

From Hierarchy to Equity

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ISPCK/DACA

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Subaltern Insights Into Tamil Cultural Milieu



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Chapter 2

Socio-political and Religious-Cultural Situation of Dalits: The Contemporary South Indian Scenario

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1. Introduction

Dalits In India have been treated as an appendage ever since they were relegated to the ignominious status that they are now. They are not considered as part of the society; they are a part apart¹. They have separate dwelling place, separate language genre, separate dress code and separate everything. In other words, they are a village within a village, a town within a town and a city within a city, a separate society within a society and finally a separate nation within a nation called India. For all these centuries “*Mahatmas have come and Mahatmas have gone, but the untouchables have remained untouchables*”.² Their plight remains the same with slight ups and massively downs due to socio-political, economic, religious and cultural rulings of different regimes and sagas of India. In all, their sufferings, deprivation, discrimination and exclusion have not been removed even in modern India which claims to steer in a fast-track road of science, technology and progress in all parameters: education, economics, health and hygiene, self-sufficiency, etc. Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have had the least impact on their lives. In sum, none of the national and global development discourses be in terms of access to human rights, economic justice, social parity, religious and cultural inclusion and self-determination have

¹ “I am not a part of the whole. I am a part apart” was the declaration made by Dr B. R. Ambedkar on October 27, 1939, in Bombay Legislative Assembly has become the experience of every Dalit in the country.

² Ambedkar said this in 1932, referring to the many Mahatmas in India who tried to end untouchability and elevate the Depressed Classes, but failed.

visited their doorsteps. In other words, they are still fighting for their rights to be human, to be treated as civilized and self-worth creature with rationality.

To understand the ground reality of Dalits in India, we need to know the fundamental fact that everything has caste as mentioned above. Unless we know this basic Indian ethos, it will be difficult for us to realize the severity of the problems they go through.

2. Dalits in India Today

Dalit is a generic word in English meaning broken, scattered, crushed, and so on referring to people who were formerly known as untouchables³. They occupy the lowest position in the Indian caste order in the society. In the words of Mr Zakkian, a Dalit activist and leader “among the piled-up bags of grain, Dalits occupy the bottom row bearing the burden of all above them”⁴.

There are about 200 million Dalits in India and 260 all over the world under this category who are known as polluted or polluting people. They are segregated as untouchables based on their birth or descent in the international classification. They are traditionally called as Avarnas which means without colour. This means that they were not brought under the Varna system. Over the years, they were assigned to particular occupation, also known as 3D occupation which became their identities. They are mostly dangerous, dirty and demeaning jobs by which they are identified. They are ranked at the bottom of society’s classes based on their descent, and face discrimination based on their gender, religion, social status, and culture. This stigma of “untouchability” can lead to abuse and exploitation.

Dalits in India face many problems, including discrimination, violence, and exclusion. According to Paul Divakar of NDCHR, *“India has 600,000 villages and almost in every village a small pocket on the outskirts is meant for Dalits. This settlement is far from health care centers, banks, schools and other essential services. During times like Covid-19, the aid may not even reach this small pocket.”*⁵

3. Various Forms of Discrimination

Dalits experience multiple forms of discrimination at every sphere of life.

i. Embedded discrimination from birth

According to Hillary Mayell,

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalit>, visited on July 01, 2024

⁴ Shared by Mr Zakkiaian in a meeting conducted by the reader at Doctor Ambedkar Cultural Academy (DACA), Madurai, 2022

⁵ Priyali Sur, CNN, “Under India’s caste system, Dalits are considered untouchable. The corona virus is intensifying that slur”, April 2020. Retrieved on July 12, 2024

“Human rights abuses against Dalits are legion. A random sampling of headlines in mainstream Indian newspapers tells their story: “Dalit boy beaten to death for plucking flowers”; “Dalit tortured by cops for three days”; “Dalit ‘witch’ paraded naked in Bihar”; “Dalit killed in lock-up at Kurnool”; “7 Dalits burnt alive in caste clash”; “5 Dalits lynched in Haryana”; “Dalit woman gang-raped, paraded naked”; “Police egged on mob to lynch Dalits”⁶, etc.,

along with the old practices like denial of entry into temples, wearing shoes in public, drinking water from the same cups in tea stalls, etc., etc. The above headlines are not something that happened decades before. They all took place within 5 years. This is the proof that caste discrimination is still the dominant factor in social relations. In other words, Dalits are relegated to the lowest jobs, live in constant fear of being publicly humiliated, paraded naked, beaten, and raped with impunity for the oppressive-caste Hindus seeking to keep them in their place. Merely walking through an oppressive caste street can attract a life-threatening offense and punishment.

Another despicable fact is that nearly 90% of the poor Indians and 95% of all the illiterate Indians are Dalits, according to figures presented at the international Dalit conference that took place on May 16 to 18, in Vancouver, Canada in 2003⁷.

Thus, the identity of Dalits is marked by discrimination and oppression.

ii. Exclusion

Dalits in India are mostly excluded from development policies and programs in areas such as health, education, housing, employment, and rural development. It becomes even more burdensome since most of the Dalits, nearly 75 – 80% live in rural areas involved in traditional and demeaning occupations. They are also marginalized and shunned in other aspects of life, despite the constitutional abolition of untouchability and affirmative action programs. They are often excluded from access to land, education, and other resources that are available to other castes.

iii. Violence

In the preliminary note, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022 observes,

“Throughout the year we documented incidents of hate crimes based on caste as well as attacks on tribals. Such incidents were reported from various parts of the country and a common thread between these incidents is that caste-based atrocities are often triggered by miniscule and trivial matters such as sporting a moustache, drawing water from a well, eating food at a ceremony and so on”⁸

⁶ Hillary Mayel, June 03, 2003, “India’s “Untouchables” Face Violence, Discrimination”. National Geographic

⁷ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/pages/article/indias-untouchables-face-violence-discrimination>, retrieved on July 12, 2024.

⁸ <https://cjp.org.in/2022-a-look-back-at-hate-crimes-against-Dalits-and-advaisis/>

It is very interesting to note that India's crime rate in general has decreased from 2021 to 2022 while the crimes against SCs and STs have increased. Statistics shows, "the crime rate per lakh population dropped from 445.9 in 2021 to 422.2 in 2022." On the other hand, crimes against SCs and STs are escalating according to the same report. Here is the official statistics of NCRB, 2023.

*The Crime in India report highlighted an overall increase in crimes and atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) persons. States like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana experienced a surge in such cases in 2022. Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan persist as key contributors, consistently ranking among the top five states with the highest occurrences of crimes and atrocities against SC and ST communities.*¹⁰

The same report gives the details of the major five states which have highest number of crimes against Dalits and Adivasis. They are,

*"Uttar Pradesh (13,146 cases) reported the highest number of cases of atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs) accounting for 25.82% followed by Rajasthan with 14.7% (7,524) and Madhya Pradesh with 14.1% (7,214) during 2021. The next two states in the list are Bihar accounting for 11.4% (5,842) and Odisha 4.5% (2,327). The above top five states reported 70.8% of cases of atrocities against Scheduled Castes"*¹¹.

This clearly shows the contrast. Violence against Dalits is a day-to-day incident in most parts of the country, either in the name of superiority-inferiority issues, or issues based on right over basic necessities like water, food, proper clothing, right over self-expression like wearing decent clothes, sporting moustache, wedding processions on horse, entry into worship places, etc. While all these are looked at as one's basic rights and nobody would pay attention to these things, these become problematic as caste superiority looks at these as a threat to their continued superior position in the society.

4. Violence Against Dalits In Tamil Nadu

I would like to come to a more specific status of Dalits in Tamil Nadu as Tamil Nadu is extolled as the land of Social Justice and projected as Dravidian model which as it claims, has brought down poverty, unemployment and better growth rate under all indicators. I would like to look at this from historically noted major violences against Dalits in Tamil Nadu and the redressal mechanism that has been employed.

⁹ <https://www.drishtiiias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/06-12-2023>, visited on July 12, 2024

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Dalits have been more unsafe in the hands of Indian political leaders than in the hands of the Britishers, because some of the most heinous crimes against Dalits took place only in post independent years. Some of the massive violences broke out in South India, particularly in Tamil Nadu which took away hundreds of lives and massive destruction of their livelihoods. These are the examples of how Independent India treats Dalits and tribals. Some of them are:

1. 1957 Ramnad Riot

i. The incident

The **Ramnad riots** or the **Mudukulathur riots** were a series of violent clashes that occurred between July and September 1957 in Ramnad district, Tamil Nadu. The violence was between Thevars (a Shudra community which is pitted against Dalits on a daily basis) supported by the Forward Bloc, and pro-Congress Dalit Pallars, which was triggered over a by-election held in the aftermath of the Madras Legislative Assembly elections of earlier that year. 42 Dalits were killed during the riots.¹²

ii. Cause of murder

Dalits asserted their identity and importance in the by-election under the leadership of Immanuel Sekaran, an educated young and energetic Dalit leader who claimed that his community should also contest in the elections.

Hon'ble K. Kamaraj was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu when the violence took place. He belonged to the Congress party.

2. 1968 Kilvenmani Massacre

i. The incident

The Kilvenmani massacre was an incident in a village called Kilvenmani in Nagapattinam district, Tamil Nadu on December 25, 1968, in which 44 Dalits were burnt alive by a gang led by their landlords. The chief accused was Gopalakrishnan Naidu¹³.

ii. Cause of murder

The incident occurred when some poor labourers were influenced by the Communist Party of India (Marxist – CPI (M)) to organize themselves into a campaign for higher wages following the increase in agricultural production as a result of

¹² 10 “Remembering Immanuel Sekaran: Brave Dalit leader who lost his life to Savarna brutality”, The news minute. September 2016. Archived from the original on 2 September 2016. Retrieved 10 August 2024.

¹³ “Fifty years after caste violence, Keezhvenmani village waiting for daylight” *The New Indian Express*. 23 Dec 2018 Retrieved 10 August 2024.

Green Revolution in India¹⁴. The lands were controlled by powerful Shudra caste families, while the labourers were all from an oppressed Dalit community called Parayas or Adi-Dravidars. The labourers formed a union in 1968 seeking better working conditions and higher wages. The landlords formed their own union, hired henchmen, blocked all routes of the hutment of Dalit village, the attackers shot at the villagers. The massacre resulted in the death of 44 people, including 5 aged men, 16 women and 23 children. It took place on 25 December, 1968¹⁵.

Hon'ble CN Annadurai was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu when this massacre took place. He belonged to Dravida Munetra Kazhagam.

3. 1978 Villupuram Atrocity

i. The incident

The 1978 Villupuram Atrocity was an incident of caste-based violence which took place in July 1978. The violence resulted in the killing of 12 Dalits and more than 100 Dalit houses were razed to the ground at Periyaparaicherry, a Dalit settlement in Villupuram town.

ii. Cause of murder

Periyaparaicherry is located in the city centre of Villupuram town where the market was located. The market was controlled and managed by Hindu Vanniar, Mudaliar and Nadar castes as well as Muslims while all the labourers were from the Paraiyar, a Dalit community¹⁶. A young Dalit lady was insulted at the vegetable market by a dominant caste laborer working at one of the vegetable shops on the afternoon of July 23, 1978. He allegedly flirted with her and grabbed her breast as she stooped down to pick tomatoes for her husband's lunch¹⁷. Her husband later went to the perpetrator's place to enquire about the incident and later beat him up along with other Dalits¹⁸.

Hon'ble MG Ramachandran was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu when Villupuram massacre took place. He was the founder and Chief Minister of Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

¹⁴ "Anniversary of Kilvenmani Carnage Observed", *The Hindu*. 26 December 2009, Retrieved on August 10, 2024.

¹⁵ "New Memorial to Commemorate Keezhvenmani Massacre", *The Hindu*, March 10, 2014.

¹⁶ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1978, p. 1722.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 1978, p. 1721.

¹⁸ Balasubramaniam. J, "Villupuram Atrocity: Physical and Symbolic Violence against Dalits", *Contemporary Voice of Dalits*, Vol 6, (2), 2013, p. 118.

4. 1992 Vachathi Atrocity

i. The incident

The **Vachathi case** involved a mass crime that occurred on 20 June 1992 in the village of Vachathi, in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu. A team of 155 forest personnel, 108 policemen and six revenue officials entered the Tribal-dominated Vachathi village, searching for smuggled sandalwood¹⁹ and to gather information about forest bandit Veerappan.²⁰ Under the pretext of conducting a search, the team ransacked the villagers' property, destroyed their houses, killed their cattle, assaulted around 100 villagers, and raped 18 women.

ii. Cause for Violence

The officials complained that the villagers were involved in sandalwood smuggling and aiding Veerappan, a notorious forest brigand. This resulted in the incident narrated above. The worst crime against women was the gang rape of 18 tribal women by government officials, 155 forest personnel, 108 policemen and 6 revenue officials who were supposed to safeguard the marginalized.

Hon'ble J Jayalalitha was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu when Vachathi gang rape took place. The CM was a woman, and she was in-charge of law and order in the state.

5. 1995 Kodyankulam violence

i. The incident

The 1995 Kodyankulam violence occurred on August 31, 1995, when a force of 600 policemen attacked the village of Kodyankulam in Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu and destroyed their property and took away cash and jewellery worth several crores of rupees.²¹ They looted televisions, tape recorders, fans, sewing machines, motorcycles, tractors, farm equipment and food grain storages, etc. They burnt the passports of educated youth in bonfire along with clothes.²²

ii. Cause of violence

Kodyankulam villagers belonging to Devendra Kula Vellalar Community, one of the Dalit sub-castes, who have benefited from the influx of financial resources

¹⁹ Dorairaj, S. "Justice for Vachathi": Frontline, 22 October 2011, Chennai, Retrieved on August 10, 2024.

²⁰ TN: 19 yrs on, 215 guilty of atrocities on tribals, Hindustan Times, Chennai, September 29, 2011: Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

²¹ Pandian, M. (January 2000). "Dalit Assertion in Tamil Nadu: An Exploratory Note". *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*. No. 12, Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

²² Salil, K. (2021-04-12). "Caste in Tamil cinema: Karnan raises the bar". *The Federal*. Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

from family members working in Kuwait, Dubai and the United States, since 1980s²³. Both men and women were educated in the village, with a large number of female graduates and postgraduates which made them assertive.²⁴ The dominant caste Thevars did not take it very kindly as it challenged their caste pride. The police raid was reported to target the material prosperity of the Devendra Kula Vellalars.

Hon'ble J Jayalalitha was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu when Kodiangulam violence took place.

6. 1997 Melavalavu Massacre

i. The incident

The 1997 Melavalavu massacre case refers to the murder of a Panchayat President of the village with six other men of the Dalit community by dominant caste members in Melavalavu, Madurai on 30 June 1997. The men were hacked to death after some dominant caste members refused to accept a Panchayat president from the Dalit Community.²⁵

ii. Cause for murder

The Melavalavu panchayat is located near Melur in Madurai district. Though Melavalavu was housed predominantly by Kallar community, it was declared as SC panchayat in 1996, which angered the caste community and threatened them of dire consequences if they contested. Murugesan, an SC who contested and won the election was murdered and six others along with him in broad daylight at 11 a.m. in public.²⁶

Hon'ble M Karunanidhi was the Chief Minister when the gruesome assassination of Melavalavu took place.

7. 1999 Manjolai Laborers Massacre

i. The incident

Manjolai laborers massacre took place on 23rd July 1999 in which 17 Dalit labourers, including two women and a two-year-old child died in the lathy charge by the police and drowning in the river in their attempt to escape the police firing.

²³ Human Rights Watch, 1999, p. 103.

²⁴ Manikumar, K.A. (2017-12-01). "Caste Clashes (1995) and Judge Gomathinayagam Inquiry Commission: A Study". *Review of Development and Change*. **22** (2): 62–87. Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1997_Melavalavu_massacre, Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

²⁶ Tamilarasu, Prabhakar (25 November 2019). "22 years after Melavalavu massacre, what has changed — and what hasn't, Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

ii. Cause of murder

On 23 July 1999, a large number of labourers from Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Tea Estates of Manjolai assembled in Tirunelveli and took out a procession towards the Collectorate demanding the release of a number of estate workers, who were arrested earlier for demanding just wage.²⁷

Hon'ble M Karunanidhi was the Chief Minister when the gory assassination of Manjolai Laborers massacre took place.

8. 2004 Kalapatti violence

i. The incident

The 2004 Kalapatti violence refers to the violence against Dalits by dominant-caste villagers in the village of Kalapatti, Tamil Nadu on 16 May 2004. About 100 Dalit houses had been burned down by a mob of 200 villagers and the Dalits who attempted to escape were attacked. The attack lasted for 2 hours and 14 people were seriously injured in the violence including a man's arm reportedly hacked off. The attackers besides burning more than 100 houses destroyed their properties and looted things of values worth millions of rupees.

Hon'ble J Jayalalitha was the Chief Minister when the gory Kalapatti violence took place.

9. 2008 Uthapuram caste wall

i. The incident

70 houses belonging to the Dalits were attacked in October 2008 reportedly in retaliation for the demolition of the wall and a Dalit man was shot dead by the police. The Village of Uthapuram in Madurai district has two major castes, the dominant caste Vellalar and the Pallar caste.

ii. Cause for violence

The Uthapuram caste wall, which is also known as the wall of shame, the wall of [untouchability](#) is a 12 ft high and 600 meter long wall built by dominant caste villagers reportedly to segregate the Dalit population in the Village of Uthapuram, Tamil Nadu. The village witnessed violence between Dalits and the dominant castes during 1948, 1964 and 1989 and was also known for its caste-based discrimination. Protests started in 2008 campaigning to demolish the wall led mostly by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and left parties²⁸.

²⁷ "Manjolai Victims got Compensation, not justice". *M K Ananth*. *The Times of India*. 24 July 2019.

²⁸ Viswanathan, S. (6 June 2008). "The fall of a wall". *Frontline - The Hindu*. Uthapuram. Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

Hon'ble M Karunanidhi was the Chief Minister when Uthapuram caste riot took place both in 1989 and 2008.

10. 2011 Paramakudi Riots

i. *The Incident*

The Paramakudi riot was a series of incidents that happened from 10 to 13 September 2011 in Paramakudi, in Ramanathapuram district. On 11 September, the second day of rioting, five rioters were killed and 50 injured. Later two died of their injuries.²⁹ According to district collector Arun Roy, the police opened fire when the mob refused to disperse after an attempt to use tear gas.

ii. *Cause for Violence*

The rioters were held in response to the detention of Tamizhaga Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK) leader John Pandian who was detained while heading to Paramakudi to commemorate the 54th death anniversary of Immanuvel Sekaran, a Pallar caste leader who was murdered along with 41 others in 1957.³⁰ According to Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Jayalalithaa Jayaram, "What happened at Paramakudi was unfortunate and we are forming an inquiry commission under a retired high court judge to probe the whole incident".³¹

Justice Sampath commission justified the police firing without which there would have been loss of lives and state property. The report suggested that sensitive caste gatherings must be avoided.³²

Hon'ble J Jayalalitha was the Chief Minister when the gory assassination of Paramakudi took place.

11. 2012 Dharmapuri violence

i. *The Incident*

This is another gory incident that took place in Natham village in Dharmapuri district. In this incidence of violence, as many as 268 homes of Dalits (belonging to Adi Dravida community) were torched, 50 bikes, 4 vans were also burnt.³³ The

²⁹ "Paramakudi Police Firing: Toll rises to Seven", *The Hindu*. 12 September 2011.

³⁰ "India: Seven killed as police open fire on protesters", *BBC News - India*. BBC News. 12 September 2011. Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

³¹ DNA Correspondent (13 September 2011). "7 die as Tamil Nadu cops fire on Dalit mob". *Daily News & Analysis*. Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

³² Ramakrishnan, Sathyalaya (8 May 2013). "Paramakudi Communal Clash: Justice Sampath Commission justifies Police Firing". *Asian Tribune*. Retrieved in July 2024.

³³ *Economic and Political Weekly*. 47 (52): 7-8. 5 June 2015, "Caste Fire in Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu"

National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) described the attack as well-organized and pre-planned³⁴.

ii. Cause for Violence

It was due to a love marriage between a Dalit boy and a Vanniar girl. When the girl refused to leave the boy, her father committed suicide and in retaliation to this, about 1,500-strong mob rampaged through Natham and two smaller Dalit settlements, Kondampatti and Anna Nagar, where the mob set ablaze over 200 houses, damaged at least 50 others, and allegedly looted valuables and cash worth crores of rupees. The mob rampaged for four hours and was brought under control after arrest of 90 men and an additional deployment of 1000 policemen.³⁵ Ramadoss, belonging to Vanniar political outfit Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) is believed to have orchestrated the incident. The police force seemed to have done it in collusion with the local Vanniar mob.³⁶ Nearly 22 neighbouring village men were gathered to destroy their properties and ransack Dalit villages and loot their properties which included cash, jewels, vehicles, and other valuables.

Hon'ble J Jayalalitha was the Chief Minister when Dharmapuri violence was let loose.

12. The 2015 Seshasamudram violence

i. The Incident

This is also known as the Villupuram violence refers to the violence that took place on 15 August 2015 in Seshasmudram, a village in Shankarapuram Taluk, Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu. A crowd of 500 dominant-caste villagers attacked a Dalit colony over a procession of a temple car. 15 houses belonging to the Dalits were burnt down and 40 Dalits were injured during the violence.³⁷

Hon'ble J Jayalalitha was the Chief Minister when Seshasamudram violence took place.

13. The 2019 Ponparappi violence

This incident happened on April 18, 2019, during the polling for the 2019 General Elections in the village Ponparappi, Tamil Nadu. Tension started brewing during

³⁴ R. Arivanantham (12 November 2012). "Attack on Dalits was Planned: National Commission for SCs. Retrieved on July 11, 2024.

³⁵ K A Shaji, TNN; V Senthil Kumaran; Karthick S (9 November 2012). "Inter-caste marriage sparks riot in Tamil Nadu district, 148 Dalit houses torched". The Times of India. 27 January 2013. Retrieved on July 10, 2024.

³⁶ Shoba, V (25 November 2012). "Love and violence in Dharmapuri - Indian Express. Retrieved on July 10, 2.

³⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Seshasamudram_violence, Visited on July 11, 2024.

the polling for the 2019 General Election where some members of the Hindu Munnani reportedly broke a pot which is the election symbol of the VCK and when some members of the PMK reportedly prevented an elderly Dalit to vote in the elections. These tensions led to scuffles and stone pelting between the two parties. Later a mob of 100 people reportedly belonging to the PMK went on to attack the Dalit colony damaging Dalit owned houses, house-hold items and vehicles and assaulted Dalit people including women and children. There were also reports of sexual abuse on Dalit women. A study was carried out by the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) blamed the Hindu Munnani and the PMK for orchestrating this violence. It also reported that the attack was “pre-planned and murderous.”³⁸

Hon’ble Edapadi K. Palanisamy was the Chief Minister when Ponparappi violence took place.

14. 2022 Vengaivayal Issue

In December 2022, unidentified people mixed human faeces into an overhead water tank that supplied water to Dalit residents of Vengaivayal village in Tamil Nadu’s Pudukkottai district.

Five Dalit children of Vengaivayal village fell ill and were hospitalised on December 24, 2022. More people fell sick later. The doctors who treated the children had alerted the villagers regarding possible contamination of drinking water: To their great shock, they discovered that the drinking water source of the Dalit families had been contaminated with human excreta. It was a 10,000-litre tank, supplying drinking water to the Dalit community of around 100 people. It as an *Adi Dravidar colony*, and home to the SC Arunthathiyar community.³⁹

Despite High Court orders, a CB-CID probe and CM’s assurances in the legislature to nab the culprits, attention of National Commission for Scheduled Castes, no arrests were made, and no breakthrough in the case was achieved by the DMK government even after two years. Caste-based discrimination and violence are significant issues in several villages in Tamil Nadu. The dropping of human excrement in water tanks is not a new tactic in the state, said a report by IANS (Dec 29, 2022).

Hon’ble M K Stalin, the son of former CM M. Karunanidhi was the Chief Minister when this inhuman incident took place.

³⁸ “Attack on Dalits in Ponparappi was preconceived and murderous”: MIDS study, The New Indian Express, June 09, 2020, Retrieved on July 11, 2024.

³⁹ Ramakrishnan, 31-12 – 2023, “Drinking water-tank of Vengaivayal Dalit colony found with human excreta mixed: no arrests, no breakthrough even after one year”, Countercurrents.org.

Some Critical Remarks

- These violences and murders were carried out on all grounds that Dalits have been subjected to for ages. When Dalits show any form of development like self-awareness and assertion, educational progress, economic mobility, religious and political assertion, they are dealt with severely and oppressive caste system destroys their hopes and aspirations. The above mentioned violences are the aggressive responses of the oppressive caste communities to Dalit assertion.
- Violence and murder of Parmakudi & Uthapuram Dalits is the attack on the awareness of and assertion for identity and dignity; Kodiakulam & Dharmapuri events are the clear cases of economic destruction of Dalits especially when they live on par with oppressive caste communities; Melavalavu & Papparapatti atrocities are attack on the political assertion of Dalits, Seshapuram event is an outlandish act of oppressive caste communities curbing the religious space of Dalits. Thus, every sphere of Dalit life and identity is stifled with whenever and wherever Dalits show progress and self-reliance.
- Except one incident, all other crimes took place during the tenure of Dravidian rule either by DMK or AIADMK both of whom claim to be guided and governed by Dravidian political philosophy founded on social justice and egalitarian principles.
- Dravidian philosophy clearly speaks about three important characteristics such as Rationalism (against all superstitious practices in the name of religion, culture, etc.), suppression of Brahminic domination (domination of Brahmins, not so much of Brahminic ideologies) and Social Justice (means the least will get the best treatment in the eyes of the government). In practical terms, the so-called Dravidian model has been successful in curbing the supremacy of Brahmins but has become Brahminic in maintaining hierarchy which is the core of Brahminism. Unfortunately, Dravidian model has done very little towards annihilating caste. That is the reason there are so many violence and atrocities against Dalits in Tamil Nadu. Today, Shudras have taken the place of Brahmins in oppressing and excluding Dalits. Hence it will be more fitting to name its Shudra model than Dravidian model. In other words, Dravidianism is nothing but, “Shudrasism” which works against Aryanism (Brahminic supremacy) and also Ambedkarism which is equality of all. Ambedkarism does not subscribe to any form of hierarchy, be in the name of gender, caste, religion, or language; but celebrates equality of self, a dignified self.

- Interestingly the law-and-order portfolio was always with the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. All the CMs of Tamil Nadu were the party president also, CN Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, MG Ramachandran, Selvi. Jayalalitha and at present MK Stalin. They had all the powers to stop violence against Dalits and establish justice whenever such Shudra-Dalit scuffles take place and to immediately establish justice. Noting of this sort happened. This shows that under the Shudra rule, justice to Dalits is impossible.
- History also tells us that a Dalit can become the Chief Minister of a state in the Brahmin dominated ideological political set up, not in the Shudra dominated political ground. For example, Damodaram Sanjivayya (1960) was CM of Andhra Pradesh, Bhola Paswan Shastri (1968) CM of Bihar, Ram Sundar Das (1979), CM of Bihar, Jahannath Pahadia, (1980) CM of Rajasthan, Mayawati (4 times), CM of Uttar Pradesh, Jithanram Manjhi (2014), CM of Bihar and Charanjit Singh Channi (2021), CM of Punjab⁴⁰. But there is not even one Dalit CM in the Dravidian model of political governance. This clearly shows that Brahminic supremacy has an edge for Dalits, but not Shudra supremacy. Hence, justice and recognition for Dalits in Shudra dominated land are never possible. Otherwise, today in my opinion, Hon'ble Thol. Thirumavalavan and Hon'ble A. Raja are more suited to be the CMs of Tamil Nadu than anybody else. There is more Shudra dominated caste hierarchy than family or descent politics.

5. Inquiry Commissions: A Farce?

According to academicians and researchers, inquiry commissions on police firing and violences against Dalits are a big eyewash. Government has set up these inquiry commissions as a tactic to diffuse the heat that ferments during and after every atrocity, especially violence against Dalits. In this regard, the government of Tamil Nadu has set up perhaps, the highest number of inquiry commissions mostly on caste violence. But the outcome of all those commissions is a matter of shame. The whole process is a sham.⁴⁰

- According to Dr C. Lakshmanan, professor at Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), Tamil Nadu has set up the highest number of inquiry commissions on violence against Dalits, starting from 1968, the year when Justice Ganapathy Pillai Commission was set up to investigate the Kivenmani massacre.
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⁴⁰ CP Balasubramanyam, "28 inquiry commissions into Tamil Nadu's police firings, yet search for documents remains elusive", *The New Indian Express*, 12 December, 2021.

- Mr Kathir, founder of Evidence, a Madurai based NGO, also shared the outcome of the commissions set up since 1991. According to him, as many as 28 commissions headed by retired judges were set up to investigate various incidents, 14 of which involved alleged violence by police. None of these reports were tabled for public consumption.
- The impact of the reports of inquiry commissions cannot be better stated than the Retired Madras High Court judge Krishnaswami Chandru. He rightly observed, “An inquiry ordered under Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952, is an eyewash. The commission is a toothless tiger. Such commissions are appointed mostly to ward off public protest”⁴¹.
- Interestingly, all the commission heads were either a Shudra from one of the communities which perpetrated violence against Dalits or a Brahmin who is again from a dominant caste. Hence, the outcome of such commissions were predictable even before they started the investigation that it would not deliver justice.

6. Modern Forms of Caste Violence and Discrimination

According to Simon Susen, in her article on “*Reflections on ideology: Lessons from Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski*”,

“Ideologies, in so far as they are produced and reproduced by specific social groups, serve a major bonding and integrative function, which depends on their capacity to create a sense of collectively sustained cohesion. Shared ideological frameworks make it possible ‘to maintain the performers’ cohesion reinforcing, through ritual reaffirmation, the group’s belief in the necessity and the legitimacy of its action.”⁴²

This is very apt to understand the practice of “Honor Killing” by which the dominant social groups maintain their supremacist tendency and practice over their subordinated communities. The opportunity for Dalits to go to higher and professional education, economic mobility, exposure and access to modern and consumeristic culture, and other things by which the so called 2K kids are identified has seemingly posed a threat to the strong and rigid caste relations in India in general, and in Tamil Nadu particularly, Shudra hegemonic tentacles stretch up and strangle the anomic liberality. This has been very well stage-managed through the practice of Honor killing when such caste rigidity still prevails in the name of preventing inter-caste love marriages.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Simon Susen, (2014) “Reflections on ideology: Lessons from Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski” City University London, UK. P. 91.

I would like to present three representative cases of caste hierarchical practices of discrimination and exclusion: *Honor killing*, *Tsunami*, and *COVID 19* are cases in point in which we see caste reproducing itself to discriminate against Dalits.

Honor Killing

In less than three years, Tamil Nadu has witnessed 81 incidents of honour killings with the ghastly murder of Dalit youth Shankar in Udumalpet, in neighbouring Tirupur district being the latest⁴³.

- ***“Though honour killings are on the rise, not a single case has ended up in conviction in the state as family members of the dominant castes are involved in such murders,”*** said Madurai-based Dalit Activist Vincent Kathir, managing director of the non-profit organisation, ‘Evidence’. He further opined that in an attempt to cover up incidents of honour killings, the Tamil Nadu government dismisses such cases as one among many incidents that happen. As a result, Tamil Nadu is one among the few states that has not submitted its report on it to the Supreme Court.
- As per the statistics, *“As many as 22 states have given details on honour killings to the apex court,”* he said, adding, that most cases of honour killings are merely passed off as suicides. Of the 81 incidents, 80 per cent of victims are women and 20 per cent are men. *“Caste Hindu women, who love or marry Dalit men are murdered by their family members. On the other hand, Dalit women, who marry caste Hindu men, are ditched due to societal pressure. Almost 84 per cent of Dalit women, who are into inter-caste marriage face humiliation due to marital discord,”* said Kathir.
- Ghastly murders of Dalit youths only indicate that caste-based violence and politics are intertwined in Tamil Nadu. Those who unleash violence for the sake of community pride tend to enjoy the backing of caste-based political outfits. Thus, certain Yuvaraj, the murderer of Gokulraj in such an honour killing case turned into a hero and was given rousing welcome when he arrived to surrender in Gokulraj murder case,” said R Athiyamaan, Founder President of ‘Adhi Thamizhar Peravai’.⁴⁴

Thus, Shudras are the worst perpetrators of caste superiority even though they are treated as second class citizens in the national parlance, either in terms of job opportunities, ministers of cabinet ranking, civil service positions, top positions in private and corporate sectors, etc. They keep quiet when and where they are

⁴³ <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/crime/150316/81-honour-killings-in-three-years-in-tamil-nadu.html>.

⁴⁴ V. Ashok Kumar, Deccan Chronicle, March 15, 2016. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/crime/150316/81-honour-killings-in-three-years-in-tamil-nadu.html>.

supposed to raise their voices but pretend to be superiors in the face of Dalits and Adivasis. It is beyond any doubt that unless and otherwise, they join hands with Dalits and Adivasis, they will not be able to break the traditional hierarchy which is detrimental to them also.

i. Tsunami 2004

Caste is as active in situations of natural calamity as other times, sometimes even more and worse, visible and aggressive as the situation of benefit is short lived. The best example will be caste prejudiced treatment in the relief works after Tsunami in southern India in 2004. Though it happened 20 years ago, the impact it created in differential treatment of the victims on the basis of caste is still felt and experienced in the Dalit community. As a result, while the fishing communities were pumped in with materials and monetary helps and returned to normal life routine, Dalits are still limping behind as they were ostracized beyond imagination.

- Human Rights Watch, an NGO working among the marginalized communities stated, *“it has received credible reports of discrimination in tsunami-stricken areas against Dalit communities by the authorities as well as by some aid groups and local communities”*. Also, Brad Alam, Asia director of Human Rights Watch asserted, *“In the aftermath of the tsunami, the Indian government should try to help Dalits who may be excluded from equitable relief and employment opportunities.”*
- According to many press reports and an on-site investigation by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), some higher-caste fishing communities refused to share emergency shelter and rations with the Dalits. Dalit areas have been the last to have electricity and water supplies restored during rehabilitation processes. It was also found out that officials were discriminating against providing financial assistance to the families of deceased Dalits in tsunami.⁴⁵

Some of the heinous practices during the most despicable situation were,

- Dalits cannot drink water from tanks put up by UNICEF at some relief camps as other groups say Dalits ‘pollute’ the water;
- Dalits have been excluded from some relief camps resulting in much of the relief materials failing to reach them;
- The dead bodies of other communities have been buried in the living areas of some Dalits;

⁴⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/01/14/india-end-caste-bias-tsunami-relief#:~:text=Most%20of%20the%20immediate%20victims,wells%20were%20filled%20with%20seawater.>

- Officials have been apathetic about registering deaths among Dalits, establishing the conditions of Dalit victims and have been reluctant to register missing Dalit persons or respond to appeals for relief.⁴⁶
- The reason behind such attitude is that most of these officials were from the Shudra community which joined hands with their communities and denied all the rightful share of Dalits even in the most critical time of Tsunami.

ii. *COVID 19, Caste and Untouchability*

Given the tenacity and pervasiveness of caste system, it is hardly surprising that some of the worst sufferers of the COVID-19 pandemic are Indian Dalits. Branding of migrant workers returning to their home states as carriers of COVID-19 made their life more miserable. Gross violation of humanitarian charter that insists right to life with dignity, right to receive assistance and the right to protection and safety became evident.

In a shocking incident migrants, majority of whom were Dalits returning to their homes in Uttar Pradesh were sprayed with chemicals by a team on sanitising duty at the Bareilly bus stand. According to reports, the migrants who had walked down from Noida and Delhi, were told to sit at the bus stand by officials who said that they would be taken on buses and would be given food. According to sources, the sanitising team sprayed the group with a diluted mixture of Sodium hypochlorite,⁴⁷

To conclude,

Fundamental realities of Dalits have not changed. While Dalit assertion has become more and more articulate and vocal, atrocities against them also become more ruthless and shameful. The aim was to destroy the economic bases of Dalits so that they will always depend on the oppressive castes, polluting their drinking water with human excrements (far more shameful than denying fetching water in public water tanks), and obstructing their fundamental religious freedom. The only exception to Dalit oppression seems to be Left political parties. Historically Communist Party of India (CPI) and (CPI-M) are the only political parties that stood by them in claiming their constitutional rights, in taking up their litigations and establishing justice for them. From political analysis, there is no point that Dalit political movements join with Shudra political parties. Dalits, Adivasis, religious minorities should review their support to these parties, move towards Left parties and empower them for their own empowerment.

⁴⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/india/indias-Dalits-refused-access-tsunami-relief>

⁴⁷ March 30, 2020, 04:55PM IST Source: TOI.in: retrieved on July 15, 2024.

Chapter 14

Fruit Gathering

Selvaraj Arulnathan SJ

Many insights were driven home in the keynote address by Rt Rev. Devasahayam, Bishop Emeritus, CSI Archdiocese, Chennai and the successive paper presentations. I would like to enumerate a few insights and highlights of the presentations, which I felt of importance in this seminar and the theme we have taken for the seminar. Mine will be analytical in approach.

- A comparative analysis of Dalit and Black worldviews in terms of inferiority and superiority was well articulated throughout the seminar. Most of the paper presentations brought out the superiority-inferiority conundrum in the society, in policy makings and also in the church.
- The volume and extent of this binary is further contrasted with pollution and purity in Indian context which doesn't exist in the black world. While inferiority and superiority conundrum in the racial world is maintained by external colour differences, it is much nuanced in pollution and purity binary which is part of Hindu religio-ethical archetype that creates both bloated identity on the one hand and an emaciated self-identity on the other in the graded varna and caste SELF. Unfortunately, this graded inequality has become the fundamental reality of Christianity also in India.
- The keynote address made it very clear what is equity and equality and what is needed for the historically marginalized communities. While equity stands for justice and fairness, equality is treatment of all on the same ground which is not the right approach in the oppressor-oppressed socio-cultural and historical dual identity. Black thinkers and scholars articulate the difference between equity and equality much more emphatically and graphically than Indian caste analysts. While a white man starts from 'O - zero' in a race for life and self-dignity,

a black and a coloured person in the western world starts with ‘- 5’ (minus 5). Social equity will mean giving an edge of 5-plus for a black when a white starts with 0.

- Caste or varna is a paradigm of hierarchy in Indian ethos which has been forced and practised for millennia with religious sanction. Though it faced innumerable crises ever since it was introduced and created paradigm shifts every now and then (Buddhism, bhakti movements, Ambedkarism, and even Indian Constitutions), there was not a paradigm shift which could overthrow the hierarchical caste to create an egalitarian society. Hindutva is another attempt to reinstate a hierarchical paradigm even more vigorously.
- Today there is a need for revisiting and reinventing subaltern sources, religious and spiritual sources to continue to challenge graded social systems. The keynote speaker brought out many such counter ideological paradigms from other religious sources, Dalit cultural sources, and also personalities like Jesus who thoroughly critiqued his own Judaic religious and cultural values which was again built upon hierarchical order.

Dr Selvaraj Arulnathan in his paper critiqued mainly the highly celebrated Dravidian model which is hyped as the alternative to Aryan model. While Dravidian model has addressed the issue of Brahminic supremacy to a great extent, annihilation of caste has not been addressed. In other words, in as much as it has addressed annihilation of Brahmin domination in Tamil soil, so much it took for granted to address and annihilate Brahminism and casteism. Dalits, generally known as Adi-Dravidas, have suffered more in the hands of Shudras (the so-called Dravidians) than in the hands of Brahmins. It is very much true in the case of the Catholic church and also in other denominations where Shudra Christians are sizable in number.

- The number of inquiry commissions against violence on Dalits, honour killing and other such atrocities against are more in Tamil Nadu than any other part of the country.
- While there are so many atrocities against Dalits in the Dravidian land, there is also marked development in Tamil Nadu among the Dalits thanks to their innate quest for freedom and self-reliance. This has paved the way for forging self-dependence and self-dignity and an infused culture of self-critique.
- Art has always been referred to as a production of elite culture and a segment of society. To counter this prejudice or even practice, modern Indian art forms introduced for centuries folk art forms (dance, music, paintings, etc.) and even revolt art forms. While Dr Anand Amaladoss

highlighted Christian art forms and looked at from the point of view of “Art and Option for the Poor” and its importance in the church and society, there are also art forms which portray the pain, agony and awakening of the people in the margins. He could have brought out the ideological orientation on the art of the poor and the marginalized and the portrayal of their pain, agony and struggle for dignity.

- Dr Maria Arul Raja, usual to his nature, broke the ground through his exposition on the subaltern spiritual energies which posits a different ethical genre when a woman asserts, “We don’t want prayer; we want justice”. There is a different spiritual source from which Dalits would draw their spiritual strength. This is again, a challenge to the archaic meaningless liturgical practices devoid of action and compassion. He argues that systemic violence should be met with systemic strong justice struggle. A new spiritual source in which everybody can find justice, peace and joy beyond caste, colour and other discriminatory agents.
- Tamil spiritual doyens like Vallalar and Ayya Vaikundar are the real architects of modern spiritual movements whose ways of liberation steeped in long lasting justice, peace, and development, again a new look at spiritual praxis. It is not about the other world; it is not about the pie in the sky. It is here and now, formed in flesh and blood. Justice and peace are the other names of spiritual sources, steeped in the everyday life of the masses, in their poverty, struggle for freedom, angst for equality and fraternity. It is a spiritual praxis, a way to live and let others live. The two papers on Vallalar and Ayya Vaikundar brought out these points very clearly. Their spiritual renaissance in Tamil soil were a great threat to the Brahminic spiritual stagnation and a leap in modern spirituality. I can safely adduce that the so-called Dravidian model of material progress is borrowed from people like Vallalar and Ayya Vaikundar.
- Iyothee Thass Pandithar is a forerunner of Dr B. R. Ambedkar in many ways, specially creating liberative Dalit Consciousness. He reinvented ancient Buddhist (Purva Buddhism) egalitarian consciousness by historically revisiting Tamil sources where he found the treasure of scientific Buddhism and its liberative consciousness which became his political and spiritual agenda to organize and awaken Dalit consciousness.
- Dr Francis P Xavier traversed the ideological formation of “*Option for the Dalits and the Jesuits of Tamilnad*” which was a checkered historical struggle for the Jesuits especially those who took Dalit Empowerment discourse very seriously. There have been vanguards, bogus “Dalit champions” who reaped the fruits of their jargons. However, we are

still at the crossroads in terms of Dalit emancipation agenda. He traced this option from the beginning of the Society of Jesus as the 'care of souls' which was a great shift in the Christian world when care of the body (material wealth and bodily pleasure) was the dictum of the day. As usual, he argued his case very convincingly with facts and figures especially when it came to option for the Dalits and the Jesuits in Tamil Nadu. Being the Provincial of Jesuit Madurai province (the whole Tamil Nadu was one province when he was the provincial) at the turn of the millennium, his personal encounter with the forces that worked against the province policy would have added vitality to his presentation.

- Dr Josephine Mary, a religious nun has very graphically portrayed in her paper, "*The Space of Dalit Religious Women in Indian Church*" the atrocities, both overt and covert Dalit nuns experience in their respective religious congregations in the Catholic church. While there has been very lofty ideas and ideals about women religious in India, the despicable side of Dalit nuns within women religious congregations is gradually surfacing with serious doubts about the authenticity of women religious life in Indian context. Those Dalit nuns who are able to articulate either because they are well educated or well versed in understanding the truth and reality or who have kept impeccable track record are religious nuns, who are the targets of intimidation, coercion and even direct character assassination. Those who cow down such pressure and intimidation are pushed back to their silent suffering mode, but those who withstand such coercive behaviour of their higher-ups experience justice and victory over injustice. This again needs tremendous willpower and spiritual force. In other words, there has been continuous conflict between brute force and spiritual force. It is even more heinous and insidious when it is Dalit women religious. Dr Josephine Mary has brought out very succinctly, but also very powerfully.
- Dr John Jayaharan in his paper "*Life after Violence: Dalit Powers for Transformation*", speaks of Dalit assertion inspired by Dalit cultural resources. While resilience at the face of Dalit violence is taken as the weakness of the Dalit community, they deem it a reverence for life, not only of their own, even of their enemies. For them life is the same. That is why you will find only some form of retaliation, never active in causing violence. This is considered by the violators as weakness and inability. In real sense Dalit power remains in love for life and dignity, resilience as power of encountering violence and Dalit music and dance as alternative to violence and intimidation. Dr John Jayaharan has brought out these aspects very much in his paper. Retaliatory justice needs to be focused

more sharply so that power of resilience should not be equated with inability and weakness. This aspect needs more attention and perspective.

To sum up, Shudra politics has been devaluing and usurping Dalit space in every sphere, social, political, economic, cultural and very much spiritual. All those spiritual sources are devaluing, and their rightful spaces are appropriated so that they remain as subordinates to Shudras. This has been kept under check by letting lose violence, demolition of their properties both moveable and immovable, desecrating their faith, etc. whenever and wherever Dalits assert their identity and reclaim their dignity. Dalits continue to suffer in the hands of Shudras than in the hands of Brahmins and the so-called other twice-born Hindus.

- While Shudras under Dravidian reign have been able to challenge brahmins, they have imbibed Brahminic tendencies more than brahmins themselves. In this context, there is only one way possible for Dalits to reclaim their identity, dignity and freedom by coming under one umbrella and fighting for their rights. In other words, they should organize, unite and agitate to win their dignity and unique identity through political and economic power and progress in order to gain their dignity.

Constructing Hierarchies

Humans, by nature and nurture, tend to construct and sustain systems of hierarchy. Is it because of the social Darwinism of might is right? Perhaps, the powerful minority with their pursuit of asymmetry of power and denial of relational anthropology draw their undeserving privileges through brute physical violence, daily systemic violence, hegemonic sweet-coated violence, or subtle symbolic violence. In fact, the hierarchy of graded inequality is construed by the caste-minded people as natural order, creational order, social order, harmonious order, and divine order.

The caste-obsessed people have immersed all people into the evil of casteism. The Dalits and Dalit women have been treated with the stigma of untouchability or inferiority, be it under Brahmin-centred model or Shudra-centered model. Most of the relief measures or enquiry commission reports about the hate crimes against the Dalits are either upholding the caste positions or negating the legitimate demands of the Dalits.

From Hierarchy to Equity

But how to move away from the culture of hierarchy to the culture of equity? Are there models in the Tamil cultural soil?

Vallalar- Ramalinga Swamy

For every life, the divine is the parent. If so, there could not be any hierarchy possible.

Neither by birth nor by title could one claim superiority over the other. Attainment of the divine is possible only through compassion for all creatures.

Sivavaakiya Cittar

The iconoclastic and reformatory universalistic ethics of the Tamil Cittars interrogated hierarchy for favouring egalitarianism at all levels integrating both the material and invisible aspects of life

Ayya Vazhi Muthukutti Samy

The innate and in-built divine roots of self-dignity planted in every human has to be identified, cultivated, watered, and celebrated in every human being.

Iyothee Thaas Pandithar

Dalit consciousness is to be awakened with appropriate pedagogies of excavating into the primeval native cultural soil of Tamil Buddhism for moving towards spontaneous fraternal freedom and egalitarian justice to all

Interior Movements of the Caste Rulers and Dalit Victims

In the day-to-day life experience of the Dalits, we need to differentiate between the interior movements of the caste rulers and of the Dalit victims.

Caste Rulers	Dalit Victims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status Quo • Fear of role-exchange • Neutral nomenclature eclipsing conflicts, violence, and perpetrators • Violence (brute, symbolic, and systemic) • Dividing-and-ruling Dalits • Exclusion • Deviant labelling upon Dalits • Organized hate crimes and hate campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dismantling • Desire for role-exchange • Pointed nomenclature exposing conflicts, violence, and perpetrators • Violation (against structure, tradition, and hierarchy) • Seeking collaboration • Inclusion • Deifying others at their own cost • Unorganized claims of rights with multiple approaches

Ways and means of Building Equity

Instead of becoming reduced to be victims of these imposed violence, the Dalits and subalterns are to be awakened to their identity as community-building agents as assertive subjects of history. How the wounded psyche and humiliated consciousness could re-read the past effectively, evolve the present fruitfully and project the future creatively?

- The all-permeating casteism has to be openly and comprehensively encountered in view of annihilating it
- Subjugating dependence is an eternal curse but dignified dependence or humanizing relationality is salvation. Self-dignity is non-negotiable and has to be pursued by all means.
- Celebration of pluralism is imperative for abolition of the totalitarian homogeneity insisted on by Brahminic supremacy and the culture of casteism.
- Preferential option for the marginalized has to be the order of the day for constructive resolution of caste conflicts.
- Victims are to be focused on subjects of history and accordingly the human body has to be venerated, health has to be democratized, and materiality to be celebrated.
- Constitutional morality has to be promoted from top to bottom.
- Dalit emancipation cannot become a reality without emancipation of Dalit women at all levels.
- Identifying the right type of collaborators with goodwill is necessary for attaining ideational clarity, evolving political strategies and achieving empowerment programmes.
- On-going political formation, mobilization, advocacy, lobbying, or organization has to be constantly and consistently look up, discerning our long-term and short-term goals.

Questions for Further Probe:

- Every human is capable of self-affirmation and self-assertion. But how to enable the wounded psyche and humiliated consciousness to rise up with self-assertion?
- While seeking to annihilate castes, how to differentiate the evil of castes from the person practising castes?

- How to accompany and awaken the Dalits with blind loyalty to the religion/ church/ tradition/ deity/ caste lord/ political party, even while undergoing humiliation by the same?
- Faith that performs justice is wonderful. But how to fruitfully integrate justice with reconciliation from Dalit location, that too with dialogue with non-Dalits and anti-Dalits?
- Every organisation, including the religious institutions, claims that rightful place, due proportion, appropriate time and fitting space is assigned to the persons according to their hierarchical placement. Then what is the rightful place for Dalit women, Dalit nun, Dalit labourer, Dalit professional, and Dalit person?
- Dominant ideologies sustain themselves through ritual affirmation and artistic production for reinforcing their oppressive belief systems projected as necessary and legitimate. If so, how could we enable the egalitarian ideologies to evolve effective rituals and aesthetics to be rooted within Dalits, non-Dalits, and even anti-Dalits?
- How to set the stage for dialogue between the Dalit world and Shramanic world (Tamil Chittars, Buddhist, and Jains) in the contemporary 21st century scenario?