writings for a clear idea of the principles and means of poverty alleviation. Dalit political progress has resulted, through and despite a number of crises, particularly of atrocities, in *some* social progress. But there has been precious little *economic* progress of Dalit groups. To gain economic progress, Dalits appear to be forced to de-emphasize Dalit distinctiveness in order to form a coalition that will have the political will to help Dalits *economically*. No coalition can be formed that will choose to increase taxes on the rich to help Dalits without also helping larger numbers of other, primarily Shudra, groups. The greatest *political* hope Dalits can have for economic progress is that they can sufficiently entrench their rights and form coalitions so that if the political will to increase egalitarianism ever again arises,

they will not again be excluded from the general benefits. To this, reservations based on social status are an obstacle, not an assistance. If reservations are to be sought, it makes far more sense to insist that they be granted on an *economic* basis. Otherwise, it is better to forget about reservations with economic rewards and concentrate instead on general egalitarian economic measures.

Though there are major issues of reservations, I will not discuss them more here because it seems to me to be more urgent to direct attention to the huge mass of suffering which Dalits *share* with Adivasi and most Shudra jatis. Dalit politics tends to downplay these issues because they do not promote *specifically* Dalit issues. Yet more Dalit suffering and oppression is actually *caused* by them than by the identity and discrimination issues that form the focal points of Dalit politics. It is an object lesson that the move of Martin Luther King, Jr., that most alarmed the then head of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, and probably resulted first in Hoover's effort to blackmail King into committing suicide and, when that did not work, to have James Earl Ray assassinate him, was King's beginning to organize a racially mixed union of sanitation workers in Atlanta, Georgia. What US reactionaries like Hoover feared most was the unification of American Blacks and poor Whites because *that* had the potential to change the established order. The comparable move is for Dalit leaders to actually come to the aid of poor Shudra workers. That is probably the most radical and productive step Dalits could take, for that is the step that could simultaneously overcome caste discrimination and yield joint economic progress.

The constitutionally promised land reform, the provision of decent drinking water, adequate sanitation, and public health measures, the extension of microcredit, and vast improvements in both the quantity and quality of public education are, as Amartya Sen repeatedly insists, clearly the four most important things the government needs to provide for the general progress of the people of India. All four would greatly improve the lives of Dalits—as well as Adivasis and Shudras. Land reform would correct the most long-standing economic injustice to Dalits, that of forcing them always to be exploited laborers on the land of others or to have nothing at all. In all the land reform that has been done in India, which constitutes less than 2% of the land originally promised, Dalits have been almost universally excluded. So the need for land reform, which Dalits share with Shudra jatis and others, if fairly conducted would proportionately benefit Dalits most. The same is true of provision of drinking water, sanitation, and public health, and of microcredit. I want, however, to focus on the fourth, education, for of the four, education has the most significance for Dalit culture.

Dalits, Adivasis, and Shudras all need education desperately, but not the kind of education the government now provides. That kind of education was a British invention designed

to create *clerks* for British bureaucracy and business, not to *serve* the Indian people, but to allow the British to *exploit* them more cheaply and effectively. What is needed is a rural educational system designed to serve progress in the actual lives of villagers, and an urban system designed to serve progress in towns and cities. Though there are some model programs<sup>22</sup> for such systems, no means has been provided by which such schools could actually be created across the country. The primary problem is that teacher education would have to be completely changed and revised. Teachers would have to learn how to respond to the real needs of students and the community rather than shutting the community out and keeping the students in line. To do this, the teachers would need a great deal more knowledge of their environment, of villages, towns and cities, of people, of educational psychology, and, at higher levels, of their subject matters than they now have. Compared to this problem, the physical problem of building schools is small, but even that problem has not been addressed seriously.

Indian education is *not* a problem of money, but of political commitment. Many countries substantially poorer than India have far higher levels of literacy and education among the general population. In 1995-97 India spent 3.2% of GNP on education, exactly the same percentage it spent in 1985-87, despite the fact that for over 30 years it has been saying its target is 7%, more than double that. The UNDP Human Development Report shows 21 other countries listed in similar per capita income brackets as India, adjusted for purchasing power parity, .50 to .59 on the Gross Domestic Product Index. 18 of those countries have a higher level of educational enrolment (only 3 have a lower level); 19 have a higher level of adult literacy (only 2 have a lower level.) Of the 19 of 21 for which figures are given, 15 spend a greater percentage of GNP on education (only 4 spend less.) Of 45 countries with Gross Domestic Product Indices below .50, 35 also have a lower level of educational enrolment, but 10 have a higher level, and 19 have a higher level of adult *literacy* (while 26 have a lower level.) Of the 34 of the 45 countries for which figures are given, 18 *spend* a greater *percentage* of GNP on education, (16 spend a smaller percentage.) Of the 46 of 48 high human development countries for which figures are given, only five spend a smaller *percentage* of their GNP on public education; forty-one spend a larger percentage and all, of course, spend more per student adjusted for purchasing power parity. India is a medium human development country; of the 69 of 78 medium development countries for which figures are available, only 16 spend a smaller percentage of GNP, 1 spends the same percentage, while 53 spend a higher percentage. Of the 26 of 36 low human development countries, 13 spend a smaller percentage, 2 spend the same, and 11 spend a higher percentage. So

---

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Vijay Rattan, *Women and Child Development Programme Administration*, volume 1: *Women and Child Development & Sustainable Human Development*, volume 2: *Integrated Child*

*Indian public educational spending is approximately average for low human development countries and of countries poorer than itself, but quite atypical of the medium development countries to which it belongs, and of countries of similar wealth. India aspires to advance in income and human development, but far higher levels of general education are necessary for both. Why India has allowed its public education to remain at such a low level thus requires explanation.*

National poverty is obviously one cause of low levels of education. But low levels of general education also *cause* poverty by making promotion and change of work impossible, by diminishing the ability of laborers to negotiate, to contract, to take legal responsibility, to become independent, to seek new methods of production, and to represent themselves. *Over half of governments poorer than India, and 79% of countries of similar wealth believe it necessary to spend a greater proportion of GNP on education that India does.*<sup>23</sup> They do this primarily because they acknowledge that lack of education causes poverty. So why does the Indian government persist in denying the universal education the Constitution mandated to be instituted within *10 years* of Independence—that is, *over forty years ago*, and even after the Supreme Court has confirmed the mandate? The answer must be sought in caste and class. Public education depends on taxation. The upper castes and classes do not want to pay for the education of the lower castes and classes even if this is necessary to enrich the country. They want to be able to continue the system of marginalization and exploitation they now have so that laborers will remain frozen in their places, will not be able to find better work, and will not be able to demand promotions or strike out on their own.

For Dalits, the largest effect of this is that it makes it impossible for them to gain access to the intellectual stimulation and resources they need to function outside the Dionysian and Epimethean phases of culture. For the vast majority of Dalits, the attempt to rise means being forced into Epimetheanism totally alien to their lives, and inimical to them. Consequently it generally means a forced betrayal of family and friends. Few choose to enter the Epimethean mode, and those who do generally cut themselves off or are cut off from their original society. This is entirely unnecessary social suffering. And because Dalits are almost totally denied direct access to the means of Apollonian and Promethean culture, there is enormous waste and loss to society as a whole. If Indian society wants the best surgeons, the best engineers, the best lawyers, the best professors, the best entrepreneurs or organizers and administrators, it has to make professions open to *all* the most potentially competent people in the whole culture, not just the

---

*Development Services Programme Administration, (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1997.)*

<sup>23</sup> All figures in this paragraph are from the UNDP World Development Report 2001, pp. 170-177.

ones from the families with the most money, the most political clout, and the best social connections. By failing to invent and provide an educational system designed to serve the country as a whole, India is squandering its talent as well as making its people suffer.

Yet even if education were provided on an egalitarian basis, it would still be easy to use it to destroy many possibilities of Dalit culture. All modern education has strong elements of cultural imperialism that leave students in a confused and self-alienated state, unable to register and examine their own perceptions, unable to create. It is largely because access to education and mass communication is now increasing that the struggle to preserve, recreate, and develop Dalit culture is so urgent.

**Note on the Graphic Estimate of the Distribution of Overall Social Power of Minority Groups by Percentage of Population on the following page:**

The 100 bold squares of the following chart represent the relative positions in terms of social power of the families of 100 crore persons of India. Each bold square represents 1% of the population of India, roughly families of 1 crore persons, each small square roughly families of 1 lakh persons. The highly significant differences of social power *within* families are not represented. The estimate is of a compound of economic, political, and social power worked out on the basis of the theory of *Differential Social Power Flow* discussed briefly in the first section of this paper and more completely in the manuscript of that title mentioned in the first paragraph of this paper. The estimate's assumption is that the three forms of differential social power are simply different means of extracting energy from those below to serve the purposes of those above. Compensatory or economic power uses divisible expendable units of money, representing entitlement to labor, to command labor by offering the means to command the labor of others. Condign or political power uses a hierarchy of command to coerce compliance by threatening penalties for non-compliance. Conditioned or social power uses the extraction of attention to create prestige for those attended to while imposing their models of reality and ideality on the attentive. Compensatory power is quantified by economists, but condign power can be quantified by the number of people an individual official can command, and conditioned power can be quantified by the ratio between the amount of attention offered and the amount of time spent in preparation for presentations. Conditioned, condign, and compensatory power, *on the average*, have high correlations with each other, but do not in individual cases. What counts is that all three are ways of mobilizing other people's energy. The positions assigned to groups depend on an estimate of the total amount of energy transferred upwards versus the amount of control exerted downwards when all three forms of social power are considered.

Rough indicators of class status are included because class formation is a result of all three forms of social power. I estimate the Indian upper class as roughly 20 million Indians having that level of social power at which individuals can afford to live in developed countries at will; they are capitalists and the largest landowners. I count as the upper middle class the approximately 50 million Indians who live

between that level and the world average income adjusted for purchasing power parity of the rupee, 5,400 rupees per month per person, or 27,000 rupees per month for a family of five; that is the position of successful professional and business families, medium to fairly large scale landowners. I estimate as the middle class roughly 130 million people in families having less than the world average income but some security either from land ownership or reliable employment or small business ownership. Dividing this middle class from the lower middle class is arbitrary in the Indian context; there is a steady continuum between the 90<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> percentiles, but it would certainly be unreasonable by world standards to call anyone below the Indian 70<sup>th</sup> percentile middle class. But the division at the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile makes sense by world standards.

This perception is confirmed by analysis of UNDP poverty lines for rich and poor countries. The 44<sup>th</sup> percentile is the UNDP's poverty line for poor countries, \$1 a day adjusted for purchasing power parity, the 37<sup>th</sup> percentile the common current estimate for the Indian government's poverty line; families below the first level can be considered to be in absolute poverty by world standards, below the second by Indian standards. I consider people between the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile and the 44<sup>th</sup> to be lower middle class and working class in India in the sense that they live in permanent jeopardy of far more serious poverty through drought, changes in farm prices, loss of employment, family disruption, sickness, old age, and disability; their condition is contingent on dependent relations with others. The Indian poverty line at 37% has more significance than the world poverty line because it has potential legal consequences in benefits based on economic need, but people even well above 37%--and up to the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile—certainly should be considered impoverished by any standard that includes full nutritional requirements—not merely calorie count—and needs for shelter, clothing, health, transportation, communication, and education. The UNDP's \$1 a day line is obviously intended to relieve developed countries of responsibility; for developed countries the line is now drawn at \$11 a day which, because it is also adjusted for purchasing power parity, provides a standard of living at 55.7% of the world average income calculated for the USA, the equivalent in India of 3008 rupees per month per person, or 2.046 times the standard the UNDP sets for India. (The incongruity of this figure is a reflection of distortion of the value of the rupee against the dollar; the world average income of \$6980 per person per year adjusted for purchasing power parity is the equivalent of \$7204 in the US and \$1393 in India, for what \$1 will buy in India would cost \$5 in the US.) Applying the developed country poverty line standard to India shows that all Indians below 1.644 times the Indian average income (as of 1999, \$448, or \$2248 adjusted for purchasing power parity) must be counted as poor, and that includes roughly 80% of Indians, those I am counting as below the Indian middle class. Consequently what is meant by not being middle class in India is what is meant by being severely impoverished in developed countries. When purchasing power parity figures are used, the designation of two poverty lines is pure hypocrisy on the part of rich countries. Therefore, by world standards, only 20% of Indians are not severely impoverished.

Absolute poverty, however, is generally considered to be that level at which over 80% of expenditures are on food. In India, this generally happens around the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile. Everyone below that

level must be considered to live in absolute poverty. In India, however, there are huge gradations below the level of absolute poverty; as one sinks below that level both quality and quantity of food deteriorate and larger and larger portions of energy and labor are unremunerated. Those between approximately the 20<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> percentiles live in continuous jeopardy of falling into the bottom fifth, which represents complete marginalization and is essentially lethal. Two to four million Indians die every year of malnutrition and malnutrition-related diseases. Average life expectancy is now 62 years; most of the people die of malnutrition and malnutrition-related diseases come from this bottom fifth. The lower figure of 2 million per year would imply that 124 of these 200 million people have unnecessarily shortened life-spans; the higher figure of 4 million per year implies that 248 million of the poorest 400 million do. Consequently the Indian poverty line must be considered to life-threatening and to be in the bottom decile to be lethal.

Yet, wherever a poverty line is drawn, assistance to the poor nearly always goes to the richest of the group designated as poor, for they are the ones with the most conditioned and condign power needed to gain access to it. The result of this pattern of assistance can well be considered institutionalized manslaughter of the poorest. Day by day, international responsibility for this increases relative to Indian responsibility for it, as the international level of extraction of value from India as a whole increases over extraction of value within the country.

## **Bibliography**

- Berle, Adolf A., Jr., *The Three Faces of Power*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967)
- \_\_\_\_ & Gardiner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, (New York: MacMillan, 1932)
- Beteille, Andre, *Caste, Class, and Power: Changing Patterns of Social Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965)
- Duffee, Richard, *Differential Social Power Flow*, (manuscript to be converted into LL.M. thesis.)
- \_\_\_\_, "What the World Bank Knows but won't Tell You" in *The Social Scientist*, (forthcoming in 2002.)
- \_\_\_\_, "Prejudicial Exploitation: the Issue of Caste and Race," in *Indian Journal of Human Rights*, (Hyderabad: Human Rights Programme University of Hyderabad, Jan-Dec 2000), pp. 25-68.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth, *The Anatomy of Power*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983)
- Guha, Ramachandra, "The Career and Credo of Andre Beteille" in Guha, Ramachandra & Jonathan P. Parry, eds., *Institutions and Inequalities: Essays in Honour of Andre Beteille*, (Delhi: Oxford, 1999.)
- Jung, Carl Gustav, *The Theory of Psychological Types, Collected Works*, Volume 6, (Princeton, New Jersey, Bollingen, 1954/67.)
- Marx, Karl, *Capital*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954.)

Montagu, Ashley, *Growing Young*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Granby, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1989)

Rattan, Vijay, *Women and Child Development Programme Administration*, volume 1: *Women and Child Development & Sustainable Human Development*, volume 2: *Integrated Child Development Services Programme Administration*, (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1997.)

Russell, Bertrand, *Power: A New Social Analysis*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1938/1998)

Shaw, George Bernard, *The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*, (London: Constable & Co., 1928)

United Nations Development Program, *World Development Reports 1996 to 2001*, (Delhi: Oxford, 2001.)

Weber, Max, *Economy and Society*, vol. 2, Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968/1978)

Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990)

Arthur Koestler, Thomas Kuhn, and Stephen Jay Gould are particularly good on this feature of the history of Western science.

Richard Lowenthal's analysis in the 1970's.

Carl Sagan's estimate in *The Dragons of Eden*.

Richard Z. Duffee

[zellduff@rediffmail.com](mailto:zellduff@rediffmail.com)