CHAPTER II

DALIT RIGHTS AND THE CHANGING INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE ON DISCRIMINATION

In a memorandum dated 15 April 1947, submitted for the consideration of the Sub-Committee on Minorities, the Working Committee of the All-India Adi-Hindu Depressed Classes Association asserted that 'The position of the Scheduled Castes in India is unique. It is impossible to find a parallel to it.'¹ Fifty years hence, it seems well nigh impossible to make this claim. Dalit activists have found common cause with groups in other parts of the world that have faced discrimination based on occupation and descent.

This chapter is aimed at understanding the developments in international and Indian discourses on the rights of marginalized groups that have driven these groups to form solidarities across national boundaries in order to highlight and combat the discrimination they face in their societies. In the course of the chapter, the thesis that the condition of the Dalits could be considered as unique is sought to be revised based on the writings and thought of some early protagonists of societal reforms in India. The social mobilization and politicization of Dalit claims in the colonial period since the 1920s shall be analyzed for external influences. The post-independence developments in Dalit mobilization shall also be considered from a similar perspective. The ideological motivations shall be analyzed for cross-cultural influences. The deliberation on the problem of caste-based discrimination in the UN Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) will be studied as a culmination of this process of drawing on experiences of marginal and discriminated groups in other parts of the world.

External Consciousness in the Reformist Thought of Jotirao Phule

Caste has been considered to be the defining feature of the Indian society. The word itself is derived from the Portuguese castas, a nomenclature used by

¹ B.Shiva Rao, Framing of India's Constitution: Select Documents, Volume II, New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1968, p. 381. The Sub-Committee was analyzing the recommendations of the Committee on Fundamental Rights of the Constituent Assembly with special consideration for the rights of minority groups in India.
Portuguese traders to describe the different ‘species of men’ encountered by them on the western coast of India. Phule was the first activist reformer of the late 19th century who concerned himself with the condition of the lower castes in Indian society. Social reform until then largely meant the reform of family law pertaining to the position of women in families of the higher castes, or against brahmanical orthodoxies such as idol-worship, under the influence of English education received by members of the higher castes. Phule’s efforts at educating women of the lower castes and attempts at improving the life of Shudratishudras were commendable, especially considering that the efforts of some reform minded lawyers of the period like Mahadev Govind Ranade to form a Congress for Social Issues (Samajik Parishad) parallel to the Indian National Congress, was not successful. Phule attacked the brahmanical dharma and the texts such as the smritis and vedas that upheld it. Thus, he rejected the distinction between the pure and the polluted, touchable and untouchable based on the doctrine of Karma. He saw the existing system of power and dominance as being sustained by a bi-polar division among the Brahmins and the Shudratishudras, which in turn was based on the division of labour in the productive process. He saw the roots of exploitation of the lower castes in their position as peasants and therefore laid great emphasis on agricultural reform. In addition to opening schools for women of the shudratishudra castes in 1848, Phule founded the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873. Deshpande attributes his polemical narrative to the fact that Phule was rejecting brahmanical history from a Shudratishudra perspective and concludes that it was more subversive than scientific. He also concluded that Phule was not a social reformer since social reformers are liberal humanists. Phule for him was a

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3 Gail Omvedt, Dalit Visions, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1996, p.18. Phule wrote before the rise of Hindu nationalism and the rise of staunch defenders of Hindu orthodoxy like Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Therefore his opposition was mainly directed against the ‘moderates’, liberals and reformers, grouped in organizations such as the Prarthana Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Sarvajanik Sabha and Congress.


5 Ibid., p. 5. Phule rarely uses the words Hindu or Hinduism.

6 Ibid., p. 8.

7 Ibid., p. 9. This was a distinction mentioned in the earliest of the Vedas, i.e. the Rig Veda

8 Ibid., pp. 12-14.

9 Ibid., p. 6.
revolutionary with ‘a complete system of ideas, and was amongst the early thinkers to have identified, in a manner of speaking, classes in Indian society.’

Like most Indian social reformers of his times, Phule had read Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*. However, unlike most other reformers, Phule went beyond the constraints of English branch of European liberalism exemplified in the writings of J.S. Mill and Herbert Spencer. In 1872, Phule published *Gulamgiri*, literally meaning slavery. The book focused on the slavery of the Shudratishudras (the peasants or as he termed them, the ryots). Written in the form of a dialogue between the author, Phule and Dhondiba, *Gulamgiri* traces the origin of the slavery of the Sudras (Phule’s spelling) since the time of the arrival of the Aryans and explodes the myths that had been propagated regarding the demon-like Sudras. Instead it uncovers the violence that lay at the roots of the subjugation of the aborigines of India. As the Aryan theory of race was the most prevalent explanation of the origins of caste in Indian society in those times, it provided the context in which Phule framed his critique of the caste system. Jotirao Phule appropriated the theory of racial division between Aryans and non-Aryans and he was probably the first to use it against its grain in defense of the rights of the Shudratishudras. He argued that the high caste Brahmins who were Aryans were a foreign people and that the lower (basically peasant- that is untouchables and tribals) castes subjugated by them were the natives of India. He reinterpreted

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10 Ibid., p. 20.
11 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
12 Ibid. For the full text of the translated version of *Gulamgiri* by Maya Pandit, see pp. 23-99. According to Gail Omvedt, theoretically also, Phule attempted to unite the shudras (non-brahmans) and atishudras (dalits), most of whom were ryots (peasants). See Omvedt (1996), op.cit., p. 19.
13 The entire dialogue takes place in sixteen parts, in each of which Phule challenges the divinity of the avataras (reincarnations) of Vishnu and treats them instead as Aryan conquests of the aboriginals.
14 Over the period of a century, there was a change in the manner in which caste had been theorized. Initially, Orientalists perceived caste as a phenomenon peripheral to Indian society. In the late eighteenth century, evangelical, anglicist, and utilitarian thinking placed caste at the centre of the social system and called for the need to reform the caste-society. For details, see “Homo Hierarchichus: The Origins of the Idea” in Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and Making of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, pp. 19-42. See “The Ethnographic State”, for the story of the commencement of the concretization of caste identities as a result of the work of the Census Commissioner H.H. Risley. ( pp. 43-60.)
sacred religious literature to show 'how the invading Aryans had conquered the indigenous people through force, treachery and use of religious propaganda.'

Phule also asserted the unity of oppressed peoples all over the world and dedicated his book to the abolition of slavery in the United States and identified with the black Americans. He also saw the link between Aryan subjugation of the indigenous people of India and the situation of Native Americans. Phule’s Shetkaryacha Asud (Cultivators Whipcord) is about the condition of the peasants who largely belonged to the Shudratishudra class. He provided a religious alternative, a more egalitarian theism in Sarvajanik Satya Dharma. In a family in which such a dharma was to be accepted, the father would become Buddhist, the mother a Christian, the daughter a Muslim and the son a satyadharmi, none would remain a Hindu.

That Gulamgiri was written taking into cognizance the international context is evident from the fact that it was dedicated to the Americans who had struggled to abolish the practice of slavery during the civil war of 1860:

Dedicated
to
the good people of the United States
as a token admiration for their
sublime disinterested and
selfsacrificing devotion
in the cause of Negro Slavery; and with
an earnest desire, that my countrymen
may take their noble example as their guide
in the emancipation of their Sudra Brethren
from the trammels of Brahmin Thraldom.

17 Ibid. According to the author, the purpose of the “non-Aryan” theory is to establish a cultural and racial basis for the unity of the Maharashtrian masses. (p. 1974, col.1.) Phule’s theory became discredited as many of the non-Brahmins later identified themselves as belonging to the warrior caste and accepted that ‘the concepts of “slavery”, “shudra”, and non-Aryan came to be applied primarily to untouchables and tribals.’ (p. 1974, col.2.) The primary issue for Phule was cultural and not racial, the aim being to create a non-Aryan version of national culture.


19 Some recent writings on Dalits view them as a national minority with rights of self-determination along with other civil and political rights. Y.N. Kly, International Law and the Dalits in India, Geneva: Dalit Liberation Education Trust with support from the Program for Racism of the World Council of Churches, 1989.


21 G. P. Deshpande, op.cit, Gulamgiri, p. 25.
In the Preface to this work, Phule contested the claim of the Brahmans that they were the aborigines of India based on British anthropological studies and asserted that they were a race that derived from the great Indo-European race and ‘imbued with very high notions of self, extremely cunning, arrogant and bigoted.’ Instead he said that the Shudratishudras of his times were the descendants of the aboriginal people of this land. Thus, Phule used the discourse of race that the colonizers had used to describe the Indian society. Moreover, he likened the treatment of the real aborigines of India by the Aryans to the cruel treatment of American Indians by European settlers. In his opinion, the slavery of shudras in India was much like condition of slaves in America.

In the days of rigid Brahmin dominancy, so lately as that of the time of the Peshwa, my Sudra brethren had even greater hardships and oppression practiced upon them than what even the slaves in America had to suffer. ... Now the only difference between them and the slaves in America is that whereas the blacks were captured and sold as slaves, the shudras and atishudras were conquered and enslaved by the bhats and brahmans. Except for this difference, all other conditions in which they lived were the same.

Phule stressed on the value of freedom and rights. He applauded the attempts of the English and Americans in ending the practice of slavery and restoring slaves to their estranged families.

In a satirical vein, the conversation between Dhondiba and Jotirao begins with a reference to abolition of slavery by the French and the English as an act of flouting the Brahman law of Manusmriti.

Jotirao: You say that the English, French and other governments prohibited the slave system which means they defied the brahman law. But there are so many different people on this earth? Which limb of the Brahma were they created from?

Dhondiba: Regarding this, the brahmans, learned as well as illiterate, say that since people like the English are

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22 Ibid., Preface, p. 27.
23 Ibid., p. 28.
24 Ibid., p. 31.
depraved vulgar sinners, the Manusmriti does not mention them.\textsuperscript{27}

Jotirao explains that the reason the educated English prohibited slavery was that they learnt of the ulterior motives of the brahmans in writing such texts that were in complete contradiction of the theory of evolution of nature.\textsuperscript{28} Continuing in the same vein, Jotirao held that to believe that the first Aryan chief was born of a fish is to assume that one of the fish eggs contained a human baby and that the baby was delivered on dry land in order for it to survive or that a fish told a diver the exact location of the particular egg inside the water so that the baby could be retrieved. This in his opinion was not possible despite the medical advances made in Europe and America.\textsuperscript{29} Dhondiba then concludes that the Aesop’s fables were more realistic than the accounts of such improbable events in the Bhagawat.\textsuperscript{30}

Jotirao also argued that the prophesized second coming of the famous King of the aboriginals, Baliraja, who had been deceitfully confined to the netherworld by the Aryan chief Vamana came about in the form of Jesus, who tried in his lifetime to release the oppressed from the bondage of slavery:

Millions became followers of this Baliraja in Europe where he had brought about a tremendous upheaval. All of them began to work ceaselessly for this noble task of establishing God’s Kingdom on earth. Ancestors of great scholars like Thomas Paine became his followers and attained eternal joy.\textsuperscript{31}

He further argued:

\begin{quote}
Several American and Scottish missionaries, followers of Baliraja in the west, that is Jesus Christ, came to this country, without least regard for what their governments would say. They preached the true
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 47.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 142. He later refers to Darwin’s theory of evolution of the human being from monkeys which proves the fictitious nature of the brahminical theory.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p 51. The reference is to the reincarnation of Vishnu as Matsya. For reference to the Vaman avatar, see p. 63.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 73.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 74. In what seems to be an attempt at reclaiming the reincarnations of Vishnu for the shudras, he also speaks of The Buddha as a reincarnation of Baliraja. ‘In this country, after there was relative stability, several intelligent Balis exploded the silly games of fraudulent make-believe stories concocted by the brahmans. Rational sages like Sakya Muni (The Buddha, according to the Editor) rejected the fraudulent books written by the selfish, presumptuous, licentious and vice-ridden brahmans who, who spread superstitious rituals, based on their Vedic incantations of black magic among other people.’
\end{itemize}
teachings of Jesus among the shudras and freed them from the deceit and slavery of the brahmans.\textsuperscript{32}

While defending the idea that qualities of each individual are not hereditary and therefore that people could not be permanently fixed into hereditary occupational-castes (Plato's thesis), Phule gave the examples of Thomas Paine and George Washington who were able to overshadow several lords and kings considered to be hereditarily wise and brave, or black soldiers who fought the soldiers of Kabul and Egypt and farmers in America like Parker and Merriam who fought the enemies of the nation despite being farmers.\textsuperscript{33}

While Phule's efforts were largely confined to Maharashtra, the period up to the 1920s was also the period of rising caste consciousness and mobilization among the lower castes in several parts of India. '...Caste became the primary mode for the textualization of social identity in the last years of the nineteenth and early years of twentieth century, the census providing a primary illustration of the extent to which textual politics were as much about political struggle as about narrative form.'\textsuperscript{34} The Namashudras in Bengal and the Nadars and Vanniyars in Madras organized their struggles on similar racial grounds. However, there were scholars like G.S. Ghurye who conducted detailed anthropological research and concluded that the link between caste and race was confined to Punjab and parts of the United Provinces whereas in the rest of the country there had been so much miscegenation over the centuries that there was no correlation between race and caste.\textsuperscript{35} They were concerned with the increasing politicization of caste due to the need for recording them in the census. The mobilization of Dalits continued to take radical forms until the 1930s, with most of them appropriating the Aryan discourse of being original inhabitants. Thus, they called themselves Ad-Dharmis in Punjab, Adi-Dravida in Tamilnadu, Adi-Hindu in Telugu provinces and Adi-Karnatakas in

\textsuperscript{32} Jotirao saw the rise of Indian nationalism against the British rule as a reaction to the British/Christian attempts at upliftment of the shudras, by means of conversion. He seems to encourage such conversion. (pp. 79-80.) Later, he also refers to George Washington and Lafayette as symbolizing a patriotism in favour of the downtrodden. (p. 88.) In 'The Book' (The Book of the True Faith: Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak) he considered the arrival of the Mussalmans as destined to enable the shudras to overcome their social disabilities, but since the Mussalmans became 'corrupt and betrayed the Creator', he sent the British in their place. (p. 235.)

\textsuperscript{33} Omvedt (1996), op.cit., p. 22.

\textsuperscript{34} Nicholas Dirks, op.cit., p. 236.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 246-250.
Kannada speaking provinces. Many however started associating with Hindu nationalism or even joined Gandhi’s movement for eradication of untouchability.

In the aftermath of the non-cooperation movement when Gandhi decided to stay away from the political and concentrate instead on social issues, some of them such as E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, popularly known as Periyar, decided to go ahead with the political as well as social agenda. In 1926, Periyar launched the Self-Respect Movement which challenged Hinduism, Brahmanism as well as nationalism. In the 1930s, he used communism to denounce Indian nationalists and the British as agents of capitalism.

Ambedkar, Dalits and the World

By the 1930s, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar had emerged as a prominent leader of the depressed classes and he asserted the rights of his people to political representation by separate electorates, education and temple entry. Against the attempts of Gandhi to keep the ‘Harijans’ within the fold of the national mainstream by reforming the evil system of social segregation in Hinduism, Ambedkar proposed a break away from the Hindu society that had never considered the outcastes as integral to it. For him, the injustice of the caste system lay in the fact that it was not a division of labour but a division of labourers and moreover, that it was not a division based on the choice of the individual. ‘Individual sentiment, individual preference has no place in it. It is based on the dogma of predestination.’ Like Phule, Ambedkar’s alternative theology was the

36 Gail Omvedt (1996), op.cit, p. 18.
37 Nicholas Dirks, op.cit., pp. 262-263. According to Gail Omvedt, the anti-caste movement in India has an ambivalent relationship to the left parties in India. In Maharashtra, the attempt of the Communist Party to forge and alliance with the Dalits were rejected outright. There was a reluctant alliance with the ruling Communist parties in the states of Kerala and West Bengal, and the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (Committee for Struggle, DSS) formed in 1974 supported a broad left alliance in Karnataka. The only state in which some Dalit groups actively formed alliance with the radical Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was in the state of Bihar from 1970s onwards where they adopted the tactics of Maoist guerrillas and resorted to a violent killing of high caste men violating their rights to land or the respect of their women. See Gail Omvedt, Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993, pp. 47-75. For Bihar, see pp. 58-61.
39 Ibid. For the Gandhi-Ambedkar stand-off, see pp. 150-179.
annihilation of caste or conversion to Buddhism. Ambedkar rejected racial as well as economic theories of origins of caste and focused instead on ideological and religious factors.

Ambedkar's thoughts were replete with examples from outside India. In a report to the Simon Commission Ambedkar made a case against the continuation of a system of separate electorates that had been granted to the Muslims minorities. He felt that the Muslim minority in India had misperceived the nature of the Council of the Bombay Presidency which was essentially a secular council as the Cardinal's Conclave, an ecclesiastical body convened for the election of the Pope. However, in the Council, what the Muslims needed were numbers, rather than a few strong representatives and therefore that they must realize the importance of joint electorates. He also cites successful examples from countries where joint electorates have served the interest of minorities well such as the British and Dutch in South Africa and English and the French in Canada. Similarly in Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary. He also gave examples of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim states of Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia and Russia who did not demand separate electorates.

In stressing the importance of adequate representation and a constitutional guarantee for such representation, Ambedkar recalled the argument of J.S. Mill for safeguards against the tyranny of the majority:

...it was now perceived that such phrases as self-government, and the power of the people over themselves, do not express the true state of the case. The people who exercise the power are not always the same people with those over whom it is exercised....and precautions as such are needed against it (tyranny of majority), as against any other abuse of power....in political speculations the tyranny

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41 Zelliot, op. cit., p. 188-196. As early as 1935-36, Ambedkar considered the idea of conversion to Sikhism, Islam and Christianity as means for gaining self-respect and political empowerment for the untouchables. (p. 193.)

42 Omvedt (1996), op.cit., p. 49.


44 Ibid., paragraph 59, p. 352

45 Ibid., paragraph 60, p. 353. Also see paragraph 74 for examples of minorities who were rulers earlier like the Muslims in India but had lost their past glory and yet did not demand separate electorates. (pp. 360-61.)
of the majority is now generally included amongst the evils against which the Society requires to be on guard.46

He also stresses the need for Constitutional guarantees drawing lessons from post World War I Europe:

The post-war history of Europe abounds in such cases. The peace treaties between the allied powers and Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Rumania and the Polish-German Convention relating to Upper Silesia with their guarantee clauses for the benefit of the minorities bear eloquent testimony to the fact that the minorities cannot depend upon the representative form of government, but must seek protection in the form of guarantees of their rights.47

At the Round Table Conferences (1930-32) Ambedkar was the spokesman for the untouchables. In this capacity, reflecting on the denial of civil rights to untouchables, he called for substituting the bureaucratic form of government with a government for the people, of the people and by the people.48 He also said that the solution to the social problem of the Depressed Classes lay in their acquiring political power. Emphasizing the need for the representation of these classes he said that in the absence of it they might face discrimination in legislation, administration as well as the exercise of rights of citizenship.49 So he put forward the following demands on behalf of the depressed classes: declare untouchability as illegal, liability of officers of the Crown for acts of tyranny, provisions similar to the Burma Act against social persecution, right to appeal against acts of neglect or prejudices to the Central Government, or the Secretary of State and the establishment of a special department to look after the welfare of his people,

46 Ibid., Statement concerning the safeguards for the protection of the interests of the Depressed Classes as a minority in the Bombay Presidency and the changes in the composition of and the guarantees from the Bombay Legislative Council necessary to ensure the same under Provincial Autonomy, 29 May 1928, pp. 429-458, paragraph 16 at pp. 442-443.
47 Ibid., paragraph 17, p. 443.
48 Ibid. “Need for Political Power for Depressed Classes”, Plenary Session of Round Table Conference, Fifth Sitting, 20 November 1930, pp. 503-509 at pp. 503-504.
49 Ibid. Sub-Committee No. III (Minorities), Second Sitting, 31 December 1930, pp. 528-56 at p. 529. Ambedkar felt that this was a problem of all minorities.
adequate representation in legislatures by election, as opposed to nomination, joint electorates with reserved seats if there were to be a provision of adult suffrage.\(^5^0\)

The scheme of political safeguards included (a) the right of equal citizenship as guaranteed by Amendment XIV of the Constitution of the US and Chapter 67, section 5 (2) of Government of Ireland Act 1920; (b) provisions for free enjoyment of citizenship rights by outlining offences relating to infringements of citizenship as in the Civil Rights Protection Acts of 9\(^{th}\) April, 1866 and 1\(^{st}\) March, 1875 passed in the US in the interest of Negroes after their emancipation and offences of social boycott defined in the Burmese Anti-Boycott Act of 1922; and (c) protection against discrimination by adequate representation in legislatures, services redress against prejudicial action as in section 93 of the British North America Act of 1867; special departmental care and representation in the Cabinet.\(^5^1\)

In his *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar made a clear distinction 'between social reform in the sense of the reform of the Hindu Family and social reforms in the sense of reorganization and reconstruction of Hindu Society' and criticized the Social Conference for being concerned with the former.\(^5^2\) Ambedkar felt that the interests of the depressed classes lay in getting special privileges for them of the kind that had been given to the Muslim minority. Therefore, in opposition to the Congress stand on the Communal award of 1931, he supported the provision it made for separate representation of different minorities in India including the depressed classes. According to him the significance of the communal award lay 'in this that the political constitution must take note of social organization. It shows that the politicians who denied that the social problem in India had any bearing on the political problem were forced to reckon with the social problems in the devising of the constitution. The Communal Award is so to say the nemesis following upon the indifference and neglect of social reform.'\(^5^3\) In claiming separate representation, Ambedkar invoked the example from the history of Irish Home Rule. In order to bring the Ulstermen into the fold of a Home Rule

\(^{50}\) Ibid., pp. 532-533.


\(^{53}\) Ibid., p. 42.

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constitution, the Southern Irish offered them political safeguards of their liking. The Ulstermen declined on the ground that they chose not to be ruled by the Southerners on any terms. Ambedkar argued that this was because there was a social problem between the Ulstermen who were Protestants and the Southerners who were Catholics: ‘... it was the social problem of caste between the Catholics and the Protestants, which prevented the solution of the political problem.’

Justifying the Communal Award, he also cited an example from the History of Rome in which the republican constitution that divided the kingly power (imperium) between consuls (secular authority) and pontifex maximus (religious authority) each of which had representatives of the two main social classes of plebeians and patricians. His argument was based on the belief that social/religious reform must precede political reform, as indeed had been the evidence of history in several parts of the world. His illustrations of this phenomenon were the Lutheran reform that led to Enlightenment, English Puritanism which fore-grounded political liberty and American independence, the propagation of Islam by the Prophet that led to the rise of Arab power, Buddhism which was at the base of the ascendancy of Chandragupta Maurya, the reforms of Saints in Maharashtra that led to rise of Shivaji and the preaching of Guru Nanak which led to the rise of Sikh political power.

Although Ambedkar believed in the economic emancipation of the depressed classes he was critical of the socialists for ignoring the power of religion as a source of domination. He likened this to the plight of plebians in Rome who could elect their consuls but no strong candidate would ever get elected since it was mandatory that the representatives got the approval of the Oracle of Delphi, who mysteriously spoke the wishes of the priests, all of whom were patricians.

Ambedkar completely rejected the racial theory of caste division thus:

(C)aste system came into being long after the different races of India had commingled in blood and culture. To hold that distinctions of caste or (sic) really distinctions of race and to treat different castes as though they were so many different races is a gross perversion of facts. What

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54 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
55 Ibid., p. 43.
56 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
57 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
racial affinity is there between the Brahmin of the Punjab and the Brahmin of Madras?... (The) caste system is a social division of the same race.\footnote{58}

However, he did point out the similarities in the plight of the ‘negros’ and the ‘untouchables’ and therefore for solidarity between the two movements.\footnote{59} Since Ambedkar, the Dalit movement has not perpetuated the ‘caste is race’ slogan, although they have used the discourse of anti-racism to advance their agenda. The significance of this will be examined in the course of this chapter.

For Ambedkar, caste was a problem on several grounds. ‘Caste does not result in economic efficiency. Caste cannot and has not improved the race. Caste however has done one thing. It has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus...There is no Hindu consciousness of the kind. In every Hindu the consciousness that exists is that of the consciousness of his caste...Similarity in habits and customs, beliefs and thoughts there is. But one cannot accept the conclusion therefore, that the Hindus constitute a society.’\footnote{60} His other point of critique of caste was that it had an unquestioned right over the individual and thus stifled the scope for reform of society. ‘The assertion of an individual of his own opinions and beliefs, his own independence and interest as over against a group standards, group authority and group interests is the beginning of all reform. But whether reform will continue depends upon what scope the group affords for individual assertion.’\footnote{61} Thus he seems to be advocating for group rights for the purpose of safeguarding the rights of the individual belonging to the depressed classes.

Yet another problem with caste from Ambedkar’s perspective was that it prevented the attainment of society based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.\footnote{62} He likened the chaturvarnya thesis of Arya Samajists based on gunas (worth) rather than janma (birth) to the division of society proposed by Plato in his

\footnote{58}Ibid., pp. 48-49.
\footnote{59}In the 10th Ambedkar Memorial Lecture entitled “Ambedkar Abroad” delivered in Jawaharlal Nehru University, 28 November 2002, Prof. Eleanor Zelliot elaborated on the manner in which Ambedkar used western theory (especially Deweian pragmatism) and events in other parts of the world to comment on the situation of Dalits in India.
\footnote{60}Ibid., pp. 50-51.
\footnote{61}Ibid., p. 56.
\footnote{62}Ibid., p. 57. Ambedkar felt that these should form the new doctrinal bases of democratic religion in India, that would help destroy Brahmanism and save Hinduism. (p. 77.)
Republic and critiqued the two on the same grounds. ‘The chief criticism against Plato is that his idea of lumping of individuals into a few sharply marked-off classes is a very superficial view of man and his powers. Plato had no perception of the uniqueness of the every individual, of his incommensurability with others, of each individual forming a class of his own.’ For Ambedkar this was wholly unscientific. Moreover, caste divided the society and prevented its proper functioning. ‘The strength of a society depends on the presence of points of contact, possibilities of interaction between different groups which exist in it. These are what Carlyle calls ‘organic filaments’ i.e. the elastic threads which help to bring the disintegrating elements together and to reunite them. There is no integrating force among the Hindus to counteract the disintegration caused by caste.’

Asserting that caste was an integral part of religion, Ambedkar felt that the Brahmmins would never be part of a process of the abolition of caste since they would lose the privileges that came with it. Quoting Dicey in support of his argument, he said that ‘a revolutionist is not the kind of man who becomes a Pope and that a man who becomes a Pope has no wish to be a revolutionist.’ This, for him, was in the very nature of sovereign power. Also, such a graded system of hierarchies in the caste system prevented a mobilization of general Hindus along the lines of Marx’s famous call of ‘Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains.’ And therefore he endorsed the Marxian thesis that revolution must come from below. And finally, speaking of the importance of being self-critical, Ambedkar draws on the thought of Carver to suggest the need of a workable scheme of morality, on his teacher John Dewey’s thought that the undesirable aspects in the past culture must be cast off in order to have a better

Ibid., p. 60.
64 Ibid., p. 65. Ambedkar sees the presence of such filaments among the Sikhs and the Mohammedans.
65 Ibid. This was in total contrast to Gandhi’s views on caste. For Gandhi caste had ‘nothing to do with religion...varna and ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do with caste...and there is nothing in the law of Varna to warrant a belief in untouchability.’ See Harijan (Ahmedabad), 18 July 1936, cited on p. 83.
66 Ibid., p. 70.
67 Ibid., p. 72.
present, and on the thought of Burke who suggested that a society without a means for change would stagnate and perish. 68

Ambedkar also made several comparisons between the situation of marginalized groups in other parts of the world and the untouchables. For him, like the Jewish problem was a ‘gentile problem’, the untouchable problem was a problem of the touchable Hindus. 69 However, he perceived the case of the Jews as one of voluntary separation and that of untouchables as being compulsory segregation. 70 Analyzing the situation of slaves in ancient Rome and negro slaves in America he felt that the situation of untouchables was far worse. The similarity in the two systems was that neither was a free social order. 71 However they were also different in that slavery was not obligatory while untouchability was, slaves could be freed but untouchables could not be, slaves were taken care of by their maters but not the untouchables. 72 In other words, that slaves were property and untouchables were not. He dealt extensively with slavery in Rome, the system of villeinage in England, servility of Jews and Negroes as parallel cases. 73 Pointing towards the lack of support for depressed classes from the Hindu society he expressed disappointment at the fact that although the funds and endowments (essentially white) for providing relief to Negroes in the US had grown numerically by the 1930s, the only association of the Hindus was the Harijan Sevak Sangha that had meager funds which were spent on petty purposes. 74

According to Ambedkar, the solution to the communal deadlock in India was in following the principle of arriving at decision based on unanimity rather than that of majority rule. The precedent for this was the working of the League of Nations. Similar provisions were made in the American Constitution regarding the

68 Ibid., p. 78.
69 B.R. Ambedkar, “Untouchables or the Children of India’s Ghetto”, in ibid., Volume V, pp. 3-112 at p. 3.
70 Ibid., p. 5.
71 For Ambedkar idea of a free social order, see “India and the Pre-requisites of Communism”, ibid., in Volume III, pp.95-98. For Ambedkar, free social order since the French Revolution meant the recognition of the individual as an end in himself and a society, the aim and object of which was the growth of the individual. He believed in the moral equality of all individuals and therefore the importance of civil and political liberties. The Hindu social order that recognized neither liberty, nor equality nor fraternity was therefore not a free social order.
72 Ibid., p. 15.
73 Ibid. See “Parallel Cases”, in Volume III, pp. 75-88.
74 Ibid., pp. 97-99. The capital fund at the disposal of the Sangh was Rs. 10 lakhs, of which only a few thousands were spent per annum.
protection of fundamental rights and the amendment of the Constitution by three-fourth majority.\textsuperscript{75}

Quite expectedly then, there are several references to external experiences in securing minority rights in Ambedkar’s Draft Articles on the Rights of States and Minorities, submitted to the Minorities Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the Scheduled Castes Federation (1942). \textsuperscript{76} Suggesting possible remedies against violation of fundamental rights regarding discrimination against citizens by government officers in public administration or by private employers in factories and commercial concerns on the ground of race or creed or social status, he felt that they ought to be treated as offences that may be tried by a tribunal set up for the purpose by the Union legislature. In his explanatory notes, Ambedkar stated that such a measure was provided for in a Bill introduced in the US Congress, the aim of which was to prevent discrimination against the ‘Negroes’. \textsuperscript{77} Outlining the provisions for protection of minorities he suggested the formation of a non-parliamentary executive which would not be removable until such time as the term of the Legislature ended and for representation of minorities in the Cabinet by election by the members of each minority community in the legislature by single transferable vote. \textsuperscript{78} The reason for this, according to Ambedkar, was that adopting the British system of Parliamentary executive would mean that the majority in the legislature would form the executive. And, whereas in Britain this majority was the political majority, in India it would be a communal majority. Also as in Britain there was no obligation upon the majority party to include representatives of the minority party, in the context of India it would result in making the majority a ruling class and the minority a subject race. \textsuperscript{79} So he proposed an American style executive (as against that prescribed in the Indian Acts of 1919 and 1935). \textsuperscript{80} The provision for an officer of minority affairs came from recommendations of the Sapru Committee. In clause 3 Ambedkar dwelt at length
on the problem of social boycott (untouchables), defining it and suggesting remedies to prevent it and records that the provisions relating to boycott were taken bodily from the Burma Anti-Boycott Act, 1922.

Article II Section IV of Ambedkar’s draft focused specifically on the rights of the scheduled castes. The clauses relating to right to representation in Legislatures, Executive and Public services and the special responsibilities of the state with regard to education of Scheduled Castes and settlement of land claims in Ambedkar’s draft relied on arrangements spelt out in the Poona Pact and the Government of India Act, 1935.81 Yet in calling for making the safeguards a part of the constitutional law of India he cited the Canadian experience and also referred to South Africa. He explained that ‘(N)o country which has the problem of a communal majority and a communal minority is without some kind of an arrangement whereby they agree to share political power....The arrangement for sharing political power between the English and the French in Canada is carried to the minutest office.’82 Also in regard to alteration, amendment or abrogation of safeguards he proposed the formulation of a strict procedure as contained in Constitutions of Australia, America and South Africa.83

One may attribute a great deal of this to Ambedkar’s American education. Eleanor Zelliot concludes that ‘American influence on Ambedkar really counted for very little. It is more likely that in those early years in America his own natural proclivities and interests found a healthy soil for growth, and the experience served chiefly to strengthen him in his lifelong battle for dignity and equality for his people.’84

Dalit Panthers and Black Panthers

In the first two decades after independence, there was no significant mobilization of Dalits. The Republican Party of India founded by Ambedkar in 1956, lost its members to the Congress party. It was a period in which the Scheduled Castes observed the working of the various constitutional safeguards

82 Ibid., pp. 112-113.
84 Eleanor Zelliot, op.cit., p. 85.
and the benefits of the five-year plans. The increasing level of poverty of these
castes and their continued ill-treatment in the urban and rural settings led
eventually to another phase of active mobilization in different parts of the country.
The Dalits who had benefited from the reservation policy of the government, who
were educated and were in the public services, started expressing their anger
against the Hindu society since there seemed to be no end to the miseries despite
conversion to Buddhism. They re-appropriated the word Dalit as a militant
alternative to being address as Harijans or Scheduled castes.

A response to these circumstances was the rise of the Dalit Panthers from
the Little Magazine Movement that had begun in the late 1960s to challenge the
literary monopoly of the high castes. It was a movement that originated in
Maharashtra among the young, educated poets and writers of Dalits. The
founders of the movement were Naîndev Dhasal and Raja Dhale. ‘They called
themselves “Dalit”, meaning downtrodden or ground down, because it was a
casteless term that simultaneously acknowledged and challenged their history of
caste oppression; and “Panthers” because ‘they were supposed to fight for their
rights like panthers, and get suppressed by the strength and might of their
oppressors.” These ‘poet-leaders’ not only wrote poems criticizing Brahmanism
and highlighting the exploitation of Dalit men and women, they organized protest
marches, ‘publicly attacked images of Hindu deities, burned the Bhagwad Gita,
and engineered a successful election boycott to bring attention to the desperate
situation of the Untouchables.’ The Panther movement was characterized by
‘opposition to ‘Brahmanism’, targeting of the mythical Brahman law-giver Manu
as the source of oppression, identification of such submerged figures as Shambuk,
Ekalavya, and Ravana (the non-aryans, Dalits, tribals, demons of epics...)
They published their manifesto at the end of a year and claimed that within this period,
they had moved from being a cultural/literary association to a political

85 Gail Omvedt (1996), op.cit. pp. 75-76.
86 Ibid., p. 77.
87 Janet A. Contursi, “Political Theology: Text and Practice in a Dalit Panther Community”,
89 Contursi, op.cit., quoting Lata Murugkar, p. 326.
90 Ibid., p. 326.
91 Ibid. These were to become the vocabulary of the women’s movement and for most sections of
the environmental, peasant and tribal movements in India.
movement. The manifesto was an ideological statement prepared with the help of Naxalite activists and integrated ‘Marx’s views of exploitation with Ambedkar’s critique of cultural oppression.’ Thus they moved from a critique of caste to concerns of economics and class. The Manifesto characterized the Congress rule as a continuation of Hindu feudalism that had taken control of the machinery of the state. They also broadened the category of Dalit to include in it members of ‘scheduled castes and tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion.’

In addition to Marxism, another external ideology inspired the Dalit Panthers was that of the Black Panthers of America. They were familiar with the ‘militant literature, community service, and political struggle’ of the Black Panthers. The name for their organization had been decided at a Dalit literary conference from a discussion of the ‘Negro literature’ of the time. They also drew inspiration from the ‘Third Dalit World’ struggle against American imperialism i.e. from nations such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Africa. This is indicative of identification with the international groups that faced oppression.

**Dalit Christians and Dalit Theology**

Seventy per cent of Indian Christians are Dalits. It was in the 1980s that Christians of Scheduled Caste origin began to identify themselves as Dalit Christians. The problem of these Christians has been that they continued to be treated as outcastes by the Church and other Christians who continue to harbour caste prejudices of the rest of the society. If one looks at the history of

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93 Contursi, op.cit., p. 326.
94 Panther Manifesto in Barbara Joshi, op.cit., p. 141.
95 Ibid., p. 145.
97 Ibid., p. 48.
98 Panther Manifesto in Barbara Joshi, op.cit., p. 145.
100 There are also Dalits among Muslims and Sikhs in India.
missionary activity in India, it becomes clear that beginning in the sixteenth century with the Roman Catholic Jesuit priest Francis Xavier, successive groups of missionaries belonging to different Christian denominations acquired the low castes as converts. The only exceptions to this phenomenon were the proselytizations by Roberto de Nobili and Alexander Duff. De Nobili, who having observed that Xavier's efforts had been confined to lower castes, adopted a priestly life style and was able to convert some high caste people to Christianity. Since early Christian activity was confined to spiritual upliftment, what was achieved as result was only 'half-salvation' with a preponderance of other-worldly concerns, while the real socio-economic issues of the lower castes remained unaddressed. So the caste-consciousness remained intact. In fact most missionaries desired upper caste converts and ended up getting low caste ones. Moreover, most missionary education was given to the higher caste converts, while low caste converts were merely given menial jobs. The Indian Church, Catholic and Protestant, inherited some of these biases and so the situation of Dalit Christians continued to be disregarded until their mobilization pressed the Church to consider their problems.

The Government of India Act of 1935, that for the first time used term Scheduled Castes to replace the term Depressed Classes, was also the first to specify that Christians would not be considered as members of the Scheduled Castes. This practice was reinforced by debates in the Constituent Assembly and the subsequent adoption of the Presidential Order of 1950 (revised, 1956) that limited the Scheduled Caste status to those professing Hinduism. Since

101 Ibid. For a brief account of the missionary activities of St.Xavier, Roberto de Nobili, Ziegenbalg and Plutschua (Protestant), Christian Frederick Schwartz (Lutheran), William Carrey, Bishop Herber and Alexander Duff (Scottish Presbyterian), see pp. 42-45.
102 Ibid., p. 47.
103 Ibid., p. 50.
104 Ibid., p. 52.
105 Jose Kananaikal, *Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1983, p. 12. It also vested the power of designating SCs in the His Majesty in Council. They were thus excluded from the Government of India(Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936. However they continued to enjoy political representation as Christians. For details, see M.E. Prabhakar, op.cit
106 James Massey (1990), op. cit., Massey argues that the three Christian representatives in the Constituent Assembly, H.C. Mukerjee, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Jerome D’Souza, S.J., were from the higher caste/class and therefore gave up the claim of Christians to special privileges and reservations in exchange for the right to profess/propagate religion, which proved as a further setback for the low caste Christians.( p. 52.) For Ambedkar’s views on Dalit converts
independence, several Christians of Scheduled Caste origin (CSCO) associations attempted to change this policy of the government. Prominent among them were the Harijan Catholic Mahajana Sabha (Kerala), Backward Class Christian Federation (Kerala), Avasa Christava Samyukta Samara Samiti (Kerala), Pravan Welfare Association, Tutikorin (Tamilnadu), Tamil Nadu Christian Depressed and Backward Classes Kazhagam, and the Akhil Gujarat Khristi Samaja Utkarsh Sangh (Gujarat). As result of these agitations, in the four states mentioned, Scheduled Caste (SC) converts to Christianity were granted some aid, while central government benefits continued to be confined to Hindu SCs. The All-India Scheduled Caste Christian Leaders Council presented a memorandum to Prime Minister Morarji Desai in 1977 regarding the discrimination suffered by them and he responded that their grievances were not justified. This was followed by the first National Convention of Christian Leaders on the plight of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin in 1978 and endorsed the amendment of the Presidential Order to include within it the SC Christians. The Church leaders however have not addressed the issue of caste divisions in the Church itself. In 1985, the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement (CDLM) was founded including some associations and groups that had been formed for this cause since 1936.

Dalit Christians have attempted to develop an alternate theology for their movement and this has been greatly influenced by Ambedkar’s views on religion, especially his criticism of the Church in India that perpetuated the caste system. Ambedkar saw religion as a source of social change rather than as a theology for moral upliftment. Some recent activists urged that Ambedkarism be used to


109 Jose Kananaikal, op.cit., p. 18

110 Ibid., p. 20.

111 M.E. Prabhakar, op.cit.

liberate the church. Arvind P. Nirmal, M.E. Prabhakar and P. Aroiadossare are the three prominent Dalit activists who have drawn on Ambedkar as a source of Dalit theology. It was on this basis that Dalit theology was developed by the Dalit Christians as a theology for emancipation. Thus, in what appears to be a curious mix of the indigenous and external inspiration from the liberation theology in Latin America, we find the interaction of the domestic and the international.

Dalit Christians framed their struggle in the language of liberation theology, and called it Dalit theology. The beginnings of Dalit theology are the early years of 1980s when writers like Arvind P. Nirmal, M.E. Prabhakar, Bishop M. Azariah, K. Wilson, V. Devasahayam and James Massey started writing about the Dalit issue theologically. Dalit theology is seen as being similar to four other liberation theologies in other parts of the world, namely, Latin American liberation theology (Gustavo Gutierrez), Black theology in the United States (James Cone), the Korean-born Minjung theology (Kim Young-Block) and the ‘theology of struggle’ in the Philippines (Eleazar S. Fernandez). All of them were formulated to address the suffering of the common people and took cognizance of the social injustices suffered by the respective groups by re-reading mainstream history and recovering the history of oppressed groups. Despite its similarity with other liberation theologies, it has been argued that Dalit theology is not similar to the theologies of the marginalized groups developed in other parts of the world. Its proponents argue that:

(It) may not be seen as a counter-theology to European-constructed systematic theologies or traditional Indian Christian theology, for these theologies were not intentionally formulated as enabling theological expressions to deal with the Dalit experience, nor were they based on Dalit life in the past or present. Nor is Dalit theology interchangeable with any of the other liberation theologies... there are obvious links on the issue of

113 Ibid., p. 66.
114 Ibid. For their appropriation of Ambedkar, see pp. 65-73.
116 Ibid., p. 51.
history and on the general goal of the entire liberation of the whole people. But on the issues of actual history, context, racial elements, ideological basis, all liberation theologies differ from each other and differ from Dalit theology.\textsuperscript{118}

Borrowing from the revolutionary writings of Paulo Freire, some Dalit theologians argued that the Dalits had to overcome their sense of inferiority by themselves and then humanize the dehumanized oppressor.\textsuperscript{119} This line of thinking rejected the ‘gift’ of reservations given by the Government as sops to keep the Dalit in his inferior position.\textsuperscript{120} Yet another scholar reiterated this point and argued that the very acceptance of the status of ‘Dalit’ meant a loss of the ‘sonship of God’, ‘of wisdom… righteousness’, sanctification and redemption’, ‘sonship of man from the Son of Man’, ‘the fellowship of freedom, oneness and love’, ‘the sense of sin, grace and salvation’ and ‘the fellowship of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, Bread of life and Word of life’.\textsuperscript{121}

The growth of Dalit theology may also be attributed to the support of the World Council of Churches. In the 1970s, the Council decided to transcend its traditional ecumenical role of denouncing racism and to work in solidarity with racially oppressed groups. At a consultation held in this connection in the Netherlands in 1980, a Dalit Christian raised the issue of Dalit untouchables in India. At the sixth assembly of the Council in 1983, Bishop M. Azariah (then the general secretary of the Church of South India) made a plea for the consideration of the case of Dalit Christians in its work on human rights. However, since the movement itself was not very organized at this stage, the Council could not take up their cause. By the 1990s, the Dalit Christian movement was fairly organized and

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 62. Also see M.R. Arulraja, Jesus The Dalit: Liberation Theology by Victims of Untouchability, an Indian version of Apartheid, Secunderabad: Volunteer Centre, 1996. In the opinion of Father Gispert Sauch, Dalit theology comes very close to the Minjung theology of Korea in its emphasis on political as well social dimensions of power. Stated in an interview held on 7.10.2003.

\textsuperscript{119} Dr. Benjamin Khan, “Reconstruction of the Philosophy of the Dalit”, in Benjamin Khan, ed., Dalit Christian Movement and Christian Theology, Indore, M.P: New Christian Perspective Association, 1995, pp. 8-13. However, Dalit Christians from Punjab, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh continue to demand the benefits of reservations since most of their ancestors were Hindu. For details see Ebenezer Samuel, “A Note on the Christian Dalit Movement in Punjab (India)”, in ibid., pp. 37-39.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 12.

\textsuperscript{121} For these biblical references see Dr. Reverand C.W. David, “Dalit Movement as a Great Divide among Indian Christians”, in ibid., pp. 14-23 at pp. 16-18. The author allays fears of further division of the Church in India along caste lines as a result of the Dalit Christian movement.
made a plea to the Council. At its seventh assembly in 1991, the Council recognized these Dalits being the indigenous people of India. The World Council of Churches played a crucial role in building a united movement of Dalits from all religious groups in India.\footnote{Massey (1997), op.cit., “Introduction”. For the role of World Council of Churches in initiating the Dalit solidarity programme based on ‘interfaith’, see pp. 45-47.}

**From Racism as Caste to Caste-ism as Race**

It is interesting to note that between 1930-1960, several American sociologists likened racism to caste-ism and thought that the comparison better enabled them to understand the ‘Negro problem’ in America.\footnote{Andre Beteille, “Race, Caste and Gender” in *Man*, NS 25, September 1990, pp. 489-504. In this paper he argues that then inequalities perpetuated by caste and race are quite similar in the context of the treatment of the women of the ‘inferior’ groups by men of the ‘superior’ group.} In fact, there existed a Caste School of Race Relations at the Chicago School of Sociology pioneered comparative research on race as caste.\footnote{Kamal Visweswaran, “Is there a Structuralist Analysis of Racism? On Louis Dumont’s Philosophy of Hierarchy” in Robert Bernasconi, ed., *Race*, Massachussets, USA: Blackwell, 2001, pp. 205-217 at p. 209.} Sociologists and anthropologists, both white and black, such as Lloyd Warner, Allison Davis,

St. Claire Drake and John Dollard conducted ethnographic studies of the Southern US states and concluded that caste was the ‘the best way to understand US race relations.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 210.} Gunnar Myrdal’s *American Dilemma* was probably the most significant work in this paradigm. To quote:

> The term ‘race’ is ...inappropriate in a scientific inquiry since it has biological and genetic connotations, which run parallel to widely spread racial beliefs. The...term ‘class’ is impractical and confusing...since it is generally used to refer to a non-rigid status group from which an individual member can rise or fall...We need a term to distinguish that large and systematic type of social differentiation from the small and spotty type and have...used the term caste.\footnote{Ibid. Gunnar Myrdal quoted on p. 211.}

Myrdal however pointed out that ‘unlike in India, caste in the United States existed in a moral environment governed by the principle of equality.’\footnote{Andre Beteille, op.cit., p. 490.}

Oliver Cox challenged this interpretation and argued that caste was unique to India and that race relations in the US were primarily class relations. It is in this
context that Louis Dumont wrote *Caste, Class and Race* (1948) in which he anticipated the arguments he put forward in his famous *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966).\(^{128}\) He argued that the hierarchical system of caste in India was mainly religious while the racism in the West was a result of the efforts of an egalitarian society at eliminating difference.\(^{129}\) Borrowing on the structuralist argument of Claude Levi-Strauss and Weber's *Religion in India* (linking caste to Hinduism and forwarding the analogy of caste system to sex relations), Dumont argued that the 'distinctive opposition' in the case of India was that between the pure and the impure and that was what was reflected in the religion-endorsed caste hierarchy. However, this hierarchy merely reflected the 'status' of the caste groups. It was not a reflection of power relations, which according to him were confined to political and economic domains and were subordinate to caste hierarchy.\(^{130}\)

Such similarities were also highlighted in the course of some researches undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s. Scholars of comparative politics discussed the similarities in the political behaviour of blacks and 'untouchables' as deprived groups and their social movements in terms of their political orientation, activities and nature of participation.\(^{131}\) Some social anthropologists based in the United States and in Africa in the 1960s and the 1970s wrote of the similarities between caste in India and what they described as caste-systems in other parts of the world. Gerald Berreman argued that caste-systems everywhere were defined by hierarchy and cultural distinctiveness, with psychological and socio-cultural concomitants.\(^{132}\) He had arrived at this conclusion without sacrificing the cultural content of

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128 Louis Dumont, "Caste, Racism and Stratifications: Reflections of a Social Anthropologist", in Bernasconi, op.cit., pp. 218-234. For critical comments on the inability of separation of power and status and the idea that the abolishing of slavery gave rise to racism, see Visweswaran op.cit. The main criticism of Dumont by Berreman, Kathleen Gough and Joan Menchor is that he has used brahminical texts to arrive at his conclusions. These an many other scholars provide a view from the below countering the argument that there are no power-relations in the caste system and discuss the distinctiveness of caste cultures. For details regarding this and on contemporary perspectives on caste, see S.M Michael, ed., *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1999.

129 Kamal Visweswaran, op.cit., p. 209.

130 Ibid., p. 207 and p. 211.


particularly social systems by using concepts derived from studies relating to stratification, cultural pluralism and social interaction.¹³³

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, British administrators interpreted the status of the outcastes as that of slaves and in their general policy of abolishing slavery in all part of the world in the 1820s, they abolished the rights of feudal lords over them.¹³⁴ Phule’s equation of outcastes with slaves has already been discussed in detail. Writing at the turn of the century, H.H Risley and G.S. Ghurye pointed out that the caste system was a result of the racial encounter.¹³⁵ The colonial debate on whether caste divisions were racial divisions was firmly refuted in 1964 by the eminent historian D.D. Kosambi. Kosambi argued that:

the theoretical system (division into the four fold caste system) is roughly that of classes, whereas the observed castes and sub-castes derive clearly from tribal groups of different ethnic origin...(T)he relative status of the small local castes depends always upon the extent of, and the caste’s economic position in, the common market.... (T)he lower one goes in the economic scale, the lower the caste in the social scale on the whole. At the lowest end we still have purely tribal groups, many of whom are in the food-gathering stage.¹³⁶

Another factor that accounted for the lower status of some castes was their later transition to food production and it is precisely these lower castes that constitute the workers and peasants, the primary food producers.¹³⁷ In the earliest Veda, Rig-Veda, which is dated 2000-1500 B.C. the only caste difference was of colour between the light skinned Aryans and their darker enemies.¹³⁸ The shift from pastoral to agrarian society by 600 BC was the period of re-Aryanization of the mixed people.¹³⁹ However, the subsequent inter-mixing of Aryans with non-

¹³⁴ Edmund Leach, “Caste, class and Slavery: The taxonomic Problem” in ibid., pp. 1-21 at p. 12. Leach also pointed out the differences between caste and race, many of which came to be discussed in the context of the WCAR and will be dealt with in detail a little later in this chapter.
¹³⁵ Andre Beteille, op.cit., p. 490.
¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 46.
¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 81-82.
¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 117-120.
Aryans obliterated this distinction. He identified two distinct impulses for the development of the caste system— one, an internal stimulus that resulted in a class structure within the tribe and second, an external stimulus which was the result of the contact between producers and gatherers by fighting or some form of exchange during the eastward expansion of the food-producers into the Gangetic Valley around 700 B.C. And finally with feudalism, caste performed an administrative function, still keeping the primary producer at work without the use of too much force. 140 Some contemporary historians while seeking to defend the work of some officials of the British Indian government still argue that the idea of race in India was not just a British invention since many of their Indian informants spoke of caste as a racial division. 141 However, mostly, British ethnographers saw linguistic and religious divisions as racial divisions. 142

Contemporary historians like Romila Thapar who have based their analysis on the preceding work, also contest the Aryan theory of race and claim that historical evidence suggests the myth of the Aryan race. According to Thapar, Orientalists established a connection between language and race and said that similarities in language of Sanskrit and that of other languages belonging to the Indo-European group symbolized a common descent from the Aryan race. So a distinction was made between Aryan and Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic races based on the languages they spoke. Further, she contends that comparative philologists and those working on early Sanskrit texts, such as the Vedas, read the word aryas as having a racial connotation and hence characterized the relationship between the aryas and the dasas as a racial one. 143 Based on a detailed study of archeological

140 Ibid. For details of how this process was regulated by the Brahmins, see pp. 50-52. 'The further expansion into the interior of the peninsula which was far more varied led to further development and a new function of caste, where the Brahmin would write Puranas to make the aboriginal rites respectable, while the savage chiefs of the tribes would turn into kings and nobles ruling over the tribes.' (p. 171.) For the origin of the caste system and its ambiguous relationship with the coming of the Aryans see "The Aryans", pp. 72-95.

141 See especially Susan Bayly, "Caste and 'race' in the Colonial Ethnography of India", in Peter Robb, ed., The Concept of Race in South Asia, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995 [Page nos. missing]. Nicholas Dirks also argues along the lines of Kosambi and Thapar. Iravati Karve is perhaps the only contemporary Indian anthropologist who demonstrated cultural distinctions among caste groups in India and argued that in some cases, caste differences were ethnic and racial.


143 Romila Thapar, "Which of us are Aryans?", Seminar 364, December 1989, pp. 14-18, p. 15. Also see Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid-First Millennium B.C. in the Ganga Valley, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1984. Thapar argues that contrary to oriental (racial) theorizing, ancient India was a lineage society in which clans

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evidence and texts she argues that the formation of castes is a more complex process than that suggested by the racial theories.\textsuperscript{144} Caste looked at as \textit{jatis} (sub-castes) suggests other avenues and emphases in the development of a caste society. ‘Jatis evolve from the intermeshing of a variety of factors such as location, environment, technology, access to resources, differences in the patterns of social observances, and the ideology of ritual purity. A caste society is characterized by hereditary groups ordered hierarchically, associated with particular marriage and kinship relations and often viewed as performing services for each other...History provides evidence of kinship patterns and occupation to caste identities, as well as evidence of transition from what has been called from ‘jana’ to ‘jati’ (generally translated as tribe to caste).\textsuperscript{145}

The post-Ambedkar Dalit movement has generally not subscribed to the theory of racial origins of caste. Some activists who had attempted to internationalize the issue in the beginning of the 1980s still appeared ambiguous in their initial stand on the issue. V.T. Rajshekhar, for instance, made a clear racial connection between the Aryans and the fascists and racists of different brands in the world. To quote, ‘...that Aryans who constitute the bulk of India’s ruling class are the founders of Fascism and Racism.'\textsuperscript{146} Most others have sought to highlight similarities in situations of oppressed groups, or work in solidarity with them or have used the UN forum for anti-racism to highlight their problem as one of decent-based discrimination. This can be substantiated by looking at the writings of some contemporary Dalit activists. A noted US-based Dalit activist Laxmi N.

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\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p.17. The Varna system, reflecting social stratification, was nevertheless an idealisation of this stratification.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{146} V.T.Rajshekar, “Apartheid in India: An International Problem”, Bangalore: Dalit Sahitya Academy, 1983. In the Preface to the first edition he writes that this was the document presented by him as the representative of Indian Untouchables at the Asian Racial and Minorities Conference held in New Zealand in 1978. (p. 14.) Another argument that one witnesses in the text, is that the condition of the Untouchables is worse than that of the “Negroes”. The reason for this is that while the slavery of “Negroes” was sanctioned by law, the treatment of Untouchables is sanctioned by religion. In the same text, V.T Rajshekar quotes another prominent Dalit (Janata Party) leader, Babu Jagjivan Ram speaking at a function organized by the Martin Luther King Society held in New Delhi in which he compares the prejudices suffered by the blacks and untouchables as similar, despite their being no phenotypical differences between higher and lower castes in India. He quotes Dr. Ambedkar as making a similar comparison between the plight of the untouchables with the slaves of ancient Rome, the “Negroes” of America and the Jews of Germany.
Berwa argued that the issues facing the untouchables were those of slavery, bonded labour, and violations of civil and human rights.  

The issue was hotly debated yet again in the months preceding the World Conference Against Racism, 2001 at which the Dalits participating in the NGO caucus had decided to raise the issue of caste discrimination. Offering a comparative perspective in the manner of Berreman, a leading writer Ambrose Pinto defends this strategy on the ground that caste was a variety of race. According to him, both race and caste are entirely ascriptive and defined by endogamy, inter-generational inequality, personal and institutional prejudice and discrimination and segregation. However, it became easier to defend since there were a number of groups from South Asia, East Asia and Africa, all of whom asserted that the kind of work and descent based discrimination they had faced must be addressed by the UN forum for anti-racism.

That the problem was not confined to India’s Dalits was highlighted yet again by activists participating in a seminar on Exclusion, organized by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, in December 2001 after the WCAR.

The following counter-arguments were advanced by those who were against the inclusion of the issue as a matter of racial discrimination on the basis that there were fundamental differences between caste and race. According to Dipankar Gupta, apart from the historical inaccuracy that results from viewing caste differences as racial, there are several other features of a caste society that are different from a society that is racially divided. For instance, mixed races such as mulattos and mestizos occupy higher rank and privileges when compared to blacks. Secondly, caste identities get more commitment at the local level whereas race identities get the commitment at the more general level. Racial hierarchy is based on a colour continuum and is accepted as such, while caste hierarchy is not based on colour and is not readily accepted. Moreover, blacks

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151 Ibid.
resorted to 'passing' in order to avoid racial prejudices and to merge with the larger society, but Sanskritization is hardly akin to this phenomenon. It involves emulation but not merger of castes.\textsuperscript{152} D.L Sheth pointed out some more distinctions such as that the former afforded more social mobility than the latter, although both were hereditary phenomenon.\textsuperscript{153} He also argued that 'race has a biological connotation whereas caste is a socio-cultural construct. Further, he pointed out the likely negative consequences of this for the Dalit movement, the most prominent among them being a total substitution of the conceptual categories developed in the long struggle by the Dalits and an abandonment of the 'ideological and organizational objections to the caste system, which would then have to be defended in everyday politics.\textsuperscript{154}

Dalits and the United Nations: From the Human Rights Commission to CERD

The first ever submission made by a Dalit to the United Nations was a memorandum by E.V. Chinnaiah on behalf of the Adi-Andhra Association to Secretary General U Thant in 1968, requesting the UN to consider the problems of the Dalits and seek to enforce their demands of 'separate electorate, a separate rehabilitation programme in the villages and protection from the atrocities' since the Indian government had failed to protect their interests.\textsuperscript{155} However, Dalit immigrants in the UK, US and Canada were pioneers in the internationalization of Dalit concerns in their countries of destination since the 1970s. UK had the largest Dalit immigrants who established the Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Councils who invited dynamic speakers to their annual functions and presented a portrait and some writings of Ambedkar to the London School of Economics and Columbia University.\textsuperscript{156} As a result of their efforts, they were able to secure the attention of the Minority Rights Group International (MRG) which published a

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., pp. 36-37.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., p. 52. For further enumeration of the consequences see pp. 54-55 For a critique of internationalization of the Dalit movement on the ground of some elites/ non-dalits representing dalits and in which forums see Gopal Guru, "Politics of Representation", Seminar 508, December 2001, pp. 29-33.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p. 133. According to Dr. Vivek Kumar the role of the FABC has been crucial in making the issue of caste discrimination in India known in England. Stated an interview on 6.10.2003.
report entitled The Untouchables of India in 1975. In this report, Dalits were categorized as minority.\textsuperscript{157} The report expressed concern over the persecution of minorities in India among which it included the untouchables along with the Kashmiris and tribals.\textsuperscript{158}

The early years of internationalization of the movement provide useful insights in understanding the present nature of the movement. Dalits in the United States mobilized under the aegis of Volunteers in Service of India’s Oppressed and Neglected (VISION), headed by Shobha Singh. VISION was founded in July 1978. In 1981, Laxmi Berwa Secretary of VISION, requested Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for an appointment during her visit to the US.\textsuperscript{159} However, Indira Gandhi refused to meet the representatives of VISION. So on 29 July 1981, Dalit activists staged the first protest demonstration in front of the White House. They were joined by members of Ambedkar Mission (Canada), Guru Ravidas Sabha (San Jose, California).\textsuperscript{160} In following year, Berwa gave a testimony on behalf of the Dalits to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. His presence in the UN forum was facilitated by MRG.\textsuperscript{161} In England T. Hirekar carried this mission forward.\textsuperscript{162}

At the same time in India, V.T. Rajshekar emphasized the need and rationale to internationalize the Dalit issue. He argued that the problem of Dalits was not amenable to internal solution. Referring to a letter written by Ambedkar to W.E.B Dubois on 2 July 1946 in which Ambedkar discussed the option of taking the issue to the UN, Rajshekar argued that just as all other persecuted minorities were seeking the help of the UN, so should the Dalits.\textsuperscript{163}

There were voices of criticism of the process of internationalization that expressed caution with regard to the formation of alliances or solidarity networks


\textsuperscript{159} Dr. Laxmi Berwa, “US Dalits SOS to Indira: Human Rights Violations in India”, DV, Vol.1, No. 23, 16-30 September 1982. He also quoted Dr. Ambedkar’s parallel between anti-Semitism and casteism

\textsuperscript{160} Editorial, DV, Vol.1, No.23, 16-30 September 1982, pp. 1-2, continued on p. 11.

\textsuperscript{161} In response to a questionnaire, Dr. Berwa clarified tha his testimony did not used the world, Dalit, rather it called them untouchables. According to him, ‘the term Dalit symbolizes the Untouchables’ moment of self-respect, self pride, just like in America the Afro-American had the slogan of "black is beautiful." Dr. Berwa presently head VISION.


\textsuperscript{163} DV, Vol. 2, No. 21, 16-31 August 1983, pp.1-2, continued on p.11.
in the international arena. As an evidence of the internal critique of the movement, a prominent scholar activist, Gail Omvedt, criticized the movement's acceptance of the support of the American government. It was reiterated that this international alliance had to be with the oppressed peoples of the world and not the imperialist governments.\textsuperscript{164}

In testimony given to the 36\textsuperscript{th} session of the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights at Geneva on 19 August 1983, Bhagwan Das, Advocate and Chairman of the All-India Samata Sainik Dal and Ambedkar Mission Society, New Delhi apprised the Commission of caste discrimination prevailing in the entire South Asian region and spoke at length about the inadequacy of laws and weaknesses in existing Acts. He also mentioned the issue of difficulties in the process of conversion to another religion for members of the community who forfeited all state protection on conversion. He raised the issue of impunity of the police forces and the biased procedures of recruitment to the armed forces that adversely affected the lowest castes. He made an appeal that a Commission be set up to investigate the practice of untouchability in any part of the world and to monitor the acts of governments in caste-ridden societies and to receive complaints related to caste-based discrimination and violence.\textsuperscript{165}

Alliances were made with the Black movement in the United States. A of Blacks and Untouchables held in New York in November 1983 recommended that the Dalits should emulate the black mobilization in the form of migration to cities and representation in urban civic bodies.\textsuperscript{166}

Representatives of international human rights organizations like the Amnesty International, Minority Rights Group, World Conference on Religion and Peace were appalled at the magnitude of 'Indian Apartheid'.\textsuperscript{167} The advocacy done by Dalits at the London Office of Amnesty International was reflected in this

\textsuperscript{164} \textit{DV}, Vol. 3, No.19, 16-31 July 1982, Letters to the Editor, p. 10. The scholar-activist was reacting to \textit{DV} expressing its gratitude to then US Ambassador to UN, Jeane Kirkpatrick, for her support to Dalits.

\textsuperscript{165} \textit{DV}, Vol. 3, No.1, 16-31 October 1983, pp.1-2, In an interview held on 3.10.2003 Mr. Bhagwan Das explained that he was speaking on behalf of various untouchable and Buddhist organizations of India, namely, the Indian Buddhist Council, Ambedkar Mission (Canada) and Dr. Ambedkar Mission (Bradford U.K.). He made this intervention from the platform of the World Conference on Religion and Peace.

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{DV}, Vol. 3, No. 12, 1-15 April 1984, p. 7 col.1 continued on p. 10.

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{DV}, Volume 3, No. 12, 1-15 April, 1984, p.1. The editorial expressed its concern that the Indian units of these international organizations had been occupied by the brahmins and they were not allowing these truths reach organizational headquarters.
important international human rights NGO taking explicit note of police violence against the untouchables (and other minorities). 168

The Dalits had made common cause with the Buraku Liberation League as far back as 1984. It has been argued that a caste-like division was introduced in Japan by the Buddhist missionaries from India in the seventh century. Since then, the Burakumin were treated as external to the hierarchical medieval structure comprising the Samurai warriors, farmers, artisans and merchants. Their subordination continued despite the 1871 law emancipating them from their outcaste status. 169

In recent times, the Ambedkar Centre for Justice and Peace (ACJP) was established by Yogesh Varhade in 1990. The organization has worked incessantly over the decade of 1990s for the Dalit cause. 170 Varhade has made representations to every possible human rights forum, including the Working Group on Indigenous People. The process of internationalization that commenced in 1975 has involved making representations to various foreign governments, forming alliances with international NGOs and making submissions to the UN Human Rights Committee, Committee of the Convention on Rights of Child, Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and to the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination. 171

The Discourse of Racism and Anti-Racism

The origin of racial thinking, and therefore of anti-racism, that may be seen as a result of the interaction of/ encounter among/ knowledge of diverse cultures, has been traced as far back as the Roman imperial discourse. Thus Lucius Seneca (4 BC- 65 AD) held that:

168 Barbara Joshi in a letter to the editor, DV, Volume 3 September 16-30, 1984 No.23
169 DV, Vol. 3, No.24 October 1-15, 1984, pp.4-5. However, this is a contested fact.
170 Based on a telephonic conversation with Mr.Varhade. According to the activist, most of the discussion of India’s periodic reports in the CERD by the Committee members as seen in the summary records and adopted in the concluding observations were based on the representations made by the ACJP. The importance of path breaking work done by the ACJP was highlighted by Smita Narula of Human Rights Watch at the recent WCAR. Speaking at the WCAR, she said that the inclusion of the case of dalits in the international forum for anti-racism was entirely due to the efforts of the ACJP for over a decade.
171 For the role of the Ambedkar Centre for Social Justice established by Yogesh Varhade see http://www.ambedkar.net.
Among his own people the colour of the Ethiopian is not notable, and amongst the Germans red hair gathered into a knot is not unseemly for a man. You are to count nothing odd or disgraceful for an individual which is a general characteristic of his nation.\textsuperscript{172}

Seneca and others such as Montaigne defended the relativist notion that though people in different cultures were different they were not unequal. However the writings of other relativists such as Montesquieu propagated certain ideas of superiority of the European culture.\textsuperscript{173} The Enlightenment ideal of universalism that saw all humanity as one also proposed that people of all races would ultimately subscribe to the European value-system. The writings of Auguste Comte and the universalism of Karl Marx may be seen as exemplifying this thinking.\textsuperscript{174} The age of imperialism, however, witnessed the most clear exposition of western racism against the colonies. In fact since racial and colonial ideologies reinforced each other, anti-colonial struggles were often seen as anti-racist struggles.\textsuperscript{175}

However, in the resistance to colonialism itself anti-colonial struggles resorted to the idea of indigenous racism to challenge the racism of the foreigners. Bonnet illustrates this by indicating the combination of anti-colonialism, indigenism and privileging mestizaje (racial mixture) in the thinking of Jose Vasconcelos and Simon Bolivar; the idea of Chineseness developed by the progressive thinkers such Yan Fu and Pan Guangdan who are associated with ‘Chinese Enlightenment’ along the lines of European Enlightenment; the Eurocentric egalitarianism in Du Bois’s anti-racism and the creation of a pan-African negro identity on the basis of the Negro race; and the critical analysis of Negritude as the ‘other’ of the colonial racism in the writings of Frantz Fanon.\textsuperscript{176} The point Bonnet enforces is that for long, the dilemma of the anti-racist is that he has to use the category of race to criticize racism and to deny racial differences. Another important point he makes is that though the anti-colonial struggles were anti-racist, they were by no means egalitarian with regard to their own societies.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{172} Quoted in Alastair Bonnet, \textit{Anti-Racism}, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p.13.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., pp.13-19.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., pp.19-24.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., p.24.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., pp. 25-45.
\textsuperscript{177} Bonnet, op.cit., p. 33.He makes this point in the context of Chinese anti-colonialism.
Since the end of the Second World War, the myth of the existence of races has been debunked by the work of United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), and race has been firmly relegated as an illusory category. However, racially discriminated groups continue to feel it as an existential reality. In fact, ‘it is in the lived experience of ‘race’ as social division, that, historically, has so often provided the basis of the solidarities and collective identities at the heart of anti-racist struggles by those most immediately subjected racially discriminatory practices.’\(^{178}\) In other words, race does not exist but racism does. This has now been formulated as a debate between realist and phenomenological conceptions of race.\(^{179}\) Even Marxists like Oliver Cox and more recently Paul Gilroy who have said that race is merely an analytical/descriptive category have not succeeded in severing the link between race and racism.\(^{180}\)

Over the centuries, the meaning ascribed to the word race has changed. Until the Eighteenth century, race was the idea of similarities and differences arising due to common descent influenced basically by geographical and climatic conditions. These could be physical similarities or those of language and manners (culture). The idea that differences in geography and climate ultimately produced different types of men among the same species was the new thinking, which saw race as type. Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged the idea of race as ‘type’ and popularized the idea of race as sub-species. In the post-1945 period in immigrant societies the idea of race has been used to designate people of different regions of the world such as Asian, Black, or even nations, Chinese or Pakistani. Each phase witnessed a different sort of racism and therefore the strategies of anti-racism also


\(^{179}\) Ibid., p. 2, According to the authors, ‘the political context of these debates has been changing from a politics of emancipation (collective self-determination of oppressed groups), predominant from the 1950s to early 1980s, to the institutionalization of ‘multiculturalism’ as governmental, international NGO and corporate policy.’

varied. Moreover, in different countries, the strategies of anti-racism were different based on the historical differences.

The most significant international development on anti-racism since the UNESCO conferences of the 1950s and 1960s that revealed the pseudoscientific basis of race was the International Convention on the Elimination on all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1965). Although the Convention did not define racial discrimination in such a manner as to limit its applicability to cases in which there was manifest use of doctrines of racial superiority, this is in fact how the Convention worked until recently. This is perhaps due to the fact that the whole idea of anti-racism was pushed on the United Nations (UN) agenda either in the context of the anti-Semitism in Western Europe or that of the newly independent Third World against the Western nations largely in the economic context. While the organizing of the World Conferences symbolizes the acceptance of structural racism in the international order, the actual focus of the UN forum for anti-racism since its formation has been with particular marginalized groups in different countries. So far there have been three World Conferences Against Racism, each in the midst of a UN Decade against Racism. In the first decade from 1973-83, the Third World was successful in pushing the resolution of Zionism as Racism and the World conference in 1978 focussed squarely on this aspect of racism. The second decade of 1983-93 and the second World Conference in 1983 also reflected a prominent Third World concern with Apartheid in South Africa and celebrated


185 Ibid., p. 50.

its success with the dismantling of apartheid in 1990.187 All the while, the concerns of marginalized groups within the states, both western and non-western had been sidelined. In the third decade against racism, from 1993-2003, these groups had mobilized considerably and their concerns were raised by the NGO forum at the Third World Conference against Racism at Durban in 2001. However, the issue of Zionism as Racism and that of reparations for slavery dominated the official conference.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) was set up as the international body monitoring racial discrimination in all member countries. From an analysis of the interactions between state parties to the Convention and the Committee, it is evident that the Committee has taken a broad view of racial categories in different countries including indigenous peoples, religious and linguistic minorities.188 There was however a problem with countries such as India that denied the existence of racial groups or like the Dominican Republic that denied the existence of racial discrimination. The focus of the CERD Committee had been transferred to issues of descent based discrimination within the Asian and African countries. Special Rapporteur Goonesekere was appointed to submit a report on the different forms of racial discrimination and slavery that existed in Asia. It is at this juncture that the issue of caste discrimination was raised as an issue of descent based discrimination in the forum for anti-racism.

**Caste-ism as Racial Discrimination: the Debate in the UN**

At the core of controversy regarding the inclusion of caste-based discrimination in the forum for anti-racism was the issue of the relationship between caste and race.

In the United Nations, more precisely in the Committee of the CERD, the debate among the contending parties has been on the precise mandate of the Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Article 1.1 of the convention reads thus:

> In this Convention, the term – racial discrimination-shall mean any distinction exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin

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187 Ibid.

188 Ibid. Synopsis of the dialogue between states parties and the CERD, as on September 2000, pp. 10-27.
which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

For a long time until 1996, the Government of India argued that caste is not race and so the issue could not be raised in the forum for anti-racism. Its contention was that the term ‘descent’ in the UN Convention on Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination referred solely to ‘racial descent’. In Part I of its tenth to fourteenth periodic report submitted to Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Indian Government its position on the relationship of caste and race. The following excerpts from the report highlight the official Indian stance on this issue:

4. ...Any consideration of India’s overall approach and policies towards the elimination of racial discrimination must begin with an understanding of the racial diversity of India. In matters related to race, India’s experience may be seen as sui-generis and the quintessence of Indian society is the intermingling of races....

5. ...A variety of racial sources have (therefore) contributed to the ‘mix’ that is the hallmark of the Indian people today. The fusion of these diverse racial elements over the centuries has meant that Indian society is not racially or ethnically homogenous. Categorical distinctions of “race” or “national or ethnic origin” have ceased to exist and race itself, as an issue does not impinge on the consciousness or outlook of the Indian citizens and their social relations. Today India is a mosaic of different groups who seek identification in terms of language, religion, caste or even regional characteristic rather than race, colour or ethnic origin.

6. ...The term ‘caste’ denotes a ‘social’ and ‘class’ distinction and is not based on race...

7. Article 1 of the Convention includes in the definition of racial discrimination the term “descent”. Both castes and tribes are systems based on “descent” since people are normally born into a particular caste or a particular tribe. It is obvious, however, that the use of the term “descent” in the Convention clearly refers to “race”. Communities which fall under the category of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are unique to Indian society and its historical process. As conveyed to the Committee during
the presentation of India's last periodic report, it is, therefore, submitted that the policies of the Indian Government relating to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes do not come under the purview of Article 1 of the Convention. As a matter of courtesy to the members of the committee, the Government is, however, happy to provide any information that they may require on this subject.\footnote{It was the Indian representative in 1965 who insisted on the inclusion of the term "descent" in the definition of racial discrimination as adopted by the ICERD. India took a leading role in the international action against racial discrimination due to its concern for the discrimination faced by the people of Indian origin in South Africa.}

8. Notwithstanding the racial heterogeneity, the Constitution of India specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of "race". This is mainly because the framers of the Indian Constitution largely drew upon the provisions of the United States Constitution and the Charter of the United Nations while drafting the chapter on fundamental rights.\footnote{CERD/C/299/Add.3.}

10. ...It should be noted in this regard that 'race' as a new ground for discrimination has never been invoked before the courts of law of India so far.\footnote{Concluding Observations of the CERD, CERD/C/304/Add. 3.}

Although India had ratified the ICERD in 1969, it was not until 1996 that the CERD made its first explicit decision on caste discrimination. As noted above, in its 1996 State Report to CERD, the Government of India took the position that caste discrimination did not fall under the purview of CERD, because caste was not the same as race and the term 'descent' in Article 1 referred exclusively to descent based on race. In its Concluding Observations on the Government of India's 1996 State Report, CERD opposed the Government's position, stating that though caste may not be equivalent to race, caste, nevertheless, fell within its purview under Article 1 of the Convention:

14. The Committee states that the term 'descent' mentioned in Article 1 of the Convention does not solely refer to race. The Committee affirms that the situation of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes falls within the scope of the Convention.\footnote{Concluding Observations of the CERD, CERD/C/304/Add. 3.}
against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It noted that although constitutional provisions and legal texts exist to abolish ‘untouchability’ and to protect the members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and although social and educational policies had been adopted to improve the situation of members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and to protect them from abuses, widespread discrimination against them and the relative impunity of those who abuse them pointed to the limited effect of such measures. The Committee was particularly concerned with the reports that people belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes were often prevented from using public wells or from entering cafes or restaurants and that their children were sometimes separated from other children in school.

Likewise, almost 20 years after the Indian ratification of ICCPR in 1979, the UN Human Rights Commission first noted in 1997 serious shortcomings in the performance of the Government to guarantee basic human rights to Dalits:

Despite measures taken by the government, members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continue to endure severe social discrimination and to suffer disproportionately from many violations of their rights under the Covenant, inter alia, inter-caste violence bonded labour and discrimination of all kinds. It regrets that the de facto perpetuation of the caste system entrenches social differences and contributes to these violations. The Committee also recommends that further measures be adopted, including education programmes at national and state levels to combat all forms of discrimination against these vulnerable groups, in accordance with Articles 2, paragraph 1 and 26 of the Covenant.\(^{192}\)

In 1996 and 1997, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism and Racial Discrimination inquired with the Indian Government about the situation of 'untouchables' in the country, requesting that relevant information be sent to him. The Special Rapporteur's report on the results of this enquiry was rather negative:

The report recalls that communications concerning the situation of untouchables in India were sent to the government in December 1996 and August 1997. In its reply, the government rejected allegations that it tolerated untouchability, provided the Special Rapporteur with a list of the measures taken to curb discrimination between

\(^{192}\) CCPR/C/79/Add.81, 4 August 1997, Human Right Committee Consideration of India’s Third State Party Report, CCPR/C/76/Add.6.
castes and maintained that a practice that is so old cannot be eliminated rapidly.\textsuperscript{193}

The Special Rapporteur noted the discrepancy between the facts alleged and the government's reply and expressed the need for a visit to India to enable him to evaluate the situation in cooperation with the government and the concerned communities.

In 2000, the Indian Government submitted its first report to the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).\textsuperscript{194} The Committee raised many questions on the plight of Dalit women. Noting that Dalit women's issues seem to have been neglected thus far, the Committee asked for various particulars on the status of untouchability, the impact of the caste system on the educational status of Dalit women, atrocities inflicted on Dalit women, bonded labour, women involved in manual scavenging, living standards of women in agriculture, and minimum wages implementation of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The Government of India provided details to say that various measures — legal and developmental — were being taken for the improvement of Dalit women. The final comment of the Committee on this matter were as follows:

The Committee is concerned with the continuing discrimination, including violence, suffered by women of the Dalit community, despite passage of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act), 1989... (T)he Committee considers that widespread poverty, such social practices as the caste system and son preference . . . present major obstacles to the implementation of the Convention.\textsuperscript{195}

UN bodies also addressed the issue of caste-based discrimination in the specific context of preparing an agenda for the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban in September 2001. In a resolution adopted on 31 July 2000 at its fifty-second session, the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights recommended that 'the World Conference focus, inter-alia, on situation of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, related intolerance and

\textsuperscript{194} India's First Report to CEDAW, [CEDAW/C/IND/1].
\textsuperscript{195} CEDAW/C/2000/CRP.3/Add. 30 April 2000.
ethnic conflict and other patterns of discrimination, such as contemporary forms of slavery, that are based on race, colour, social class, minority status, descent, national or ethnic origin or gender, including topics such as: the link between forms of slavery and racial and other discrimination based on descent, its implications of multiple identities of race, colour, descent, minority status, national or ethnic origin, gender.\textsuperscript{196} At the same session, the Sub-Commission adopted another major resolution in which it unambiguously stated the following:

\textit{Aware} that discrimination based on occupation and descent has historically been a feature of societies in different regions of the world and has affected a significant proportion overall of the world's population, \textit{Acknowledging} the constitutional, legislative and administrative measures taken by relevant governments to abolish practices of discrimination based on occupation and descent, \textit{Concerned}, however, at the persistence of discrimination based on occupation and descent in such societies, \textit{Declares} that the discrimination based on occupation and descent is a form of discrimination prohibited by international law.\textsuperscript{197}

And finally in this resolution, the UN Sub-Commission entrusted to an Expert Member, Mr. R.K. Goonesekere of Sri Lanka, the task of preparing a working paper on the topic of discrimination based on occupation and descent to:

1. Identify communities in which discrimination based on occupation and descent continues to be experienced in practice;
2. Examine existing constitutional, legislative and administrative measures for the abolition of such discrimination; and
3. Make any further concrete recommendations and proposals for the effective elimination of such discrimination as may be appropriate in the light of such examination.\textsuperscript{198}

From the perspective of the United Nations human rights monitoring bodies discrimination based on caste and related to descent and occupation against Dalits and various other marginalized communities constitutes a major violation of

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
human rights. These bodies have also made it clear that it is imperative upon the Indian Government, other United Nations member states as well as the UN monitoring bodies themselves to take tangible and swift action to eradicate this kind of discrimination. From an examination of UN documents we may conclude that though the UN has made way for consideration of the issue of caste based discrimination in its anti-racism forum, it has done so without having conflated race and caste.

An important development in this connection was the inclusion of the issue of caste-discrimination in the World Conference against Racism (August-September 2001). The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) an umbrella organization played a leading role in this campaign. The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), which is an umbrella organization of Dalit and human rights NGOs from all over India. It was supported many transnational non-governmental organizations in its efforts at bringing this issue to table. Although the CERD Committee had declared in 1996 that the situation of Scheduled Castes in India falls within its mandate, its inclusion in the agenda of the World Conference was strongly contested by the Government on the grounds that it did not approve of such ‘racialization’ of caste. It will be clear from the following account that this was achieved through significant mobilization and building of international alliances at the domestic and international level.

As early as August 2000, the NCDHR made a submission to the UN Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights requesting that Sub-Commission to consider the case of Dalits along with other communities such as the Burakumin in Japan and the Ozu in Nigeria as instances of caste and descent-based discrimination. The submission reiterated the gross violation of human rights of Dalits as well as their continued segregation despite the abolition of Untouchability in 1950, in what is now widely known as the ‘hidden apartheid’ of India. It urged the Sub-Commission to consider the issue at WCAR within the context of the definition of the term racial discrimination.

The NCDHR was supported by Dalit NGOs based in United Kingdom, Canada and USA as well as other international human rights NGOs. In March

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199 The NCDHR was formed in 1998. For details on the role of NCDHR in the taking the caste issue to the WCAR see, “Pre-Durban Advocacy of odds” at http://www.dalits.org.

200 For the full text see “UN Submissions,” at http://www.dalits.org.
2000, the Dalit Solidarity Network and Anti-Slavery International made a submission to the Human Rights Commission to consider the condition of Dalits as a manifestation of slavery and called for the setting up of a Special Working Group on Caste-ism.\textsuperscript{201} The International Dalit Solidarity Network (London) made a submission to the first preparatory Committee for WCAR (1-5 May, 2000), in which it asserted that `I(n much of South Asia, race has become coterminous with caste in the definition and exclusion of distinct population groups distinguished by their descent.'\textsuperscript{202} It argued that since caste based discrimination is not usually on the human rights agenda, the attempts of some UN treaty bodies to bring the issue within their mandate must be recognized and furthered.

The International Movement against Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), in a statement at the fifty-sixth session of the Human Rights Commission in March 2000, qualified caste based discrimination as a regional variation of racial discrimination based on descent and urged the WCAR and the Special Rapporteur to study the situation of Dalits and the Burakumin as such.\textsuperscript{203} Also in March 2000, Human Rights Watch compared the cases of Blacks, the Roma and Dalits as groups facing racial discrimination. It indicted India for the violation of its obligations under the ICCPR and ICERD.\textsuperscript{204} The World Council of Churches, which had been working in collaboration with the Dalit Liberation Education Trust, Tamil Nadu, highlighted the plight of the Dalit Christians in the context of the increasing number of crimes against Dalits and urged the Special Rapporteur to condemn `discrimination and discriminatory practices and policies based on untouchability and the caste system as a contemporary form of slavery in the South Asian Region.'\textsuperscript{205} In April 2000, the Lutheran World Federation, a communion of 128 member churches from around the world also made a submission to the Human Rights Commission and urged the World Conference Against Racism to address this hitherto neglected dimension of human rights violations.\textsuperscript{206} In addition to these, the Asian Legal Resource Centre made numerous statements at the

\textsuperscript{201} For the full text, see “UN Submissions” at http://www.dalits.org
\textsuperscript{202} For the full text, see “UN Interventions” at http://www.dalits.org
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{204} For the full text, see “UN Submissions” at http://www.dalits.org
\textsuperscript{206} For the full text, see “UN Submissions” at http://www.dalits.org
Human Rights Commission urging the international community to take up the cause of the Dalits. It urged the Commission to recognize all forms of caste discrimination as falling within the scope of WCAR and to explicitly equate caste with slavery and apartheid. Moving a step further, it called for the elimination of caste. 207

In the run-up to the World Conference against Racism, intense lobbying was witnessed since early 2000 at the Preparatory Commissions that finally led to the inclusion of the issue of caste based discrimination on the Agenda of the Conference. 208 The UN held the Bellagio Consultation in January 2000, which was attended by 25 representatives of discriminated communities from different regions of the World. The NCDHR attended this consultation. The Bellagio Declaration explicitly linked caste with racial discrimination, and stated that ‘every human being has multiple bases of identity, including race, color, ethnicity, national or linguistic origin, class, caste, gender and sexual orientation. Racism compounds the various other forms of discrimination a person or group may face.’ 209 In its recommendations on the core themes of the World Conference, the resolution identified the caste system as a form and manifestation of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance. Under Theme 2 of recommended core themes, the resolution identified ‘groups subject to discrimination on the basis of descent such as the Dalits and the Burakamin.’ It also recommended that the WCAR make a commitment to ‘create a United Nations voluntary trust fund and the allocation of support facilities, and a platform to give visibility and a voice, at the international and national levels, to victims of racial discrimination, including, but not limited to Dalits, Roma and Afro-Latins.’ 210

At a joint hearing conducted by the CERD and the UN Sub-Commission on the theme of promotion and protection of human rights in August 2000, a team of Dalit activists from India headed by Prakash Ambedkar, Member of Parliament from the Republican Party of India met with members of the CERD and the Sub-

208 The chronology of events and contents has been obtained (paraphrased) from ‘UN Interventions’ at http://www.dalits.org.
210 A/CONF.189/PC.1/10
Commission. Prakash Ambedkar, chaired a briefing session attended by 80 persons, including eight members of CERD and the Sub-Commission. Indian and Nepalese Dalit activists along with activists from the Japanese Buraku community shared experiences about the discrimination faced by their respective communities. Martin Macwan, the Convenor of NCDHR, made a presentation on Dalits with translations in German, French and Spanish. Also making presentations were Takahashi Masato of the Buraku Liberation League and Sagar Biswakarma, the latter, representing a Nepal Dalit organization. Atsuko Tanaka of IMADR (International Movement against Discrimination and Racism) linked and facilitated the solidarity between Buraku and the Dalits. The Commission entrusted the writing of a paper to R.K. Goonesekera, Expert Member of the Sub-Commission from Sri Lanka. The United Nations press reported that the Sub-Commission was flooded with submissions about the need to seriously address the discrimination faced by Dalits in South Asia. The Sub-Commission also passed a resolution, moved by Expert Member David Weissbrodt, to focus on descent-based discrimination at the World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

At the same time, the Minority Rights Group International held a Roundtable (WCAR Satellite) Conference on the enforcement of CERD. At this forum, an NCDHR representative made a presentation on Dalit Human Rights and on the availability and implementation of international human rights laws and instruments in India. The audience included 12 experts of the CERD Committee and Sub-Commission on Human Rights, along with a few invitees from international NGOs. Many members of CERD and the Sub-Commission expressed that the struggle of Dalits in South Asia was a challenge to the human rights community.

Prior to the Asia-Pacific Experts Seminar organized by the Governments of the region in Bangkok in September 2000, numerous Asian NGOs sent letters of appeal and petitions to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) urging that the Bangkok Seminar set aside time to address issues other

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212 Ibid.
than Migration and Trafficking. The OHCHR agreed to this request, thus allowing various NGOs to raise the issue of caste discrimination against Dalits. In particular, the Asian Human Rights Commission and Asian Legal Resource Center, both based in Hong Kong, took a strong stand that the Experts Seminar must include the issue of caste discrimination in its draft of recommendations of themes for the WCAR. Altogether, 19 NGOs supported by three other organizations submitted a statement that caste discrimination against Dalits was one of the vital themes that needed to be addressed by the WCAR. As at the 1st PrepCom in May and the Sub-Commission Session in August, there was immediate opposition from the Indian Government on the familiar grounds that the issue of caste was not relevant to the issue of race and racism as caste is not race.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Committee Meeting at Teheran in February 2001 was a landmark since at this meeting, the Nepal Government declared that the issue of caste-discrimination should be squarely addressed by WCAR. The NGO Forum at Teheran came out very strongly in favour of including caste discrimination on the WCAR agenda. The Declaration of the Asia-Pacific NGO Forum stated that even though states had enacted laws to protect the rights of Dalit communities, it is the states themselves that often violated these laws. It also recommended that the respective governments of countries home to Dalit populations create transparent monitoring mechanisms to ensure the implementation of legislation intended to ban caste-based discrimination.

Until this point, the activism of the Dalit NGOs had been successful in raising the issue at the NGO forums and the CERD. The decision on whether the issue would be on the agenda of WCAR was yet to be decided by member states.

At the Inter-Sessional Working Group Meeting in Geneva in March 2001, representatives of member states met to prepare a Draft Declaration and Programme of Action for WCAR. The representative of Barbados raised the issue of caste discrimination, which was first included in the draft and subsequently deleted. At the second Preparatory Committee Meeting, Geneva, May 2001, the International NGO Steering Committee included an NCDHR member who then met the High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson and argued the case of Dalits. At the third and final Preparatory Committee Meeting in July-August 2001, the NCDHR continued to lobby for the inclusion of caste discrimination under paragraph 109 relating to ‘occupation and descent-based discrimination’.

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Caste discrimination was the last item to be included in the Draft Programme of Action.

Conclusion: Theorizing the Dalit Movement

Based on the foregoing analysis, it is possible to comment on the nature of theorization of the Dalit movement. Scholars writing about Dalit mobilizations over a century have commented on various aspects of mobilization. Thus in the colonial period, due to the British policy and social reform movements, lower caste mobilization has been characterized as an attempted Sanskritization. In recent times also, the policy of reservations has been understood as contributing to sankritization of some sections of the urban Scheduled Castes. 214

However most Dalit mobilizations studied in here appear to be mobilizations in reaction to such Sanskritization that have asserted the distinct identity of the Dalits and their problems. Phule’s anti-Brahmanism and the detailed analysis of the problem of exploitation of the peasant castes may be understood in this context. The various non-brahman movements of the colonial era as well as the political mobilization of Dalits by Ambedkar, his contestation of the Hindu right and his analysis of the caste-class synthesis and his support for conversion may also be seen as challenging the Sanskritization thesis. In more recent times, the rise of the Dalit Panthers who were highly critical of the submissive nature of the Scheduled Caste elite produced by the reservation policy of the government. 215 The Dalit Panthers and others mobilized around the idea of a distinct Dalit culture and produced Dalit rangabhoomi (Theatre) and literature. This is the case of the Bahujan Samaj Party too. 216

These theorizations of the Dalit movement have mainly looked at the economic and social impetus behind the mobilization of the Dalits. They have not considered the impact of the prevailing transnational discourses such as those the


215 Ibid. p. 35.

rights of blacks or minorities or more recently the human rights discourse on the mobilizations.

From the foregoing discussion we may conclude that the discourse on the rights of Dalits in India is constituted by distinct external elements and in its turn contributes to the international discourse on group rights, especially that relating to anti-racism. For over a century, Dalit mobilizations and critiques of the caste system have borrowed varyingly from the external environment. Thus in the case of Phule, the external connection is reflected in the similarity he saw in the situation of slaves in the United States and the Shudratisudras. Ambedkar’s thought concerns the civil and political rights of minorities from different parts of the world, beginning with Platonic times. The Dalit Panthers drew inspiration from the Black Panthers and formulated a largely cultural reaction to caste oppression. Dalit theology was religious ideology based on the liberation theology, in opposition to the functioning of the Church infusing it with concerns of the marginalized. The internationalization of the movement as part of the discourse of human rights has resulted in the qualified racialization of the caste system. The rise to significance of the problem of descent-based discrimination in the UN is an example of the reverse phenomenon. What is the significance of this interaction?

The discourse on Dalits, which was circumscribed as a social (religious) issue within the Indian state, is now being conceptualized in the language of human rights, minority rights, indigenous rights and as an issue of racial discrimination. The representations by various human rights groups to the UN were all made in the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (formerly called Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities) and further, most of them were made under 'Item 6 of the provisional agenda' which was entitled Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and All Forms of Discrimination. This is significant considering that the Constitution of India does not recognize the Dalits as minorities, nor as indigenous peoples and certainly not as racial groups. It is also significant since whereas there is a distinct Christian angle to the internationalization of the Dalit discourse, the Constitution does not recognize Dalits among Christians.

Simultaneously, this has had the effect of a change in the meaning of racism and hence an increase in the mandate of UN’s forum for anti-racism. At the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting of the World Conference Against Racism, activist
Mari Marcel Thakaekara said that the Asian human rights organizations ‘point out that the standard definition of racism is outdated and anachronistic. It is a colonial definition stemming from the UN’s Euro-centric proclivity. Race as defined in the white Western world does not apply to the rest of the non-white world in general or to Asia in particular.’

We may conclude therefore that the conceptual issue of whether caste is race is of little consequence today. But the fact that caste discrimination is seen as a form of racial discrimination is of strategic importance for the Dalits since it has enabled them to form transnational solidarity alliances with other similarly oppressed groups and has allowed them to use the forum for anti-racism to highlight their problem. The greatest significance of this in my opinion is that this further reinforces the current position of the anti-racists on this matter: that there are no races, yet racism exists. The case of the Dalits proves not only that racism exists, but that it exists in many different forms, and is not only a matter of concern between people who are visibly different, but also between traditional groups defined by descent and occupation. While the official stand of the Indian government, which denies the existence of races in India, is progressive, the consequences of it are retrogressive, since it results in denial of the suffering of the Dalits. This has been a long-standing dilemma of anti-racism work everywhere in the world. However, the recognition of a problem must be separated from the acceptance of the categories as being natural, and this is precisely what has been accomplished by the qualified racialization of caste by Dalits.


218 Andre Beteille, op.cit. Beteille argues that the whole attempt of the UNESCO and progressive sociologists in questioning the very existence of ‘race’ and the attempts of those who have tried to establish race as a social construction will be put back by the inclusion of caste in the forum for race.