

Preface

The monograph, “The Annihilation of Caste: A Marxist Perspective” by B. V. Raghavulu lucidly describes the Marxist understanding of caste and the relation between caste and class. It also sets out a strategic perspective for the anti-caste movement.

The study importantly clarifies that caste is not only part of the ideological superstructure but is embedded in production relations and the extraction of surplus. Therefore, caste cannot be located exclusively within either the economic base or the ideological superstructure. It straddles both. The struggle against the caste system must therefore be integrated with the broader struggle against class exploitation and inequality.

The monograph analyses the role of the left movement in the anti-caste struggles and notes its achievements and weaknesses. Based on this critical study, it sets out a programme of anti-caste struggle which should be valuable for all activists and organisations who are committed to the fight for basic social transformation.

Prakash Karat
General Editor

The Annihilation of Caste: A Marxist Perspective

B. V. Raghavulu

Introduction

The pervasive presence of caste across almost every sphere of life is a distinctive feature of Indian Subcontinent. Such a method of oppression and exploitation has no exact parallel elsewhere in the world. This specificity raises fundamental questions about its role and continuing relevance in contemporary India. From social relations and economic opportunities to political participation and institutional functioning, caste continues to shape both individual experiences and collective identities. This remains true even in the present phase of economic liberalisation.

Earlier expectations that modernisation, expansion of education, and economic development would gradually erode caste have not been realised. On the contrary, caste has not only persisted but has acquired renewed visibility and salience in social and political life. Despite constitutional guarantees prohibiting caste-based discrimination and inequality, caste hierarchies continue to operate in multiple forms. Rather than withering away, caste has adapted to changing socio-economic conditions and continues to exert significant influence over both individuals and institutions.

This persistence is not accidental. The caste system facilitates and intensifies exploitation, serving the interests of the ruling classes, which in turn act to preserve and reinforce it, albeit in new forms. Caste hierarchies become a crucial instrument for the ruling classes to deflect the discontent and anger generated by neoliberal policies. These policies impose heavy burdens on the masses, intensifying insecurity and precarity; caste divisions are then mobilised to fragment this discontent and redirect it away from its underlying economic causes.

In recent decades, caste-related issues have assumed heightened political significance. Ruling bourgeois parties have increasingly emphasised questions of representation, reservations, and affirmative action, often generating a highly competitive and fragmented socio-political environment. These issues are frequently deployed either to mobilise electoral support or to disrupt existing political alignments. Competition among caste elites is actively manipulated by bourgeois forces – particularly the BJP and the RSS – during electoral cycles. This raises a crucial question: why does caste continue to function as such a powerful axis of political mobilisation?

Among forces committed to the annihilation of caste – most notably Marxist and Ambedkarite currents – there have been intense debates regarding the nature of caste, its relationship with class, and the strategies necessary for overcoming both. These debates have generated sustained theoretical engagement and, at times, sharp polemics within the Left, as well as between Marxist, Ambedkarite, and liberal intellectual traditions.

A clear and rigorous understanding of these issues is essential for the revolutionary movement in India, particularly for building and mobilising Left, democratic, and progressive forces committed to radical social transformation and the transcendence of capitalism towards an egalitarian socialist society.

The communist movement's antagonism to caste and its recognition that the annihilation of caste is indispensable to social emancipation have never been in doubt. However, at the theoretical level, there have been gaps in understanding the specific mechanisms of caste and in developing adequate strategies for its eradication. Over time, these gaps have been progressively addressed through the contributions of Marxist thinkers and through internal debates within the Left movement.

Despite earlier theoretical limitations, in practice the communist movement – and communists as individuals – have consistently been at the forefront of struggles against caste oppression, discrimination, and atrocities. It is widely acknowledged that wherever communist-led movements, particularly agrarian struggles, have been strong, the most oppressive forms of caste domination have been significantly weakened.

Nevertheless, communists have often faced sharp – and at times hostile – criticism regarding their approach to the caste question. Proponents of postmodern and identity-based frameworks frequently dismiss Marxism as inadequate for understanding Indian society and caste. At the same time, critiques have also emerged from within Marxist circles, ranging from outright rejection of past approaches to serious and constructive efforts aimed at refining and deepening Marxist analysis. There have also been attempts, in response to perceived limitations in class analysis, to construct eclectic syntheses of Marxism and Ambedkarite thought.

It is within this complex theoretical and political terrain that the relationship between caste and class must be examined with clarity, historical depth, and strategic purpose.

This monograph seeks to contribute to that task. It begins by outlining the concepts of class and caste, and their interrelationship, from a Marxist perspective. It then proceeds to a historical analysis of the origin and evolution of the caste system through a class perspective. Finally, it assesses resistance to caste across different historical periods, with particular attention to the modern era and to the contributions and limitations of the communist movement.

The overall objective is to clarify the Marxist understanding of the caste question and to contribute meaningfully to ongoing debates within progressive, anti-caste movements committed to radical social transformation.

I

Marxian Understanding of Class

In the Marxian framework, class is not simply a matter of income, prestige, or occupation. It is rooted in the material structure of society. Formation of classes is linked with the nature of production relations. A class consists of those who share a common relationship to the means of

production and who appropriate the social product in a similar manner. What defines a class is therefore not subjective identity but objective position – whether one owns or controls the means of production, whether one sells labour power, and how one participates in the extraction or appropriation of surplus.

Marxism begins from the premise that human beings must produce their material life in order to survive. In doing so, they enter into definite social relations – relations of production. These include control over land, tools, and machinery; control over labour power; and the mechanisms through which surplus are extracted. They also include forms of dependence, coercion, and obligation that constitute labour.

Classes emerge historically when societies develop the capacity to produce and store a surplus beyond immediate subsistence. As long as production was limited to survival needs, class divisions could not crystallise. Once surplus became possible, however, some groups were able to appropriate it, giving rise to class divisions. In this sense, class is a universal feature of all surplus-producing societies – long predating capitalism. Slave societies, feudal societies, and capitalist societies all exhibited class divisions, though the specific forms and characteristics of those classes varied across time and place.

The fundamental difference between pre-capitalist and capitalist classes lies in the method of surplus extraction. In pre-capitalist societies, surplus was generally extracted through extra-economic means – direct coercion, customary obligations, or political and legal authority. In capitalist society, by contrast, surplus is extracted primarily through economic mechanisms mediated by the market. Workers are formally free, yet compelled by economic necessity to sell their labour power, allowing capital to appropriate surplus value.

The transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist society does not occur in a smooth or uniform manner. As older social formations begin to dissolve, earlier class structures break down and new classes gradually emerge. These new classes are not created in isolation; they are formed out of elements of earlier class arrangements and therefore initially bear the “birthmarks” of the old order. In many cases, those who occupied the lower strata in pre-capitalist systems become a significant part of the emerging working class in capitalism.

In India, this process unfolds within a caste-stratified society. As capitalism develops, the relationship between caste and class undergoes important changes. While new class formations take shape, caste continues to influence their composition and lived experience. In some sections, caste and class overlap, and existing caste hierarchies shape the way classes are formed and perceived. This can create an impression of continuity between old and new class divisions. However, despite these overlaps, the structural position of these groups within the capitalist mode of production is fundamentally different from their position in earlier systems.

If the transition to capitalism is thorough, older class forms are largely eliminated and new classes develop in a relatively clear and distinct manner. But where transformation is partial, delayed, or uneven, transitional and mixed forms arise. Remnants of older classes coexist with emerging ones, generating complex and layered social contradictions. These contradictions

cannot be understood abstractly; they must be studied concretely within their specific historical and geographical context.

Importantly, capitalism does not always abolish pre-capitalist social hierarchies. It may appropriate and utilise them to intensify exploitation. Even when their original economic foundations weaken, older forms of social inequality can persist and be reshaped to serve capitalist accumulation. As analysed by Karl Marx in *Capital*, capitalism has the capacity to adapt and incorporate earlier social relations wherever they enhance surplus extraction.

Class has to be understood not merely as a structural category but a historical process and lived social relation. Classes are formed through shared experiences, struggles, and cultural practices. This insight encouraged more concrete and historically grounded analyses, particularly in societies where social stratification cannot be reduced to purely economic categories.

Nature of Caste

Caste is a system of social organisation characterised by hereditary occupation and status, strict endogamy, ritual hierarchy, and the ideology of purity and pollution. At its core, caste assigns individuals a fixed social position at birth and regulates their life chances accordingly.

The caste hierarchy in India is structured as a graded order of numerous ranked castes, each positioned in relation to others through a scale of ritual status. This ranking is not confined to economic or political life; it governs the entire social existence of individuals – occupation, marriage, commensality, spatial segregation, and even rules of bodily contact. Social honour derives from ritual status, which is treated as inherent in birth rather than achieved through individual merit.

The ideological foundation of caste rests on the doctrines of *dharma* and *karma*, historically systematised within Brahmanical thought. These doctrines provide moral and divine justification for hierarchy. Inequality appears as part of a sacred order rather than as a product of historical conditions. Hierarchy is internalised as duty, reinforced by fear of pollution and belief in *karma* consequences. In this way, caste presents itself as natural, eternal, and divinely sanctioned.

A defining feature of caste is endogamy – the rule that marriage must occur within the caste. This is not a secondary custom but the basis of caste continuity. By regulating marriage, sexuality, and inheritance, caste reproduces itself both biologically and socially.

Caste and patriarchy are structurally inseparable: caste boundaries persist only through strict control over women's sexuality and reproductive capacity. Patriarchy, therefore, is not an auxiliary feature but a constitutive pillar of the caste system, making control over women a material necessity for maintaining caste hierarchy.

Since occupation is also hereditary, birth determines not only status but economic function. Structural mobility is therefore severely constrained.

Caste does not merely stratify society; it organises and disciplines labour at a fundamental level. Occupational roles are assigned hereditarily, binding specific forms of work to particular castes and ensuring their reproduction across generations. Lower castes have historically been excluded from landownership and confined to service or menial functions, while in extreme forms such as untouchability, labour discipline has been enforced through ritual exclusion, stigma, and violence. The degradation attached to certain forms of labour thus becomes a mechanism of control.

In this sense, caste operates as a system of labour control within class society. By restricting mobility and fixing occupations by birth, it secures a stable, predictable, and socially enforced labour force for the ruling classes. Labour under caste is not only exploited; it is marked, graded, and ritualised. Caste, therefore, is not external to the sphere of production but constitutes one of the key ways in which production and the division of labour are organised.

Caste also regulates the reproduction of labour power. Through hereditary occupation and strict marriage boundaries, it ensures the continuity of specific labouring groups across generations. In this sense, caste secures not only exploitation but the long-term reproduction of exploitative relations themselves.

A peculiar feature of caste society is the partial separation between ritual status and immediate economic power. While control over resources often correlates with higher status, ritual superiority does not always mechanically coincide with direct economic dominance. Yet both dimensions remain embedded within the same hierarchical order.

Thus, caste is a birth-based, endogamous, and ritually sanctioned system that organises labour, hierarchy, and social life as an integrated whole. It operates simultaneously as a structure of economic control, social stratification, and ideological domination, making it one of the most comprehensive and enduring systems of social hierarchy in history.

It is not merely an economic arrangement with ideological support. Rather, it is a social totality that penetrates and organises production, status, and social reproduction simultaneously. It determines who performs what work, who controls resources, who marries whom, and how everyday interaction is regulated. Economic, social, and ideological dimensions are fused into a single hierarchical structure.

Within Marxist debates, an important question has been whether caste belongs to a specific mode of production – slave, feudal, or capitalist. The broad conclusion that has emerged is that caste predates capitalism and cannot be reduced to any single mode of production. It has interacted differently with successive modes – mediating unfree labour in early agrarian formations, structuring rent extraction under feudalism, and shaping segmented labour markets under capitalism. For this reason, caste cannot be reduced to a single mode of production. Caste is therefore not itself a mode of production; rather, it is a social relation that organises and mediates production/exploitation relations across different historical systems.

Caste and Production Relations

From a Marxist standpoint, caste cannot be understood merely as a system of beliefs or as a form of “social stratification.” It should be treated as part of the relations of production themselves.

Historically, in pre-capitalist India, caste functioned as a central organising principle of economic life. It structured labour, regulated access to resources, and mediated the extraction of surplus. Religious sanction, social exclusion, hereditary occupation, and restrictions on mobility ensured control over labour without reliance on market mechanisms. Apart from economic compulsion and extra economic coercion, caste used social and ritual authority to secure labour discipline and continuity.

One of the defining features of caste is the hereditary fixation of labour. Occupations were assigned by birth, and movement across them was severely restricted or even violently suppressed. Agrarian labour, artisanal work, ritual services, and stigmatised occupations were distributed along caste lines. This arrangement was not merely cultural; it determined access to livelihood, regulated labour supply, and ensured the intergenerational reproduction of occupational groups. A system that allocates work hereditarily and restricts its free movement means that it directly organises production.

Caste also structured surplus extraction. In many regions, dominant castes controlled land, temples, and administrative authority, while subordinated castes performed agricultural and service labour. The surplus they produced flowed upward through rent, tribute, tax, and customary dues. Arrangements such as the *jajmani* system, often described as reciprocal, operated in material terms as stabilised mechanisms of surplus transfer. Bonded labour, attached labour, and caste-based service obligations further tied labouring groups to dominant castes. When surplus extraction follows caste hierarchy, caste is functioning as a production relation.

Untouchability, often interpreted as a purely ritual practice, reveals its material character when viewed historically. Segregation and pollution taboos ensured a steady supply of labour for sanitation, carcass disposal, leather work, and the most arduous forms of agrarian work. Social boycott, exclusion, and violence disciplined those who resisted. The ideology of pollution prevented collective solidarity and blocked escape from degrading occupations. In this way, untouchability acted as a labour-control mechanism embedded in production, enforcing economic roles through social and religious sanction.

The link between caste and land relations further underscores this connection. Land – the primary means of production in agrarian India – was concentrated in particular castes, while landless labourers disproportionately came from oppressed castes. Practices such as sharecropping, *begar* (forced labour), and unpaid service frequently followed caste lines. Marxist historians including D. D. Kosambi, R. S. Sharma, and Irfan Habib have shown that caste consolidated alongside agrarian expansion and state formation. When access to land and control over labour are structured by caste hierarchy, caste becomes inseparable from agrarian production relations.

Caste also regulates the reproduction of labour power. Through strict endogamy and control over marriage and sexuality, caste ensures that occupational groups reproduce themselves biologically and socially within fixed boundaries. Skills, status, and labour roles are transmitted across

generations inside the caste unit. This guarantees a continuous supply of differentiated labour and stabilises exploitative relations over time. Endogamy, therefore, is not merely a social custom; it is a mechanism that secures the long-term reproduction of a stratified labour force.

Recognising the material basis of caste does not negate its ideological dimension. Marxism situates ideology within material processes. Doctrines of purity and pollution, along with the moral framework of dharma, naturalise unequal labour and portray hierarchy as sacred duty. They transform historically produced inequalities into divinely sanctioned orders. In the Indian context, caste ideology is woven into everyday economic life, legitimising and stabilising exploitation rather than standing apart from it.

Seen in this light, caste is not simply a belief system attached to production from outside. It has historically organised labour, regulated surplus extraction, controlled land relations, and reproduced a stratified workforce across generations. It is therefore integral to the structure of production in pre-capitalist India and continues to shape the dynamics of labour and exploitation in transformed forms in the present capitalist society.

Caste, Base, and Superstructures

Within Marxist perspective, society is analysed through the distinction between base and superstructure. The economic base consists of the forces and relations of production – how labour is organised and how surplus is extracted. Upon this foundation stands the superstructure, which includes the state, law, religion, ideology, and cultural forms. These institutions stabilise and legitimise the economic base. While the base is ultimately determinant, the superstructure actively participates in reproducing the social order.

The question of whether caste belongs to the economic base or superstructure has been a contentious issue. An influential view placed caste entirely in the superstructure, reducing it to religion, ritual hierarchy, and notions of purity and pollution. In this view, caste system was treated as an ideological support for class rule rather than as part of the material organisation of society. It is true that caste operates through powerful ideological mechanisms. Ritual purity and pollution, the doctrine of dharma, strict endogamy, and everyday practices of discrimination convert historically produced hierarchies into sacred and moral orders.

However, caste does not merely justify economic relations; it directly organises them, as discussed earlier. It operates simultaneously as a material system of labour control and as an ideological structure of domination. This is why D. D. Kosambi observed that caste is “class at the primitive level of production, a religious method of shaping social consciousness in such a way that the primary producer is deprived of surplus with minimal coercion.”

Because of this dual character, caste cannot be located exclusively within either the economic base or the ideological superstructure; it straddles both. Consequently, class relations in India have often manifested through caste forms. Agrarian struggles, anti-bonded labour movements, and Dalit resistance have therefore tended to fuse economic exploitation with anti-caste struggle, revealing the inseparability of class and caste in concrete social practice.

The political implications are significant. If caste is treated merely as superstructure, anti-caste struggle may be reduced to cultural reform, detached from land relations and labour exploitation. If caste is treated as the sole base, class contradictions within and across castes may be obscured. A dialectical understanding avoids both errors. It recognizes caste system as a historically specific institution in which economic relations and ideological power are tightly interwoven.

Relation between Caste and Class

When examining the relationship between caste and class in Indian society, two corresponding errors are to be avoided.

The first error reduces caste entirely to class. According to this view, caste is merely a disguised expression of economic position. Such reductionism overlooks fundamental features of caste: its hereditary nature, strict endogamy, mechanisms of social exclusion, and the system of graded inequality that operates even within the exploited classes. Collapsing caste into class therefore ignores historically accumulated structures of status and social power. It also ignores important aspect of class differentiation in castes.

Some earlier Marxist interpretations treated caste essentially as a pre-capitalist form of class. According to this view, caste divisions corresponded to occupational and economic roles, and the advance of capitalism would gradually dissolve caste into modern class relations. This perspective correctly emphasised the material basis of social hierarchy and the importance of class unity. However, historical experience has shown that caste did not disappear with the development of capitalism. Untouchability, endogamy, and graded hierarchy persisted and sometimes adapted to new economic conditions.

The other but opposite error treats caste as completely separate and autonomous from class.

Many sociologists and most of the Ambedkarites influenced by Max Weber's distinction between class and status groups, highlighted separateness and autonomy of caste. However, such perspectives often treated caste as static. Caste is seen primarily as a cultural or religious phenomenon detached from material life. Such an approach disconnects caste from the organisation of labour, property relations, and the extraction of surplus. It fails to explain why caste has persisted across different economic systems and why it continues to influence access to land, employment, wages, education, and resources.

An important distinction between caste and class lies in mobility. Class position can change over time: individuals may become richer or poorer. Caste status, however, is inherited and largely immutable. A wealthy Dalit and a poor Brahmin may occupy different economic positions, but caste status continues to structure social recognition, stigma, and power. In terms of relation to the role in production elements of class are broadly homogenous, while caste may be heterogenous containing elements from different classes.

A dialectical approach recognises that caste and class are distinct but historically interconnected. While the two are not identical, they cannot be understood in isolation from one another. Caste historically structured entry into the sphere of production: it helped determine who could own

land, who would cultivate it, who would perform artisanal labour, and who would be confined to degrading and stigmatised occupations. Even in the present, caste influences access to land, capital, education, credit, skills, and employment networks.

Upper castes have historically dominated landownership, capital, education, and positions of political authority, while lower castes are disproportionately represented among landless labourers, informal workers, and the urban poor. This overlap reflects historical advantages and disadvantages accumulated under the caste system. Groups entered modern class relations from unequal starting positions: dominant castes possessed land, literacy, and social networks, while oppressed castes faced structural barriers. In this sense, caste mediates and shapes the way class relations are experienced in India.

The empirical overlap between caste and class should therefore not be mistaken for their identity. The fact that many Dalits today are concentrated among agricultural labourers, or that many landlords and capitalists come from historically dominant castes, reflects historical trajectories rather than a simple equivalence between caste and class.

Such patterns are not unique to India. In many societies, new classes emerging during the transition to capitalism carry traces of earlier hierarchies. What persists most strongly are ideological and cultural markings of past systems, even after the underlying production relations change. In India, the transition to capitalism did not reproduce the old caste-based production relations, but caste identities and hierarchies continued to shape social power and access to resources.

Under pre-capitalist conditions, caste functioned as a system closely tied to production relations, organizing labour, occupation, and hierarchy. With the development of capitalism, class relations became the primary structure of economic exploitation. Yet caste did not disappear; it persists mainly as a powerful ideological, cultural, and social structure that continues to shape economic life and intensify forms of exploitation.

Another crucial aspect is the difference in the structure of domination produced by caste and class. Class exploitation typically generates a basic antagonism between major classes, such as capital and labour. Caste, however, creates a graded hierarchy that fragments the oppressed into multiple layers. This fragmentation weakens solidarity among exploited groups and complicates class mobilisation.

For these reasons, it is essential to recognise that caste and class are analytically distinct yet deeply interconnected systems of domination. Any serious analysis or political strategy must therefore address both dimensions simultaneously. A historical understanding of the origin and evolution of the caste system in India makes this interrelationship unmistakably clear.

II

Origin and Evolution of Caste

From a historical materialist perspective, caste did not originate as a purely religious or cultural phenomenon. Rather, it evolved gradually in response to transformations in production, property

relations, and political authority as a durable social institutional mechanism that regulated labour, stabilised hierarchy, and mediated exploitation across changing economic formations.

In ancient period, the expansion of agriculture and the growth of surplus production produced new forms of social and class differentiation. Control over land required durable hierarchies to regulate labour and organise surplus extraction and maintain continuity in production. Varna ideology legitimised these emerging inequalities at the ideological level, while the proliferation of jati divisions structured labour in concrete and localised ways. Thus *varna-jati* framework (caste system) became a mechanism through which material relations of production and class domination were organised and reproduced within society.

Later, during the early medieval period, these tendencies deepened. Land grants to Brahmins, temples, and state officials fragmented political authority while institutionalising hereditary rights and obligations. As peasants and labourers became increasingly tied to land and occupation, caste hierarchies hardened and social mobility declined. As agriculture expanded to new areas and new tribal communities were integrated the multiplication and consolidation of jati divisions occurred unevenly across regions, shaped by specific economic and political contexts.

Over the period, ideology played an important role in stabilising these material relations. As ruling groups consolidated control over land and surplus, they required legitimating doctrines that naturalised inequality. Brahmanism developed historically as such an ideological system. It presented social hierarchy as sacred order and justified unequal relations as part of a divinely sanctioned structure. Mythology, theology, ritual practices, and religious texts served to reinforce and stabilise the underlying material hierarchies. Buddhism although it preached against the varna system the *karma* and *rebirth* theories, it vigorously propagated effectively rationalised the emerging caste system. Its stress on Ahimsa, apart from helping agriculture by discouraging the irrational sacrifice of livestock by Brahmanas also provided the rationale for the subjugation, humiliation and ostracisation of food gathering, hunting and fishing communities which gradually culminated in the formation of outcastes and untouchables. However, these ideological forms did not independently create caste; rather, they reflected and legitimised existing social relations, adapting themselves to the needs of changing economic and political structures.

The adaptability of Brahmanical ideology enabled the caste system to expand and absorb new social groups as regional polities emerged and new ruling elites consolidated power. Through this process, the varna framework remained the ideological template, while the complex and regionally varied structure of *jatis* organised everyday social and economic life.

Thus, caste must be understood as a historically produced system of social hierarchy that crystallised alongside agrarian expansion, control over land, and the extraction of surplus. It was reinforced by feudal relations and legitimised through Brahmanical ideology.

Thus, caste is not a static institution but a historically evolving system that has adapted to changing modes of production and social formations while continuing to reproduce social hierarchy and oppression. It has persisted because it remains materially embedded in labour relations and social reproduction. It is historical and mutable, yet resilient because it continues to serve the interests of dominant classes and ruling groups.

Untouchability

Untouchability in its full sense involves hereditary stigma fixed at birth and impossible to escape through individual achievement. It rests on a doctrine of ritual pollution, where impurity is believed to be inherent and transmissible. It enforces spatial segregation in housing, water access, and worship. It confines groups to occupations associated with death, bodily substances, or waste. It mandates endogamy, ensuring that stigma reproduces itself biologically and socially. It regulates everyday bodily interaction – touch, proximity, even shadow. Finally, it derives legitimacy from religious cosmology rather than solely from law or custom, and it persists across centuries and regime changes. (Some other societies display some of these features; very few display all of them together.)

Untouchability must be understood within the broader material context of caste society. It did not arise merely from abstract notions of ritual pollution or religious doctrine. Rather, it developed historically in connection with the extreme exploitation of communities assigned to degrading yet socially necessary forms of labour – such as disposing of dead bodies, removing animal carcasses, working with leather, carrying out executions, sanitation, and the most oppressive forms of agrarian servitude. These occupations were indispensable to the functioning of agrarian society, yet the communities performing them were subjected to systematic exclusion, repression, and denial of basic social rights.

As occupational segregation intensified and agrarian hierarchies hardened, ritual sanctions transformed certain forms of labour and the communities performing them into objects of extreme forms of exclusion. In this way, untouchability became one of the most extreme expressions of the caste system, combining economic exploitation with social degradation and institutionalised inequality.

Groups whose labour was economically essential were simultaneously rendered socially ostracised and politically marginalised. Ritual stigma served as an ideological justification for this arrangement. By defining certain forms of labour – and the communities associated with them – as inherently impure, the social order naturalised and legitimised their exploitation. Untouchability therefore cannot be treated simply as a moral failing or a purely religious belief; it was a historically constituted institution embedded in the organisation of labour, social hierarchy, and surplus extraction.

Early Vedic literature refers to social differentiation and the existence of the four varnas, but it does not clearly describe communities treated as permanently polluting or completely excluded from social interaction. The rigid and institutionalised practice of untouchability developed later, as Indian society underwent major economic and social transformations.

Between roughly 600 BCE and the early centuries of the Common Era, the expansion of agriculture, the growth of towns and trade, and the consolidation of states created sharper divisions of labour and more complex social hierarchies. In this context, groups associated with occupations considered degrading or polluting gradually came to be segregated and stigmatised. Over time, these communities were pushed to the margins of the social order and subjected to

increasing restrictions in terms of residence, social interaction, and access to common resources. What began as forms of occupational and social exclusion increasingly took on ritual and ideological sanction, laying the foundations of untouchability.

The process intensified in the early medieval period. The expansion of agrarian settlements, the growth of landlordism, and the spread of land grants to Brahmins and temples deepened social stratification.

Labour extraction from subordinated groups was ensured through mechanisms such as *vishti* (forced labour), various forms of customary obligation, and rigid social exclusion. Untouchability thus became a particularly harsh form of economic and social coercion within the agrarian order, ensuring the permanent subordination of specific communities whose labour remained indispensable.

Untouchability, therefore, emerged gradually as part of the historical evolution of caste society. It was not an original or timeless feature of the social order but the outcome of successive economic, social, and ideological developments.

Ambedkar's View of Untouchability

B. R. Ambedkar developed one of the most systematic and radical critiques of untouchability, treating it not as a peripheral social evil but as a central feature of the caste system and Brahmanical social order.

For Ambedkar, untouchability was a form of institutionalised social exclusion and degradation, rooted in the logic of caste hierarchy.

In his work *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?*, one of his central theses was that untouchables were originally part of settled communities who were later ostracised. He linked their exclusion to practices such as the consumption of beef which was not in conformity to Brahmanical norms, and their embrace of Buddhism which was frowned upon by Brahmanism. But Historical evidence does not fully corroborate this view.

Ambedkar also emphasised that untouchability was sustained through religious ideology and social practices. Concepts of purity and pollution, enforced through scriptures and customs, legitimised the segregation of untouchables and normalised their oppression. This system was internalised not only by the upper castes but also, to some extent, by the oppressed themselves.

He argued that “caste is the root, untouchability is the branch”, and that removing untouchability alone would not end the system of graded inequality. For him, the annihilation of caste was a necessary precondition for the complete eradication of untouchability.

Religion and Caste

Brahmanism played a central role in shaping and legitimising the caste order in Indian society. As a religious–ideological system associated with the authority of the Brahmin priestly class, it developed doctrines that presented social hierarchy as sacred and divinely ordained.

Hindu scriptures and epics significantly contributed to the consolidation of the caste order by reinforcing ideas of hierarchy, hereditary duty (*dharma*), and ritual notions of purity and pollution. Brahmanical texts such as the *Dharmashastras* and ritual literature codified detailed rules governing occupation, social interaction, marriage, and ritual status.

The major epics – the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* – further strengthened these ideas by upholding the importance of varna duties and affirming the legitimacy of social hierarchy, embedding them within widely circulated cultural and moral narratives.

Thus, Brahmanism provided the ideological foundation that sanctified caste hierarchy, naturalised social inequality, and enabled its reproduction across generations. While caste had material roots in the organisation of labour and systems of surplus extraction, Brahmanical ideology supplied the religious and cultural framework that justified and sustained it.

Although Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity doctrinally reject caste-based inequality, caste-discrimination have often persisted among their followers in India due to the influence of the wider social structure. Conversion from the lower castes to these religions may have offered them a measure of equality before god. However, this did not bring about any significant change in the social status of the converts who continued to face discrimination and social exclusion.

As a result, converts often retained caste distinctions within their new religious communities. Caste proved more durable than religious reform because it was deeply embedded in material and social life. It regulated labour, enforced endogamy, shaped settlement patterns, and determined access to resources and social interaction. While religion primarily addresses faith and salvation, caste organises work, kinship, and social space. Without transforming these underlying structures, theological ideals of equality alone were insufficient to dismantle caste-based hierarchy.

III

Caste and Colonialism (18th – 20th Centuries)

Under British colonial rule, the caste system underwent significant reorganisation. While caste had long been deeply embedded in Indian society, colonial administrative practices reshaped it by classifying, codifying, and often rigidifying social identities. At the same time, new economic forces, intellectual currents, and social movements turned caste into a central arena of political engagement.

A key intervention of the colonial state was the systematic classification of Indian society through censuses and administrative records. These efforts sought to fit diverse and regionally fluid social groups into fixed, hierarchical categories. Legal codification and bureaucratic

practices reinforced this process by recognising caste as a basis for governance, recruitment, and social ordering. As a result, caste identities became more standardised and rigid.

Colonial governance also integrated caste into the functioning of the modern state. For purposes of revenue extraction and agrarian control, the administration relied heavily on dominant landed castes as intermediaries. Similarly, recruitment into the army, police, and lower bureaucracy often followed caste lines. In this way, caste was not weakened but institutionalised within the structures of colonial rule.

At the same time, colonialism introduced forces that destabilised traditional social arrangements. Changes such as new revenue settlements, the commercialisation of agriculture, the expansion of transport and communication networks, and the spread of Western education and new ideas created new opportunities and social mobility for some sections. Exposure to ideas of equality, democracy, and humanism fostered critical awareness of social inequalities, including caste oppression. The activities of Christian missionaries further challenged established practices, prompting sections of Indian society to respond and reformulate their traditions.

These developments gave rise to a range of reform and revivalist movements in the nineteenth century. Thinkers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswati sought to reinterpret religious traditions by appealing to early texts like the Upanishads and the Vedas. They criticised practices such as caste discrimination, sati, and child marriage.

Simultaneously, changing socio-economic conditions – characterised by the limited but expanding spread of education among new social sections, new professions, urbanisation and the growing aspiration for community advancement and upward social nobility – encouraged the emergence of caste associations. These organisations aimed to promote the interests of specific communities, press claims for higher social status, and secure access to education and employment. This contributed to the politicisation of caste, as communities increasingly mobilised within the colonial framework.

Most significantly, the colonial period also witnessed the emergence of organised anti-caste movements that directly challenged the ideological and structural basis of caste oppression. Leaders such as Jyotirao Phule, B. R. Ambedkar and Periyar articulated powerful critiques of Brahmanism and caste hierarchy, mobilising oppressed communities and demanding equality, dignity, and political rights.

During the freedom movement, Mahatma Gandhi, did take up the issue of caste discrimination. However, Gandhi approached caste oppression primarily as a moral problem, to be addressed through ethical reform and a change of heart rather than through structural transformation.

While he mounted a strong moral critique of untouchability – condemning it as a sin and a corruption of Hinduism – he did not reject the caste system as such. Instead, he upheld an idealised conception of varna as a division based on duties rather than birth, arguing that it could sustain social harmony without hierarchy. In practice, therefore, his efforts were directed toward reforming discriminatory practices rather than dismantling the caste structure itself.

Thus, the colonial period was marked by a dual process: on the one hand, colonial knowledge systems and administrative practices rigidified caste; on the other, new ideas, institutions, and movements transformed it into a domain of social struggle and political mobilisation. Caste became not only more sharply defined but also more actively contested than ever before.

Caste in the Post-Independence Period

Growth of Capitalism and the changing role of Caste

After independence, bourgeois-landlord state headed by the big bourgeoisie, pursued a dual approach towards caste. While trying to mitigate some of its most oppressive features through reforms, it simultaneously preserved caste as an ideological and structural element shaping society.

While explicit practices of untouchability have declined in many public spaces, caste continues to shape economic conditions, social relations, and access to opportunities. This reflects a broader feature of the Indian ruling classes: they have not sought to eliminate pre-capitalist social relations but have adapted them to sustain their dominance.

The Constitution on Caste

The Indian Constitution adopted by the Indian ruling classes did not abolish the caste system as a whole. Nor did the Constituent Assembly seriously consider its complete legal abolition. Instead, it adopted a strategy combining the legal abolition of untouchability with some measures to promote equality and social justice.

Article 17 abolished untouchability making its practice a punishable offence. Provisions for equality before the law (Articles 14 – 16) were complemented by affirmative action in education, public employment, and legislatures for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Directive Principles, particularly Article 46, further mandated the promotion of the educational and economic interests of weaker sections.

Political representation followed the framework established after the Poona Pact, rejecting separate electorates in favour of reserved seats within a joint electorate system.

The policies of legal equality, protective discrimination, and welfare measures implemented over the past seven decades have produced uneven outcomes. While they have expanded formal rights, representation, and access to institutions, they have not translated into substantive equality due to deeply entrenched socio-economic disparities. Caste, as a system of hierarchy and material inequality, has not been dismantled; in certain respects, these policies have even contributed to the persistence and re-articulation of caste identities.

There is, therefore, an inherent tension between the immediate requirements of social justice and the long-term objective of annihilating caste. The continued use and preservation of caste categories for the purpose of affirmative action remain necessary to address historical injustices.

At the same time, this reliance stands in contradiction with the strategic goal of transcending caste as a social structure.

Overall, the Constitution succeeded in outlawing untouchability and enabling limited upward mobility, but it has not eliminated caste as a system of social and economic power.

Development Policies

In the initial period of state led capitalist development, a range of policies – constitutional safeguards, legal provisions, affirmative action, social welfare measures, limited land reforms, the Green Revolution, agricultural commercialisation, public sector expansion, industrialisation and urbanisation – contributed to some notable changes in the role of caste in people lives.

With the introduction of neoliberal and market prioritised policies in 1990s, whatever benefits accrued to the oppressed castes through affirmative actions, have been under threat.

Decades of capitalist development after independence, rather than dissolving caste, has reproduced it in new forms within modern economic relations. It weakened certain traditional caste-based occupations. Caste has declined in certain ritual practices and segments of public life. But these changes have not weakened its structural role.

Caste in Contemporary India

Dalits and oppressed castes continue to face deep structural deprivation.

Caste continues to shape access to resources, mobility, and social security. Dominant castes retained advantages through historical control over land, education, and social networks, ensuring their continued dominance in higher education, professional sectors, and managerial positions. In contrast, oppressed castes, particularly Dalits, remain concentrated in low-paid, insecure, and stigmatised work.

Landlessness is widespread, and existing landholdings are often small and unviable. Many are concentrated in agricultural labour, informal employment, and other insecure occupations. Wage stagnation, declining public investment, and inadequate implementation of targeted schemes have further reinforced inequality. In education and healthcare, disparities persist due to poverty, discrimination, and weak public infrastructure. Employment patterns reflect exclusion from stable and well-paid jobs, particularly with the expansion of the private sector where reservation policies do not apply. Migration has become a survival strategy, but it often reproduces inequality in new settings. Thus, caste continues to shape economic outcomes, even as it no longer rigidly determines occupation. Vast majority in the oppressed castes continue to live in rural areas under conditions of poverty and insecurity, or in urban informal settlements with precarious employment.

Caste remains a key marker of identity and social organisation. Endogamy continues to dominate marriage practices, and caste networks reproduce social hierarchies across generations. While ritual justifications have weakened, caste now operates more through social power, custom, and

informal exclusion. Culturally, dominant narratives often obscure its oppressive nature, while Dalit, feminist, and Left movements challenge its persistence and assert alternative visions of equality and dignity.

Caste-based discrimination and violence remain widespread. Atrocities against Dalits continue, particularly when they assert their rights or challenge entrenched hierarchies. Legal safeguards exist, but their implementation is uneven, marked by underreporting, delays, and institutional bias. Dalit women face the most severe forms of oppression, experiencing the intersection of caste, class, and gender exploitation. Although laws have delegitimised overt forms of discrimination, everyday exclusion persists in areas such as housing, social interaction, and access to resources.

Stratification among Oppressed Castes

Affirmative action policies have produced a small middle class, primarily through reservations, education, and public sector employment. This has enabled limited upward mobility and greater representation.

This uneven development has produced internal stratification within castes, particularly among sub-castes. The unequal distribution of benefits from reservations and development programmes has reinforced these disparities, leading to fragmentation along sub-caste lines. Competition over limited opportunities has intensified tensions between sub-castes and fuelled demands for sub-categorisation and sub-quotas.

Proliferation of Caste Organisations and Identity Politics

The growth of an educated middle class in oppressed communities has contributed to the expansion of caste-based organisations and movements, particularly since the 1980s. Hardening of caste identity generate further smaller divisions, leading to the formation of numerous splinter groups and organisations. While many organisations engage in struggles for social justice, others remain fragmented or limited in scope.

Caste and Electoral Politics

Caste has become an important instrument of political mobilisation. Bourgeois electoral politics has enabled greater participation of marginalised groups.

However, with caste identities being mobilised for electoral gains this has also led to fragmentation. Divisions and sub divisions among oppressed sections have often been exploited by ruling class parties to consolidate electoral support. They have used the so-called “social engineering” to build caste coalitions, often weakening broader class-based politics. The BJP has emerged as the most aggressive practitioner of this approach, effectively using it for electoral gains. Identity politics has become easily amenable to manipulation by bourgeois politics. As a result, this trend undermines Left and class-based politics while strengthening bourgeois parties.

In the post-Mandal period, both anti and pro-reservation movements, along with intensified caste-based mobilisations, led to the consolidation of identity-driven political narratives and the emergence of new political formations appealing to specific castes or caste coalitions. As identity politics expanded many parties mobilised Dalits as an autonomous political force in some states.

Alongside these, numerous other parties emerged across different states, claiming to represent and mobilise various backward caste groups.

IV

Resistance: Anti-Caste Movements in India

The history of anti-caste movements in India reveals a long and continuous tradition of resistance to caste hierarchy. That Resistance has historically taken different forms philosophical critique, devotional movements, social reform, and organised political mobilisation – depending on the structure of contemporary society. From the philosophical critiques of Gautama Buddha and other early heterodox traditions, to the devotional egalitarianism of the Bhakti movement, and from the reformist activities of Narayana Guru and anti-caste crusade of Jyothi Rao Pule and Periyar to the radical political mobilisation led by B. R. Ambedkar and later Dalit movements and the struggles led by the communists aimed at the material foundations of the caste system, opposition to caste oppression has taken diverse forms across historical periods.

With the emergence of modern social reform and democratic politics, anti-caste resistance increasingly took organised and political forms. Thinkers and leaders such as Phule and Ambedkar sought to challenge the institutional and social relations that reproduced caste oppression. Through mass mobilisation, legal reform, and democratic struggle, Ambedkar in particular attempted to transform dispersed social discontent into a conscious movement aimed at the annihilation of caste.

While these struggles have significantly expanded democratic rights and advanced the cause of social equality, caste continues to remain deeply embedded in social and economic structures. Moral reform, cultural critique, or spiritual egalitarianism alone cannot dismantle entrenched systems of hierarchy. The struggle against caste must be linked with broader struggles against exploitation and inequality. Anti-caste struggle must combine social movements, political organisation, and structural transformation. Since caste oppression is intertwined with economic relations and systems of power, its complete eradication ultimately requires transcending the structures of exploitation that sustain social hierarchy. In this sense, the struggle against caste and the struggle against class exploitation form inseparable components of the broader project of democratic and socialist transformation.

Historical Role of Communist Struggles

From its inception, the communist movement explicitly upheld the abolition of caste as one of the important objective. Early documents, such as the 1930 Draft Programme of the Communist Party of India, called for the complete eradication of caste inequality in all forms. Communists involved in the Meerut Conspiracy Case also denounced caste oppression, linking it to agrarian

exploitation. Second Party Congress of the CPI in 1948 emphasised the importance of anti-caste struggle.

In practice, communist activity always combined social reform with class struggle. Party members actively fought untouchability – living among oppressed castes, sharing food, promoting inter-caste marriages, and challenging discriminatory customs. These efforts were not isolated reforms but part of a broader attempt to build class unity among the oppressed.

Major anti-feudal struggles of the 1940s – such as the Telangana, Tebhaga, and Punnapra-Vayalar movements – demonstrated the transformative potential of this approach. By mobilising peasants and workers across caste lines, these struggles weakened caste barriers in practice. In regions like Telangana, land redistribution to the landless – many of them Dalits and Adivasis – struck directly at the material basis of caste domination. Collective struggle fostered new social relations based on equality and solidarity.

The activities of Communist leaders across regions – such as P. Sundarayya, P. Krishna Pillai, A. K. Gopalan, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, P. Ramamurti, Jeevanandam, Srinivasa Rao, S. V. Parulekar, B. T. Ranadive, R. C. More and others – go to show the pioneering role they played in integrating anti-caste work with broader political mobilisation. Social reform, cultural intervention, and class struggle were pursued as interconnected processes.

After Independence

After independence, the communist movement's commitment to the abolition of the caste system remained unchanged. However, in the initial years, political, ideological, and organisational challenges faced by the communist movement—along with certain theoretical limitations in fully grasping the complexity and changing role of caste—affected the consistent implementation of its anti-caste policies and programmes. Over time, these shortcomings were addressed, and renewed emphasis was placed on integrating anti-caste struggles with broader democratic and class movements.

In the last two decades, the CPI(M) and its mass organisations have undertaken sustained campaigns against untouchability and caste oppression, mobilising people at the grassroots level. These efforts have taken the form of statewide movements, public awareness campaigns, and direct struggles against discriminatory practices. Apart from Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura, across states such as Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and parts of the Hindi-speaking belt, communist-led initiatives against untouchability and caste discrimination have demonstrated a continued and practical commitment to social equality. These struggles reinforce the party's broader objective of linking the fight against caste oppression with the transformation of underlying socio-economic structures.

Policy Interventions by Left-led Governments

Left-led governments in Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura sought to translate a social justice perspective into concrete policy interventions. Central to their approach were land reforms, through which surplus land was redistributed on a significant scale and tenancy rights were

formally recorded, with a substantial share of the benefits accruing to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These measures led to weakening the material basis of caste oppression in the countryside.

Alongside this, these governments placed considerable emphasis on decentralisation by strengthening Panchayati Raj institutions. This not only deepened democratic participation at the grassroots but also enhanced the representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, often going beyond the minimum mandated quotas. In the sphere of social welfare, a range of initiatives – including scholarships, hostels, housing schemes, and financial assistance – were expanded to support Dalit and Adivasi communities.

Labour rights were another important area of intervention. Efforts were made to enforce minimum wages more effectively and to curb exploitative practices such as bonded labour and manual scavenging. At the same time, policies aimed at improving access to education, health and public employment led to increased participation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in these sectors.

Taken together, these measures contributed to measurable improvements in literacy, social mobility, and political participation. They also played a role in weakening entrenched caste hierarchies in these states.

Conclusion

The experience of the communist movement in India shows a sustained and multifaceted engagement with the caste question. It combines practical struggles, policy interventions, and ideological critique. At the same time, it acknowledges that despite significant advances, caste remains deeply embedded in Indian society.

V

Left Movement and the Caste Question in India

The engagement of the Left movement with the caste question in India has evolved through a process of critical reassessment shaped by both theoretical debates and political practice. While the Left made significant contributions to uncovering the material basis of caste, its approach also revealed important limitations that required correction over time.

The debates of the 1970s and 1980s – particularly those on production relations and the caste-class relationship – along with advances in historical and sociological research on the evolution of the *varna-jati* system, marked a turning point. These discussions challenged earlier simplifications and helped develop a more dialectical perspective, emphasising the need to integrate anti-caste struggles with class struggles.

Several key limitations in the earlier understanding and practice of the Left can be identified.

First, sections of the Left tended to treat caste primarily as an ideological or derivative phenomenon, assuming that economic transformation would gradually dissolve it. This approach

underestimated caste as a system of graded inequality and failed to grasp how deeply it structures class relations. The expectation that class unity would emerge without directly confronting caste divisions proved misplaced, as caste actively fragments the working class and obstructs solidarity.

The production relations debate was crucial in addressing this limitation. It demonstrated that caste is embedded in material life: agrarian structures – patterns of land ownership, labour relations, and rural power – have historically followed caste lines. This led to the recognition that caste cannot be reduced to either “base” or “superstructure”; rather, it operates across both, shaping and being shaped by economic and social processes.

Second, the Left often overestimated the progressive role of capitalism. Contrary to earlier expectations, capitalist development has not eradicated caste; instead, it has reconfigured and incorporated it. Caste continues to shape access to employment, education, and political power, frequently reinforcing inequality through segmented labour markets and persistent social exclusion.

Third, Left paid insufficient attention to everyday forms of caste oppression – such as untouchability, humiliation, social boycott, and caste violence. Treating these as secondary to economic struggles weakened the Left’s engagement with oppressed communities and limited its ability to address the lived reality of caste.

Fourth, despite mobilising large sections of oppressed castes, Left organisations have often been criticised for not adequately transforming the social composition of their organisational structures. Addressing this requires conscious efforts toward internal training and promotion of leadership from exploited and oppressed communities.

Fifth, the Left has at times dismissed Dalit assertion as mere “identity politics,” thereby overlooking its democratic and transformative content. Such mobilisations arise from material exclusion and constitute a challenge to entrenched caste power. Their progressive dimension must be recognised and engaged with, while also linking them to broader struggles for structural transformation to prevent co-optation within existing systems.

Sixth, the engagement with the thought of B. R. Ambedkar has often been limited. A deeper and more serious integration of Ambedkar’s critique of caste can enrich Marxist analysis and strengthen efforts to build unity between class struggles and anti-caste movements.

In response to these critiques, a more comprehensive dialectical perspective has gradually emerged within the Left. This approach recognises caste as a historically specific social relation that shapes class formation and structures social power. It follows that class struggle in India cannot remain caste-neutral; it must be consciously anti-caste. The annihilation of caste and the abolition of class exploitation are thus interconnected tasks. Accordingly, the struggle against caste is an integral part of the broader project of social transformation, to be waged across economic, social, political, and ideological spheres.

This integrated approach operates at three interconnected levels:

1. Immediate struggles for rights, dignity, and protection against discrimination
2. Social reform and ideological struggles against caste consciousness and practices
3. Structural transformation, particularly through agrarian reforms and wider anti-capitalist struggles

VI

Programme for Anti-Caste Struggle

A theoretically consistent Marxist programme to combat caste must combine/integrate structural transformation with sustained social struggle. Therefore, the struggle against caste must be integrated with the broader struggle against exploitation and inequality.

First, the programme must prioritise the redistribution of productive assets and land reforms. A decisive struggle is required to secure land, resources, and livelihood opportunities for the rural poor, particularly agricultural labourers and poor peasants, the majority of whom belong to historically oppressed castes. At the same time, the rights and livelihoods of urban and rural petty producers and the self-employed must be defended, as lower castes form a significant section among them. Anti-caste struggle must therefore be embedded within the movements of workers, agricultural labourers, and poor peasants, mobilising oppressed castes as an integral part of broader class struggles.

Struggles for land redistribution, higher wages, adequate housing, education, healthcare, secure employment, equitable access to common resource and the recognition of basic public services such as drinking water and sanitation as fundamental rights; discriminatory practices in recruitment, promotion, housing, and informal labour markets cannot be treated in isolation from caste; they must be explicitly linked to the fight against caste-based discrimination and must be pursued in ways that directly confront entrenched caste disparities, ensuring that material transformation goes hand in hand with the struggle for social equality.

Second, the programme must directly confront oppressive caste practices that sustain hereditary hierarchy. Untouchability, atrocities, violence, social segregation, boycotts and other discriminatory customs, practices have to be challenged and resisted through sustained, organised campaigns and movements that assert constitutional and democratic rights, defend human dignity.

Left's response must be prompt, coordinated, and sustained – combining legal intervention, political mobilisation, and mass action – especially in areas marked by persistent and systemic caste oppression.

Mass organisations – trade unions, peasant organisations, youth and women's fronts, among others – must integrate the struggle against caste into their main agenda. Caste discrimination in workplaces, villages, and urban neighbourhoods should be addressed as a political issue rather than relegated to a separate "social" sphere.

Third, the programme must actively challenge patriarchy, since caste hierarchy is closely tied to patriarchal relations. It must promote inter-caste marriages as a part of the struggle against caste system. The reproduction of caste depends significantly on endogamy and the control of women's sexuality. Any transformative movement that ignores these structures risks reproducing caste domination even while attempting to dismantle it.

Fourth, the programme must firmly defend and expand special affirmative-action measures alongside policies that enhance representation, broaden access to education and health, expand employment opportunities, and strengthen welfare support for oppressed communities.

Processes such as privatisation and contractualisation – which disproportionately exclude Dalits and Adivasis – must be opposed not only as regressive economic policies but also as mechanisms that reproduce and deepen caste inequality.

Fifth, the programme must build working-class unity through concrete struggle against caste influences. Genuine class unity cannot be achieved by merely proclaiming formal equality among workers. It must be forged by confronting caste discrimination in workplaces, villages, and urban communities, recognising the specific forms of oppression experienced by oppressed castes, and transforming these conditions through collective action and reform.

Finally, the struggle against caste must be linked to the broader objective of ending the capitalist system, which adapts to and reproduces caste hierarchies in new forms. The long-term goal is the establishment of an egalitarian socialist society in which the material basis of inequality is abolished and the caste system can be completely annihilated.
