CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

In the context of marginalized sections of the community, who are recognized in India through several policies both at central and state level, despite this the weakest of the weak sections of this community are neglected. My aim is to highlight this particular section who are within the marginalized and the deprived sections, who are deprived. These sections who have not reaped the benefit of several policies of center and state for the deprived sections. While the dominant caste and tribes within the marginalized sections have benefited from the several policies of the government. In this context it is important to study Doms who are the weakest of weak, deprived and marginalized sections of community.

THE DALIT IDEOLOGY:

The Hindu ideological system had its structural and processual elements. The identity and the functions of the various groups were defined through it. This Hindu ideological system ascribed to the Doms a marginalized identity and low grade occupation like working in cremation ground, removing dead cattle, drum beating, scavenging, mat weaving and basketry. This led to them developing a disadvantaged position in society. The concomitant development resulted in their exploitation and deprivation. To break this vicious cycle, the quest for a Dalit identity started way back in the late nineteenth century.
It defines it as part, in many ways the leading part, of a broader anti-caste movement which has been a central democratic movement of Indian society. In the pre-independence period this anti-caste movement comprised strong non-Brahman movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu as well as Dalit movements in Maharashtra, Punjab (the Ad-Dharm movement), western U.P. (the Adi-Hindu movement), Bengal (Namashudras), Kerala (Narayanswami Guru’s movement), Tamil Nadu (Adi-Dravidas), coastal Andhra (Adi-Andhras), and Hyderabad (Adi-Hindus). In addition there were non-Brahman ideological trends elsewhere and weaker or unorganized Dalit assertions in such areas as Mysore and Bihar. Independent India saw two decades of quiescence for anti-caste struggles, then a renewed upsurge from the early 1970s, marked by the founding of the Dalit Panthers in 1972.

The Dalit and non-Brahman anti-caste movements can be classified as ‘anti-systemic movements’. That is, they challenged and sought to transform the basic structure of the Indian social system, replacing caste and the accompanying social oppression, economic exploitation and political domination by an equalitarian society. There were of course reformist trends in the movements as in other social movements of Indian society. These were represented within the Dalit movement.

The main figures in this larger anti-caste movement, Jotiba Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar and E. V. Ramasami ‘Periyar’, with
many others throughout India (Narayanswami Guru in Kerala, Acchutanand in U.P., Mangoo Ram in Punjab) all attacked the system of exploitation at all level, culturally, economically and politically.

They challenged the 'Hindu-nationalism' which was emerging as a consequence of the elite organizing from the nineteenth century onward to define Indian society, and the majority of Indian people, as essentially 'Hindu': not only did they criticize distortions and 'excrescences'; they attacked Hinduism itself by arguing that it was in essence Brahmanical, caste-bound and irrational. They asserted that Hinduism had not been the religion and culture of the majority but rather was an imposed religion; and that escaping exploitation today required the low castes to reject this imposition, to define themselves as 'non-hindus' and take a new religious identity. Phule tried to formulate a new, theistic religion; Periyar promoted atheism; Ambedkar turned to Buddhism; others in the Tamil Nadu non-Brahman movement tried to claim Saivism as an independent religion; Narayanswami Guru formulated 'one-religion, one caste, one god' while his more radical follower Ayyapan proclaimed 'no religion, no caste, and no God for mankind'. Whatever the specificities, the rejection of Hinduism remained a feature differentiating the anti-caste radicals from the reformers.

They were also economic radicals, through different points of view, identifying themselves not simply with low castes but with peasants and workers as such. Phule strongly attacked the
exploitation of peasants by the bureaucracy; Ambedkar and Periyar both supported and helped organize movements of peasants against landlords and workers against capitalists; and Ambedkar unambiguously identified himself as a socialist.

Politically they opposed the Indian National Congress as controlled by upper castes and capitalists (as 'Brahman and bourgeois' in Ambedkar's terms; as that of 'Irani ary-a-bhats' in Phule's terminology, as shetji-bhatji or 'Brahman-Bania' in the language of the later non-Brahman movement) and sought for an alternative political front that would represent a kind of left-Dalit unity with a core base of workers and peasants. They (particularly Ambedkar) also insisted that this had to lead to the empowerment of Dalits and other exploited sections.

This anti-caste movement, with its Dalit leading section, was part of the broader revolutionary democratic movement in India, along with the national movement and communist-and socialist-led working class and peasant movements. Ideologically and organizationally, it both overlapped and contended with these movements.

Strikingly, while the Dalit movement in India began concurrently with the upsurge of both nationalism and Marxism, it is experiencing a second upsurge today in an era of the crisis of nationalities and of socialism. Nationalism is in crisis, with both Third World societies and former socialist countries buffeted by divisive ethnic struggles and by internal groups claiming their own
'nationality'; socialism is in crisis after the fall of the regimes and the development model that claimed to be based on Marxism.

This process involves new dilemmas and possibilities for the Dalit/anti-caste movement itself – the necessity of formulating new ways forward in regard to economic strategy, political structures, cultural interpretation. It requires a rethinking of the way in which the movement has been understood.

Omvedt has argued that the Dalit movement in particular and anti-caste movements in general should be seen as 'value oriented' or 'anti-systemic' movements. This however, has not been generally accepted, for these movements have been seen as basically reformist by the dominant left intellectual trends in India, while academic social science in general have focused their efforts on understanding caste as structure without dealing with the movements against it. Therefore, to establish our point it is necessary to establish a framework for the analysis of all social movement in the colonial period and today.

The major framework within which these movements have been interpreted, even by academics, has been highly influenced by the Marxism of the twentieth century. This has had two important assumptions, first that 'class' (defined in terms of holding or not holding the means of production, or private property) has been the most important factor determining exploitation and oppression, hence both social structures and the movements to transform these; and second, that beyond simply class itself the 'national
movement', defined as the anti-imperialist movement against colonial rule and characterized in term of its main organizations (such as the Indian National Congress) has been the overarching movement of the Third World countries in the era of imperialism.

The question, of identity and existence of the 'nation', was precisely the point taken up by Phule in the nineteenth century in opposing the elite-led nationalist project at its very beginning. His argument was that a society divided by caste could not constitute a genuine nation and that those claiming to represent the nation were in fact its destroyers since they not only ignored these hierarchical divisions but actually sought to maintain them as a basis for their power. It is, in fact, in regard to what constitutes the 'Indian identity' that the anti-caste movement has its basic strength today, in contrast to the now barren record of Nehruvite secularism, as a counter to the communalization of Indian politics.

The anti-caste movement was in its own way nationalists and anti-imperialist; it saw opposition to colonial power as fundamentally connected with the struggle against what Marxists and nationalists would call 'feudalism', or the caste system; both, to it, were parts of a fundamental national struggle. It seems necessary to move beyond the narrow 'class' approach as well as the understanding of 'nationalism' only in terms of political opposition to a foreign power. This involves taking a 'revisionist Marxist' approach to two levels: in terms of the relationship between 'superstructure' and 'base' (the ideological and the
economic) and in terms of a vastly expanded analysis of the economic structure itself.

Arguing for the increase of both repressive and emancipatory forces with the spread of capitalism, they see the emancipatory project as connected to the spread of a broad democratic ideology with values of freedom, equality and autonomy; these are inherently subversive of all forms of subordination and inequality, though subversion may be a slow and protracted process. From this perspective, the Dalit movement and the overall radical anti-caste movements were a crucial expression of the democratic revolution in India, more consistently democratic-and in the end more consistently 'nationalistic'-than the elite-controlled Indian National Congress. (See, Omvedt. G.: 1994)

Shinde, Phule and Ambedkar were the pioneers in this field. Shinde gave primacy to national identity and preferred to protest against the British rule. He sought to serve their interests by reforming the caste – Hindu attitudes towards and dealing with the untouchables. He did not want a confrontation between the untouchables and the caste Hindus. He preferred to align himself with the confrontation against British. He emphasized the need for social reform to meet the problems of inequality within Indian society and the cause of revolution against the British. He began with a humanitarian interest to bring about a change in religious consciousness of people.
Phule gave primacy to the non-Brahman identity and protested against Brahmanic dominance. He sought to promote their interest by including them in the non-Brahmin protest. While Shinde emphasized the need for social reforms Phule emphasized need for social revolution and a displacement of the Brahmans from their position of power. He moved from social services to social protest and the establishing of a new religious faith. He rejected the caste ridden Brahman dominated Hindus of his day, rebelled against the basic Hindu hierarchical system and priestly dominance and sought to establish a new faith based on truth as the ultimate value and characterized by rationality, social equality and the abolition of an exclusive hereditary priestly class as the inter-mediaries between an individual and god.

Ambedkar too pleaded for a socio-cultural “revolution” and held the Brahmans responsible for legitimizing the social and religious philosophy of inequality. He felt the need for rejecting the religious tradition in which they were born and for identifying another which would be more that just and which prepared a universal morality, rather that a morality differentiated according to social status. But Ambedkar’s ideology was different from Phule’s. Phule’s main strategy to counter the dominance of Brahmans in social life was to unify all castes other that brahmans into a single homogenous category. While Ambedkar rejected the social ethnic base of caste formation, he saw that the idea of a homogenous Shudra identity did not correspond to social reality.
They also differed in term of the role they attributed to political channels as a means to their ends. (See, Gore M. S.: 1993)

Ambedkar's ideology was a protest where untouchable may belong to the same religion as the caste Hindus but do not belong to the same society. Untouchability emanates from and reaffirms a philosophy of inequality. Brahmanism is the culprit responsible for the situation and Hinduism is but Brahmanism. The problem of Untouchability is thus enforced social backwardness, continued discrimination and economic exploitation.

The manifest goal of Ambedkar's ideology was to sensitize the untouchables to their own deprivation to make them socially and politically articulate, to organize them and to agitate on their behalf to ensure immediate modification to benefit the deprived. The prevalence of social equality was in part a function of the social morality taught by a particular religion but it was equally function of the general widening of economic opportunity.

The ideology of the Dalit during this period oscillated between the exhortation for cultural and social autonomy and a pull towards integration with a reformed Hindu society. (See, Dubey M: 1995)

THEORIZING CASTE IN INDIA:

According to OMVEDT, theories of caste also exist within the societies characterized by caste. They exist at two level, one in the fragmented, unarticulated normally unconscious rules of behaviors embodied in the social relations characteristic of caste societies,
and second in the articulated and elaborated ideologies which are used by those seeking to maintain or contest hegemony within the society or to challenge that society in a basic way. These marshall arguments, sometimes with an empirical reference but just as often with moral and spiritual reference, to maintain support for the dominant structures of that society or to mobilize support for its change. In this way theories of caste have been both part of the ongoing processes of Indian society and part of the movements (national, social) seeking to change the society.

Dalit and non-Brahman movements developed their own theories of caste, drawing upon the debates and theories put forward by those around them (from those of scholars to the theories of caste dominance to the arguments of those in other major social movements of their time), but with the specific focus of using theory as a guide for achieving the abolition of caste and the exploitation and oppression it involved. In taking this as their goal they made certain assumption, i.e., that caste had an origin in history, and just as it had an origin it could be effective in aiding this process.

These theories of the non-Brahman and Dalit movement confronted two types of ideologies used to legitimate caste society. First were the traditional religiously-based ideologies, developed primarily by Brahmans, harking back to the laws of Manu and the 'creation hymn' of the Rig Veda, expressed, elaborated and ideologically glossed in the Puranic myths and renditions of the
Ramayana and Mahabharata. At this level they debated both the validity of the sacred texts (shastras, smritis, etc.) and what they really meant. Upper-caste social reformers (from nineteenth century activists like Rammohan Roy and Agarkar to Gandhi) tried to argue for scriptural justification for a change in or even abolition of the jati and Varna systems, whereas social revolutionaries like Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar agreed with the conservatives that the Hindu scriptures necessarily implied observation of caste hierarchy and used this to denounce them as irrational and exploitative.

With colonial rule another important theoretical approach entered the ideological arena to serve first as an ideological legitimation of the system of caste hierarchy replacing or supplementing an increasingly questioned religious basis, and then, reversed and turned against its earlier proponents, as a theory to oppose caste domination. This was the 'Aryan theory of race', originated by European Orientalists, propagated by British administrators in their censuses and provincial studies of caste groups, picked up by early modernist Brahmans as a way of asserting their equivalence with the white-skinned conquerors and their superiority to the darker-skinned lower castes, and then taken up by Jotiba Phule and later radicals. These theorists agreed that the majority middle and low castes (Shudras and Atishudras or outcastes in the varna interpretation) were descendents of 'non-Aryan' original inhabitants while Brahmans, Ksatriyas and
Vaishyas were descendents of their Indo-European (Aryan, Vedic) conquerors, but argued that this meant the opposite from what the Brahmans claimed: it was the Shudras and Atishudras who embodied the values and national integrity necessary for a new India, while the upper castes and their scriptures represented only a society of exploitation, superstition, irrationality and backwardness.

Phule's was the first historical materialist theory of caste, and it heralded major themes of the Dalit and non-Brahman movements that were to develop in the twentieth century. In Phule's hands it was much more than a simple 'racial theory'; rather Phule used the dominant racial framework of the 'Aryan theory' to evolve a total depiction of the role of violence and community.

Later movements, however, lost these nuances and tended to assert it as a simple racial ideology of superiority against the increasingly aggressive (and sophisticated) ideologies of caste legitimacy used by the growing Hindu revivalist movement. In effect, emphasizing racial/ethnic contradictions became a weapon against those who stressed racial/ethnic solidarity of 'Hindus'.

The 1920s saw the emergence of Marxism, asserting a new theory of exploitation of liberation, claiming to have a total analysis applicable to India as to any society. It was rapidly picked up by a group of young, educated and mostly upper - caste radical nationalists searching for a mass base of the movement and
eventually founding new communist and social parties. It also
began to assert a powerful influence on the thinking of left
Congressmen such as Nehru and his colleagues.

'Marxism' as a theory and ideology came into India and
existed for fifty years (with the solitary exception of D. D. Kosambi)
in a fairly mechanical, vulgarized form, its contribution to all
liberation movements was its firm assertion that social systems
and relations are historical (they have come into existence, change
and will come to an end), material (they have a solid base in
production and collective, non-ideal social forces), and
characterized by conflict, contradiction and exploitation. Its
disadvantage was that it took the overriding reality of 'class' and
class struggle' so strongly as to assert the fundamental irrelevance
of every other sociological category. Indeed, at first the power of the
'class' metaphor seemed so strong both for analysis and as a guide
to action that it was easy for the proponents of Marxism and
socialism to treat family, kinship, the state, gender, and in India of
course caste, as not only secondary but practically non-existent
factors. Its influence lay in its seductive strength, and it was an
influence exerted not only on Indian activities but also on
academics, to the extent that a large number of the Marxist-
influenced theoretical and empirical studies even during the 1970s
and 1980s identified their radicalism with their assertion that
behind the apparent reality of caste ultimately lay class and its
dialectics, a 'class content to a caste form'.
This Marxist mechanical materialism not only succeeded in becoming the primary ideology guiding or at least unifying the developing working class and peasant movements of the country at a national level; it also exerted a powerful influence over the anti-caste movement. For even when this movement challenged Marxist thinking to assert the centrality of caste, it tended to do so with an acceptance of the fundamental framework exerted by Marxism. For Phule, economic and social and political domination, and exploitation had been interwoven factors (which is one reason why it is inadequate to call his a 'racial theory'), but Marxism set up, for decades to come, the paradigmatic polarities of 'class and caste', 'base and superstructure', 'economic and social/ cultural/ideological'. For communist and socialist activities (and for Nehruvite progressives) this meant taking class/the base/economic as primary; and for the anti-caste radicals it meant simply turning the polarity around. In doing so, in asserting that superstructure/cultural/ideological factors were primary they identified 'caste' with the cultural/ideological sphere in contrast to the economic sphere, and argued for the secondary role, if not ultimate irrelevance of, 'economic' and 'class'. This happened in part with Ambedkar himself, and also with the Lohiaite socialists; though the socialists as much as communists seemed to assume the irrelevance of caste in the pre-independence period, once they came to theorize it as important in Indian society they too analyzed it as a non-economic cultural category.
Paradoxically, the influence of Marxism on anti-caste was thus to widen divisions. Rather than lead to an integrated theory combining economic/political/cultural factors, these were separated; activities theorized only about ‘caste’ and took ‘class’ for granted. Phule himself had no theory of economic development or changes in mode of production as part of his overall analysis; but Ambedkar (and his contemporaries) also developed little of an independent economic analysis; they took from Marxism a broad economical issue, but little of this was integrated into their social–historical interpretations of the caste system, which was treated as an altogether independent field of analysis.

The equation of class/caste–base/superstructure also held when new Marxist thinking of caste emerged in the 1970s in the face of a challenge from a renewed Dalit and anti-caste movement. This again took the form of reasserting the importance of caste as a cultural/ideological factor. If the Naxalite trend in India seemed the most ready (by the 1980s at least) to pay attention to the social reality of caste, this was in part because the Maoist framework of ‘contradictions’ could allow an understanding which was cultural or political factors as at times playing the ‘leading role’ in a contradiction. Similarly, Althusserian influence on academic Marxist could stimulate a view of the superstructure (including caste in India) as ‘dominant’ if not determinant in a pre-capitalist society. This led to an analysis, which argued that in pre-
colonial Indian society there were unique features of the structuring of economic relations as a result of caste, with jajmani (balutedari) relations being a central feature; in 'caste – feudal society' thus castes and class were interwoven while in contrast in the capitalist mode of production economic classes and castes could be seen as separating themselves from each other.

Generally these revisionist attempts took for granted the basic 'class' or economic theories of Marxism, including the analysis of the capitalist mode of production and the Stalinist 'five state' theory of history (primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism), simply identifying caste as the superstructure of feudal society. They accepted the identification of the proletariat as vanguard and the peasantry as basically a backward, feudal class designed to disintegrate (or 'differentiate') under capitalism into a basically proletarianized agricultural labour/poor peasant class and a basically bourgeois rich peasant/capitalist farmer class. They accepted the notion that not only socialism but also capitalism laid a basis in the forces and relations of production of eradicating caste relations. Thus they tended to argue that while caste is an important superstructural feature of capitalist society (important in the sense of requiring specific struggles to abolish it (a position that differentiates them from more traditional Marxist) its main function is to exercise a retarding role on the development of class struggle (for instance,
when rural rich farmer elites from 'dominant castes' use caste ties to split the rural poor).

Within the new Dalit and anti-caste movement itself attempts to present a combined 'class-caste' approach gained prominence after 1970. An important recent version is that of Sharad Patil, who has put forward a combined approach based on what he claims is a new methodology of 'Marxism - Phule - Ambedkarism', which focuses not on caste as an ideological system but on jatis as entities, arguing that in pre-capitalist societies jatis themselves were basic units of production and exploitation. In this approach, 'caste conflict' or jati sangarsh is seen as being equivalent to 'class conflicts', not simply a distraction or obstacle to the real struggle and progressive in the sense of a fight against the basic exploitation of the system. Patil also identifies caste with 'feudalism' and argues that following the British conquest class relations associated with capitalism came into existence, so that a compound class-caste struggle is necessary today.

A major problem with this approach is that even in pre-British society, castes (jatis) were only superficially more concrete than 'class'. It is true that 'classes' cannot be simply identified in pre-British India, but neither did (or do) jatis exists as solid and delimitable social units. Sub-castes, as many anthropologists have pointed out, were the real units of endogamy and interaction, while the broader jati was often a category or identity rather than an actually existing group. (See, Omvedt, G. : 1994)
DEFINITION OF TRIBES:

Tribe and caste are the special feature of the social organization of India. They are also the categories of social stratification found in India. They are the unique institutions of India.

According to W.J. Perry it "is a group speaking a common dialect and inhabiting a common territory". As given in IMPERIAL GAZETTEER - "a tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so. A caste in its simple sense is also a collection of families bearing a common name, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and very often speaking the same dialect, though it is always endogamous. When the same caste is found in two geographical areas, speaking different dialects, there is no social relationship between them and no intermarriage takes place so that the groups may be taken as distinct castes though with the same appellation". According to RIVERS tribe is a social group of a simple kind the members of which speak a common dialect and act together in such common purpose as warfare.

DEFINITION OF CASTE:

According to ANDRE BETEILLE, caste is a "small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary
membership and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system, based on concepts of purity and pollution".

**THEORIES OF ORIGIN OF CASTE SYSTEM:**

There are various theories regarding the origin of caste system in India. According to earlier theories emphasis was given on the racial origin of caste structure by RISLEY, MC IVER, KROEBER and other theorists. While Indian anthropologists like S. C ROY, N. K. DUTT and GHURYE have also linked caste with racial factor. Anthropologists have not denied the importance of racial factor in the formation of caste structure, but caste system cannot be wholly explained by race.

W. H. R. RIVERS studied the actual functioning of the caste system in the south India and he found that various castes “recognize social distance among them and a quantitative estimate of avoidance could be had from the social incompetence traditionally prescribed”.

According to the orthodox theory given by MANU, it can be divided into two parts, while the first is theoretical in the sense that it assumes a mystical origin of the four Varnas and the second explains the four fold social division and is partly historical and partly functional.

According to the first, caste orders the lives of Indian Hindu and has its basis in the five-fold Varna division embracing
Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra and Untouchable. Within each Varna there exists myriad jati, which are small endogamous groups tied to a defining occupation based in a village or group of villages, and which provide for the element of mobility within where otherwise birth determines social ranks.

The Varna system provides the system of values, the jati its functional organization and practice. Jatis may seek promotion within the caste hierarchy by adopting the practices of higher Varna, which can result in promotion within their Varna but not between Varna, a process known as sanskritization. It is believed that mobility between Varna can only be achieved through rebirth, where the successful practice of the caste code or dharma earns for the individual and increased karma and therefore higher status at rebirth.

The major dividing line within and between the caste centers around the rule of pollution. These affect commensality (sharing and preparing of food) intermarriage and any form of social intercourse. Since pollution of food is most likely, the higher Varna tends towards vegetarianism, and are also teetotal. For this reason too, meat consumption is gradated with distinctions being made between mutton, pork and beef. Spatial segregation is a natural consequence of the jati system and its attendant rules are overseen by a caste court. The caste system has been able to assimilate non-caste, non-Hindu outsiders very successfully.
The association of castes with occupation has suggested a functional interpretation of the social system and some writes like NESFIELD believe that function alone is responsible for the origin of caste system, ignoring the racial point of view, that there is no racial difference between caste but the only difference is in the function followed by the people.

**THEORIES OF ORIGIN OF TOTEMISM:**

In India many tribes and castes have claimed mystic ties with some material object, animal or plant species. This association between human groups or individuals and specific animals or plants, which entailed ritualized observance and sometimes eating avoidances was first learned by J. LONG in 1791.

J. F. MCLENNAN was the first to understand the significance of totemism as a primitive social institution. He searched for the origin of totemism asserting it to be a remnant of animism (the belief that natural phenomena, animate or inanimate alike are endowed with spirits or souls which effect consequences in society).

There are several theories regarding the origin of totemism. A. C. HADDON traced totemism from the fact that many primitive groups originally lived on a particular animal or plant species and also traded it for food and exchanged it with other tribes. In course of time they became known to other by the names of animals or plants, which were vital, and importance to their life.
Sir JAMES FRAZER gave the conception theory of totemism according to which the belief in an outward soul might have suggested to primitive man the security of lodging the soul in a totemic animal and plant, so that the possessor might become invulnerable as mortal risks in predatory life are indeed great. According to him the savages were ignorant of the process of procreation of the role the male plays in fertilization and thus the totem animal becomes the ancestor of the clan, the animal sometimes mysteriously fecundating the women.

According to HOPKINS totemism rests on food supply and the worship of totem objects is a secondary stage.

According to WUNDT's theory totemism underlies all religion and that underlying the totem is the belief that the worms crumbling out of a dead man's body are his souls.

DURKHEIM also takes totemism as an elementary form of religious life, but to his totem animal or plant is the collective representation of the social mind.

TYLOR interpreted totemism as ancestor worship, in other words, a form of ancestral cult.

According to D. N. MAJUMDAR "Analysis of such evidence leads us to conclude that the spirit of totemism is to be sought not in a religious attitude toward totemic objects or emblems; not in a gradual process of postulating in totems, the higher powers or spirits who influence the destiny of the savage, nor in the social or economic necessity of preserving species of edible products of
vegetable and animal kingdoms, but in a simple adjustment of social order, which could bring about a sympathetic relation between man and his environment. Such a relation subserves the needs of human adaptation to the habitat. And he further says that "RISLEY who recorded the evidence of totemism and totemic survivals, could not vouchsafe for the religious aspect of totemism in India, and assumed that it was in disuse, but the social side i.e., exogamy, was invariably associated with it".

MAJUMDAR further goes to add that "If kinship ties determine the limit of marital choice, if the fact of kinship is important in the choice of mates, the blood ban may have forbidden many tribes to marry within the clan. When the clan multiplies beyond a convenient size, and kinship is difficult to trace due to migration and social distance, an exogamous clan may develop into an endogamous group. Thus it is kinship and not totemism that determines the limit of marital choice and a totemic group is also a kinship group".

**TRIBE/CASTE DEBATE:**

We do not know at what point tribe transform into caste but it true that in the list of exterior castes appended to the Census report of 1931 we find a number of tribes who are treated elsewhere as primitive and are shown under tribal religion. Thus a number of tribes, which, have within times been transformed into castes, have been placed in the list of exterior castes. Thus shows how difficult it is to distinguish tribes from the lower castes when a
primitive tribe reaches a certain stage of social progress or development that can be due to several socio-economic factors then it is incorporated into the Hindu society, then their disabilities manifest themselves. Some of the disabilities on the basis of which the list was drawn was on the basis of occupation as for example that of Dom. Thus the term “exterior” was adopted in the Census of India 1931 for the first time and we notice that the distribution of exterior castes shows that the disabilities were more pronounced in those areas where there were large numbers of aboriginal or primitive population. For example Uttar Pradesh (the area of my study) contains a mixed population and RISLEY described them as Aryo-Dravidian. The order of social precedence in Uttar Pradesh may be represented by a social pyramid with the Brahmins at the topmost and Doms at the lower most level. Brahmins comprise of the Indo-Aryan stock and Doms comprise of tribal groups either of Mongolian or pre-Dravidian stock whose social status have resulted from their occupation which is unclean and considered degrading by the higher occupations.

"Another significant fact in connection with the social map of Uttar Pradesh is the geographical distribution of the castes. Most of the high castes are distributed in western Uttar Pradesh while the eastern parts of the state are inhabited by the lower castes, so that social precedence increases as we proceed from the eastern to western districts."
Now terms like “exterior” and “depressed” do not exists, now they have been “Scheduled” for specific treatment and grants are being made for the advancement of these scheduled caste in educational, economic and other fields.

In this context it is now relevant to bring in the debate of tribe-caste relationship, when we go back to history we notice that in Censuses the distinction between castes and tribes is vague and ambiguous. In report of 1891 BAINES arranged the castes according to their traditional occupation and under the Agriculture and Pastoral castes, he formed a sub-heading and named it “Forest Tribes”. This was followed in 1901 and 1911, in which Animists were included in the table for castes along with others indicating against each the number following Hinduism or Animism or another religion. The only difference that took place in 1921 was the changing of heading of “Animism” to “Tribal Religion”. In the 1931 Census Dr. Hutton followed Baines but substituted the term “Primitive Tribes” for “Forest Tribes” and added a special appendix on “Primitive Tribes” giving their names and numbers.

Thus we see that the classification of tribes was very vague, neither was it done in terms of geographical distribution because even if a whole tribe was distributed mostly in plains amidst other section of Indian population and very few in hills and forests still they were counted under the tribes. Neither was religious affiliation the index of determining whether a tribe is to be included in this category or to be excluded from it. Nor language was the indicator.
Earlier anthropologists were undecided about what to call them and H. Risley as a matter of convenience called them aborigines. While Baines called them the pre-Aryan inhabitant of India. Lacey too called them up as opposed to Aryan races. Shoobert calls them the aborigines and the original inhabitants and who were pushed to the forest and hills by the latter inhabitants. But the question of those inhabitants who did not move to the forest and hills and stayed by the newcomers and adjusted and adapted to the new life have not been looked up into. Here we are trying to focus on those tribes that have stayed by and assimilated with other groups their structural and cultural feature are in between caste society and tribal customs.

ELWIN - GHURYE DEBATE ON CASTE & TRIBES:

According to Ghurye these so-called aboriginal tribes have a Hinduized section and they have been fairly in contact with the Hindus for a long time and that they have common interest with the Hindus in matters of religion and occupation and that they have a tendency to look upon themselves as Hindus or as people closely connected with the Hindus and they seek to improve their social position by asserting themselves to be Hindu and then establishing a claim for a status higher than that of the lowest or even lower castes.

As opposed to V. Elwin suggests that aboriginal tribes in terms of religious and cultural affiliation should be classed in
Census as Hindus by religion as their religion belongs to the Hindu family but to be considered separate in terms of race. He does not clarify whether by race he means physical types or group names.

GHURYE concludes that “It is clear from this discussion that the proper description of these peoples must refer itself to their place in or near Hindu society and not to their supposed autochthonism. While sections of these tribes are properly integrated in the Hindu society, very large section, in fact the bulk of them are rather loosely integrated. Only very small sections, living in the recesses of hills and the depths of forests have not been more that touched by Hinduism. Under the circumstances, the only proper description of those people is that they are the imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society. Though for the sake of convenience they may be designated the tribal classes of Hindu society, suggesting thereby the social fact that they have retained much more of the tribal creeds and organization than many of the castes of Hindu society, yet they are in reality Backward Hindus.... The so called aborigines who formed the bulk of the Scheduled Tribes and have been designated in the Censuses as Animists are best described as Backward Hindus”.

According to Ghurye the aboriginal tribes could be divided into three classes, one those who have successfully fought the battle and are recognized as members of fairly high status within Hindu society. Two, the large mass that has been partially Hinduized and has come into close contact with the Hindus. Three,
the hill sections who have shown the greatest power of resistance to the alien culture that have come upon their borders. While Elwin feels that the last two classes are quite different in the sense that the second class has suffered moral depression and decay as a result of contacts with Hindus of which the third class has been relatively free. Elwin gives two reasons for this moral depression one is loss of land due to which lowering of prestige and self-confidence and second cause is the casual and transitory nature of the contact with Hindu religion. He tries to distinguish between “real” and “non-real” assimilation of the tribal with the Hindus. Real assimilation, which is rare, leads to excellent economic and moral effect. While non-real assimilation leads to loss of nerve and total ruination.

Broadly speaking the nature of policies for the welfare of tribal can be grouped under two categories one, ISOLATIONISM as proposed by V.ELWIN and two, INTEGRATION as proposed by GHURYE.

ELWIN proposed “National Park” policy where a fairly large area would be earmarked for these tribes, which would be under the direct control of the Tribes Commissioner where they would be allowed to live their lives with freedom and happiness and nobody, should be permitted to break up tribal life. Thus the quality of Tribal Life and Tribal Culture should be untouched. That certain modification in educational, legal and other system should be made so as to adjust to tribal culture. With regards to freedom of forest
the laws should be more liberal. In terms of begar or forced labour, should be completely abolished.

Elwin divided the aborigines into three classes. The first class had solved its problem by acquiring a respectable status in Hindu society with commensurate economic stability. The second class consisted of the so-called Hinduized sections of the aborigines. The third class being formed by those tribes and tribesmen who had still kept on vigorous tribal life mostly in the remote recesses of forests and the heights of hills. And Elwin's main aim was to see how the second class had suffered moral depression and decay of which the third class had been relatively free. According to him causes of depression were (1) loss of land (2) loss of the freedom of the forest (3) disappearance of the ritual hunt (4) economic impoverishment (5) collapse of tribal industries and frustration of the creative impulse (6) nervous and moral exhaustion from contact with the law (7) suppression of the home distillery (8) an unregulated system of education (9) external contacts of tribal religion (10) organized movements of reform.

According to GHURYE "For all practical purposes Dr. Elwin must be considered to be not an isolationist but a no changer so far as the uncontaminated aborigines are concerned inspite of his disclaiming himself to be an isolationist" and for the people of second class who are suffering from loss of nerve and self-confidence, they should be provided education in Hindi which is spoken and understood by a large number of them even though
their mother tongue is different. Ghurye is also against Elwin's attitude towards some of the festivals which are generally occasion for heavy drinking in which he takes a very liberal attitude, that let them soak themselves in liquor and that they will automatically cease till another such festival occurs. According to Ghurye the best way would be to curtail the period of the duration of a festival, without closing the liquor shops as a first step.

Ghurye also admonishes Elwin's suggestion of codifying tribal customs regarding marriage, divorce etc. Ghurye believes that "customs are plastic and thus have an advantage over law which is rigid. Once we codify them we make them more rigid than law. Laws is generally the social mechanism of a society in which some central authority is considered to be the source of such law and to be competent to change it... after the customs are codified, whatever little authority the tribal elders may have in their interpretation today will cease. A desired change in the codified customs then becomes very difficult. If the reformers suggest changes they can easily be rebuked by being told either that they do not represent their people, or that they do not understand their best interest, or that they are trying to imitate slavishly the Hindus or some other people... Codification of customs can therefore, only imply a desire to see the tribal people returning to their tribal culture and sticking to it".

According to GHURYE also "Elwin's proposal of a "National Park" is rather ill thought and extravagant. An extravagant
proposal and its background of unreasonable claims is hardly the best method of serving the cause of the so called aborigines”.

In response to Dr. Elwin's three pronged solution of the problem of the tribal i.e., (1) No change and revivalism (2) Isolationism and preservation and (3) Assimilation Ghurye responds and (3) Assimilation. Ghurye responds and believes that INTEGRATION is a main solution to the problem. He believes that “Tribal solidarity has been broken by two distinct agencies. Hinduism and its assimilative process have broken up and are breaking up various tribes, sections of which seek and acquire some nook or corner in Hindu social world. This leaves the section not so absorbed rather weak and smarting or benumbed under the feeling of brokenness. If sections of tribes get assimilated in the Hindu fold they are not ushered into an altogether strange social world. Hindu castes, at least many of them have had and still have many of the characteristics of tribal society as regards the management of their internal affairs. Tribal sections on joining Hindu society develop an internal organization of the caste pattern and thus have the regulating and controlling power within themselves. The account given elsewhere, shows clearly that many of such tribal sections or tribes get smugly settled in the Hindu fold. Other not so fortunate strive for a proper status, and in the effort at stabilization, they better themselves. The sections of tribes which have been left over do suffer from the loss of their brethren, but that is an inevitable consequence of a process which is natural,
and which, if it can be shorn of the ugly feature of chicanery regarding land and labour on the whole is beneficial to the tribal people. Of course it disrupted their pristine homogeneity and unity”.

“The effective solution of the problem lies in strengthening the ties of the tribal with other backward classes through their integration. How such integration may be brought about is a matter of practical administration. The theoretical background can be provided by a brief but integrated account of the social and religious life of the tribals.

THE PRINCIPLES OF A HISTORICAL MATERIALISTIC THEORY OF CASTE:

According to OMVEDT, the basic approach of Marxist methodology is useful for an adequate understanding of the structure and role of caste in South Asian society. The basic guideline for any analysis in the interests of the oppressed people is to ask: who are the exploiters and who are the exploited? How can the exploited organize their struggle to move in the direction of liberation? And what is the relation of the structure of exploitation to the historical possibilities of moving in the direction of liberation from exploitation? In the words of Marx. ‘Philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it’. And to answer this question, he does not begin with ‘class’, which is really a derived and secondary concept in the total theory, but looks at how humans organize their production and how what they produce, the
surplus product embodying their surplus labour, is extracted and appropriated by the non-producing sections of society.

This methodology leads us to look at the concrete forms of production in any society, the concrete forms of the production, expropriation and accumulation of surplus labour. In pre-British Indian society, for example, we can answer the question whether 'dominant caste' were exploiters or not by this criterion. Dalits and balutedars or artisans apparently worked for the 'village community' or the 'dominant' peasants. They produced tools, ploughs, ropes, etc., for agricultural production; they often worked as laborers on the land. But if we analyze what happened to their surplus labour, we can see that it was embodied in the crops grown by the peasants and that the greatest share of these crops was taken by the representatives of the state (jagirdars, rajas, deshmukhs, sardars, zamindars) and of religion (Brahmans). These exploiters therefore appropriated the surplus labour not only of peasants but also of the craftsmen, field labours, etc. Therefore we can identify exploited jatis as the peasant castes (Kunbis, Kapus etc.) and the Dalits, balutedars and other. And in identifying the exploiters, we have note that it is not easy to identify them in terms of jati, except for Brahmans who almost never laboured and always claimed an important share of the surplus. Besides Brahmans, the major exploiters were the holders of state and political power, and these included households not only from the 'peasant' jatis but also
many from 'lower' jatis as well. But they were exploiters not as members of such a jati, but as holders of state power.

The more basic concept is that of exploitation and the 'specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers'. In the strict sense, classes come into existence only with capitalism and then only in the capitalist 'core' areas of factory production; peasantry, tribal communities, etc., are 'class-like' but their relations of exploitation are interwoven with community/tribal/kinship features in pre-capitalist systems and even when these are linked to capital accumulation in a capitalist world-system, thus they fight against exploitation takes place through communities, tribes, castes and kinship groups.

'Class' as defined solely in terms of the ownership of private property and the ownership or control to the means of production does not explain major aspects of exploitation and capital accumulation. A theory of historical materialism applicable in current circumstances will have to incorporate the elements of violence, force, domination, knowledge suggested by (among others) Jotiba Phule. Certainly the issues arising out of the 'fall of socialism' in Eastern Europe, the general crisis of statist societies, implies this need for broadening, as does increased thinking about the 'conditions of production' stimulated by ecological issues; the analysis of caste in India also does so. Rethinking the workings of the capitalist system as such, in relation not only to caste but also
to patriarch, environmental issue, the peasantry and other 'classes', is on the agenda for today.

In analyzing how the caste system or jati vyavastha works, we would argue that it should not be seen merely as ideological or superstructural; neither should it be identified simply as a cluster or concrete and interacting jatis. It is a 'system'. Of what? Of a set of basically kinship-like social practices and the rules that surround them. The former are 'material'; the latter are 'ideological' but in the sense of often 'unconscious' rules of behaviour as contrasted with a conscious system of ideology (a distinction used by many anthropologist). For instance, the conscious ideology of Varna-shrama dharma constituted a religiously-authoritated system used to interpret and support the caste system and the economic exploitation involved in it; but it is different from the actual rules of behaviour defining expected behaviour among and between members of different jatis.

Thus, the endogamous principles and practices that constitute the jatis, the purity-pollution behaviour rules and occupational tasks governing the relations of hierarchy and exploitation existing among them, are the practices and rules that constitute the caste system. This set of practices and rules has its own dynamics and has deeply shaped Indian society and the Indian economic system; but it has also been shaped by changing economic relations, by conquest and the changes in state formations, by involvement with the market and wage labour – to
mention a few of the non caste aspects interacting with caste. (See, Omvedt. G. : 1994)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CASTE SOCIETY: 'REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION'

According to OMVEDT, while we can identify 'proto-caste' features in the early Dravidian culture, the caste system itself emerged in a process linked with the consolidation of class (economic) divisions, patriarchy and the rise of the state. The development of Indian caste society is seen in different ways of different theories of caste. Generally the more conservative social science theories, like the legitimizing ideologizations of system, have little to say about any processes or 'stages' of development but instead take the system as either essentially existing or evolving in a smooth, harmonious process. 'Racial' theories also have tended to take the system as a given; fixed and remain more or less unchanged. Even the recent 'economic' and 'ecological' theories take it as relatively unchanging.

In contrast the main radical theories, including those influenced by Marxism, emphasize stages in the development of caste. For traditional Marxists this means simply seeing caste in terms of the 'superstructure' of the orthodox five stages (primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism). Modern variations on this include Dipankar Gupta, seeing Varna as the superstructure of Asiatic society and jati as the superstructure of feudal society. Shaarad Patil similarly uses an
adaptation of the five stages which he identifies as matriarchal society, das-slave society (characterized by varnas; this itself is broken up into various types and sub-stages), and jati-feudal society beginning with the rise of states. Strikingly, one of the most interesting adaptations, apparently independent of Marxism, is Ambedkar's 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution', which divides the pre-Muslim period as divided into stages of (a) 'Brahmanism' (the vedic period), (b) 'Buddhism', connected with the rise of the first Magadha-Mauryan states and representing a revolutionary denial of caste inequalities; and (c) 'Hinduism', or the counter-revolution which consolidates Brahman dominance and the caste hierarchy. All of these approaches share a concern for looking at caste in terms of uneven development, contradiction and radical and violent changes.

Generally we can identify four main periods following pre-class (or 'proto-caste') society, marked by specific features of the development of Indian social structure (including specific economic structure of 'class' forms, caste, patriarchy and the state): (a) the nearly 500 years of the Indus civilization; (b) the millennia-long period from its fall and the ascendancy of the Indo-Europeans to the Gangetic valley states; (c) a second millennium stretching up to the consolidation of caste-feudalism and characterized by conflict between major 'religious' traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism; (d) the period of medieval caste-feudalism characterized by the dominance of Hinduism and the later entry of Islam,
stretching from the sixth-tenth centuries AD to colonial rule. All of these saw important developments and changes in the caste system.

The Indus civilization – one of the oldest in the world with impressive achievements in two major cities and numerous towns scattered over a huge geographical region – was the starting point for what we know as 'Indian civilization'. Unfortunately, because its script is not yet deciphered, we have little direct evidence of its social structure and cultural practices. The main language was almost certainly Dravidian. It was clearly a stratified society, with large and small house indicating a major division into rich and poor. Yet the relatively weak development of weapons and the absence of other evidences of state machinery suggest that the major integrating role was played by cultural – religious unity rather than state power. A Proto-Shiva god and a goddess appear on many of the famous seals, and the earlier numerical predominance of female figurines suggests a matrilineal – matricentric heritage. Money was absent, and some archeologists believe that trade was carried on by special groups of wandering nomads, a development of earlier socially – mediated exchange between different types of production groups. It has also been argued that the famous granaries of Mohenjodaro and Harappa were, in analogy to the village grain-heap, repositories of agricultural produce distributed under administrative control to
different groups who claimed by social tradition a share of the produce, a kind of precursor of the jajmani system.

Finally, the uniformity of artisan product over a wide geographical territory is noted, 'so marked that it is possible to typify each craft with a single set of examples drawn from one site alone.... The uniformity of forms and painted decorations which they display cannot be accounted for by trade'. This suggests the existence of caste-like group of occupational specialists, maintaining endogamy and cultural tradition over a wide territory while producing locally.

Thus, while there is as yet no direct evidence regarding the social system of Harappans, there is indirect evidence that the 'proto-caste' features of sub-continental and Dravidian culture were carried forward among them. However, the transformation of the 'sacred' and 'dangerous' into the 'impure', something that has to be dominated and bound, seems to require the solidification of dominance in state power and warrior control. And these state and military features were conspicuously minimal in the Indus civilization, in comparison with all other earlier city-state societies.

The Aryan advent cannot be simply understood as a conquest over equalitarian indigenous peoples which gave rise to the caste system. Nevertheless, 'Aryan' and 'conquest' did play a role. The Indo-Europeans were a partilineal people, in contrast to local matrilineal traditions, though their patriarchy, tribal and statist, gave certain freedom to women. Once however, they
absorbed the notions of 'sacred power' and 'danger' associated with low castes in the Dravidian tradition, the resulting patriarchal synthesis in the context of group conflict was far more complete and violent in its control of women. Similarly, the tribal or lineage inequalities that intensified among Vedic people as they spread throughout India were not really 'caste-like', but once they absorbed that 'proto-caste' feature among the indigenous culture and various groups fought for dominance of the system, a caste hierarchy developed. Chaturvarnya did not actually describe existing social groups, but was rather an ideology overlaying the very different processes of transformation of 'proto-caste' tribal groups into jatis. In this Brahmans played a key role – Brahmans who derived both ethnically and culturally from indigenous as well as Aryan priestly groups, but who identified with the Aryans as they sought to legitimize and extend the total system of dominance and exploitation associated with caste in a period of developing production, surpluses and economic inequalities.

The Indus civilization did not fall as a result of Aryan raids, but rather, apparently, through environmental degradation associated with deforestation and changing river courses; the Aryans may have given the finishing touch. They appear on the Indian scene as fairly flexible groups ready to adapt to local customs. A horse driving, cattle herding people, they adopted not only wheat and rice cultivation from indigenous Dravidian and Mundari peoples, they also inter-married frequently. Not only do
the Shudras derive mainly from absorbed and dominated indigenous groups, the major twice-born varnas also had mixed origins. Large numbers of Brahmans were absorbed from pre-Aryans; the common term for merchant, vani, apparently derives from a term pani used for the richer of the pre-Aryan enemies; even a number of Ksatriyas may have had pre-Aryan or mixed origins – and one linguist suggests that both the terms 'Bharat' and 'Satavahana' derive from symbols meaning 'office-bearer' used for a Harappan ruling clan.

With the period of the rise of the state in the Gangetic valley in the middle of the first millennium BC caste inequalities appear as more crystallized and began to get the stamp of legitimacy with the development of Brahmanic Hinduism, symbolized finally in the laws of Manu. In these, extreme forms of the subordination of women and Shudras were sanctioned, and Brahmans claimed superiority at the top of a hierarchy of purity – pollution and occupational specialization.

However, this period of the rise of the Magadha – Mauryan states has been characterized by Ambedkar as that of the 'Buddhist revolution' which was revolutionary in transcending Vedic tribal particularism and in denying caste and gender and in denying caste and gender inferiority; and at least some evidence shows that it inaugurated a long period of contention for dominance. As Thapar, for instance, points out, the Magadha – Mauryan area was seen as anti-Brahman of mleccha territory,
while early Buddhist literature (argued by scholars of the society) shows inequality neither in the form of Varna or jati but rather in ‘class-like’ categories such as the gahapati and daskammakara groups. The Mauryan state had large areas of statist administration, with state-controlled lands and factories intermixed with privately controlled production. There is no evidence of the jajmani system for a long period, rather guilds were predominant. Further, even when we see signs of caste consolidation in northern India, the Satavahana era in the Deccan indicates a much more open, flexible, less caste-ridden society.

It is really only during the sixth to tenth century AD period which scholars such as R. S. Sharma and Kosambi identify as the development of ‘feudalism’, that we see the definitive consolidation of Hinduism as the dominant religion using state power to maintain itself, the jajmani – linked village economy, land grants to Brahmans (and to other intermediaries) as a major element in ‘feudal’ tendencies, and the marking out of untouchables as a separately defined excluded groups ‘outside the village’.

The long interregnum of a thousand years between the emergence of the first states in the Gangetic valley and the consolidation of the Brahmanic – Hindu social order suggests that the identification of ‘Indian’ culture with ‘Hinduism’ is badly mistaken, that the dominance of Hinduism was not so easily achieved and perhaps not inevitable, and that elements of revolt and opposition remained strong from the beginning. In this sense,
though he does not take into account changes in production systems and the exploitativeness of the non-Hindu early states, Ambedkar's metaphor of 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution' makes the crucial point: the caste system came to dominance in India in a process of turmoil, warfare, contradiction and conflict. In particular, we may see its consolidation as a result of the alliance of Brahmanism (including both ideological force and the temple and other religious institutions) and state power, of the coming together of Brahmans and the amorphous set of power holders, chieftains and rajas of various caste and tribal origins who had their power confirmed in the emerging medieval synthesis. (See, Omvedt. G. : 1994)

**DALITS AND THE ANTI-CASTE STRUGGLE:**

According to OMVEDT, the lines of exploitation in pre-British, India, as defined in terms of the production, extraction and accumulation of surplus, were structured through the caste system or jati vyavastha. This identified a particular caste division of labour involving specific forms of hierarchy among the exploited, with at least three major groups identified in most villages: toiling peasant castes, most of whom were simply cultivators but with some, 'village management' powers held by a dominant lineage (biradari, bhauki); artisans and service castes performing particular caste – duties within a jajmani – balutedari system; and (often lowest among those classed as balutedars) a large caste of general labours working for the village and its dominant sections and
classed as 'untouchables'. Tribals and pastoralists outside the villages were also among the exploited sections.

The unique position of 'untouchables' was not simply in living outside the village and performing the most 'polluted' occupations; it was also that their position within the caste division of labour made them the most exploited. This is not simply a matter of a traditional 'caste occupation'. Looking only at occupation, the Chamars of north India would have their analogue in the Chambhars of Maharashtra and the Madigas of Andhra in that all were traditionally leather workers. But more important was the functional position of Chamars in the caste division of labour, in being general village servitors, similar to the Mahars of Maharashtra. Nearly everywhere in India there was one large 'untouchables' caste which performed this role, working as field labourers (and in almost slave-like conditions in the hierarchical irrigated villages) and as general village servants working for the village headman as well as visiting 'state' officials. This gave them a key labouring role both in term of agricultural production and as servants of the wider state machinery. They were the most clearly 'proletarianized' segment of the exploited within a wider system of exploitation.

The 'exploited' as a whole included a very wide range of castes, the broad 'toiling caste' majority. Clearly it was a system which had built-in contradictions among the exploited. Dalit laborers suffered from the domination of village peasants; they also
faced exclusion and oppression from all caste Hindus, even from castes themselves ranked very low in the hierarchy. In addition there were often two major ‘untouchables’ castes in a single region who were traditionally competitors, opposed to each other and claiming a higher status in the hierarchy. This division and contradiction to some extent justify the characterization of caste as having a retarding effect on ‘class struggle’ in that it institutionalized division among the exploited.

However, the other side of the picture must not be forgotten. The existence of relatively large jatis at various level among the exploited represented groups united by social ties who could play a leading role in revolt around which other groups, large and small, could rally. Both ‘peasant’ jatis (Jats, Kunbis, etc.) and the large Dalit jatis could play this kind ‘vanguard’ role, with the difference that the greater proletarianization of the Dalits would tend to make their struggles more revolutionary. ‘Peasant’ jatis were also exploited, and had an interest in revolt; but this was often modified because of their relative privilege even as exploited toilers and because of the ease of their leaders to gain share in dominance. ‘Peasant – jati revolt’, the crucial form of struggle in the pre-British period, could be a powerful force when directed against central state power (as in the case of the 1857 revolt, perhaps, or in the rising of Kunbi peasants under Shivaji), but it could also be directed into simply the establishment of a new level of feudal intermediaries (as in the thesis that the eighteenth century was one
of the kind of ‘rise of the gentry’ in which jats, Marathas under the Peshwas and other simply created new feudal states). (This of course, can also be said of peasant revolt in societies like China.) Dalit revolt, in contrast, was more likely to be ‘anti-systemic’ and perhaps for this reason is hard to trace as a collective factor in the pre-British period.

‘Caste struggle’, like ‘class struggle’ could become revolutionary only when it could pose an alternative, a more advance system, rather than being a negative protest or a competitive struggle for more economic or social - cultural rights within the framework of exploitation. But whether it could do so obviously depend upon the possibilities of the historical conjuncture. In the early era of transition when the caste system of exploitation was being constituted, the limitations of the anti-systemic role of religions like Buddhism and Jainism were that they could not be linked to a more productive historical system. (The Buddhist sangha, as many commentators have noted, embodied equalitarian and collective features for the tribal period, but only as a refuge from the world; Buddhism also tended to be linked with the more mercantile, open kingdoms of the period.) During the period of the medieval synthesis after the defeat of these ‘heterodox’ religions only a negative rebellion appears to have been possible, represented by the bhakti cults which embodied aspirations to equality but accepted a Hindu frame work for this-worldly social interaction.
It was only from the time of British rule and the rise of a capitalist–industrial society that a more equalitarian and more productive society became a historical possibility and was posed as such in the ideologies of radical democracy and socialism. This period saw the rise of new working class struggles, the taking on of new forms in peasant struggle, but it also saw a new anti–caste revolt which was increasingly spearheaded by a Dalit liberation movement.