

THE DALIT WORLD OF INJUSTICE & PEACELESSNESS[#]

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All of us live in a world of guns and bombs, wars and battles, hunger and starvation, deaths and killings, and what not. Justice and Peace is something unpredictable and unreachable, and in many cases it has disappeared from the lexicon itself. Today what we find is a market of all sorts of deals, even peace.

As a community we are in crisis – the crisis of life; the crisis of disharmony; the crisis of livelihood; the crisis of sustainability and so on. The state is helpless. As this crisis is further intensifying in this paper I will deal with the current status of the crisis in India, and how communities like Dalits and Adivasis are adversely affected and to what extends. In the next paper I would deal with hope and the power of sustenance.

Before getting into a detailed discussion, let us understand what is the present crisis that is crippling India and how is it affecting the people at the lowest rung. It is essential to understand the context under which the people at the grassroots are resisting the challenge being posed by them. Also it will give us a wider picture of the nation as a whole and its complexities from the abyss. It is not that we were not in any sort of crisis before but today the crisis has expanded to unpredictable magnitude with severe implication and utter insinuation.

The Deepening of the Crisis:

Theoretically quite simply, I term it as imperialist globalisation and communal fascism. This is what is going on in India for more than a decade. However the grounds were prepared even before. Fascism is a terrible political domination capable of infringing people's life to unpredictable magnitude. History has witnessed various forms of fascism that turned inertly against the already broken people. The threat of fascism remains long among the people without giving any opportunity for response to such a brutish system. Today globalisation is not just confined to India, it had become a global fact and its direct impact is crushing all across the world. In India it is closely associated with the process of communal fascism.

While going into further analysis, fascism acts close to the current process of globalisation. Both these are two inter-dependent and inter-linked facets of capitalism. While globalisation is supposed to capture the global economic and political power by cutting the national boundaries and establishing/capturing the market, fascist forces act as their local agents in its approaches and attitudes with a bonus of suppressive socio-cultural and religious domination.

The ideology of capitalism assumes absoluteness only through its offspring fascism. In India, Washington has taken a lenient view to prop up the communal fascist government for long. It seems that the global governance can afford to accommodate and promote fundamentalist and fascist regimes as long as they are useful weapons in their hand because they have several things in common. That is why despite the State's crucial role in the Gujarat genocide, Washington never intervened with any principle disagreement or strong opposition, but when there is any reposition to challenge the global capital regime it is met with war as it was the case of Afghanistan and Iraq. Hence war to establish peace. A good deal. A wonderful market for many.

One is the wholesome understanding of fascism in the era of globalisation needs to be carefully studied and particularly from the viewpoint of the marginalized community like Dalits and

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Adivasis. Second is preparing the groundwork for a wider struggle against the fascist forces that are forging and camouflaging the globalisation agenda.

New Formats of Capitalism & Fascism and its inter-dependence:

One is the communal conflict. In India it is mostly among Hindus versus Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists. In recent times, rather in the last one-decade, the fundamental segments among Hindus have become very active, specifically in terms of politics. Genocide of Muslims, attack on Christians, Buddhists and Dalits have become more natural these days, particularly when it is explicitly sponsored by the state itself. With the upsurge of BJP into power they got a free zone to activate their Hindutva agenda. Day by day this crisis is growing.

Second is that we live in an authoritarian state. The state had become more undemocratic both in its operation and mechanism. New power structures and power relations had been established during the last one-decade. Yoking the people into more servitude and inflicting all agenda of power is what is happening. All obsolete program and projects of the west are today brought in as “new technology” in the name of development. In fact there is no sort of development for the people, it just fills the pocket of the corrupt administrative officials and reckless politician. The very term of development is inducted with destruction. For this reason the Adivasis are being displaced in the name of industrialisation and development while the Dalits are migrating out.

Third is the strengthening of caste system. *De facto* this is the oldest and historical one. The fascism of caste is the deliberate marginalization of people and community infringing their primary right as human beings. This is the oldest form of persecution in the history of world. Unless the very structure is trashed off its edifice the situation will continue. The state of affairs as of now seems as a conscious attempt in strengthening the caste structure and system with state support. This could be observed from the recent approach of the government in pushing all anti-Dalit agendas of the Sangh Parivar in hasty such as reservation for the forward caste people, bringing anti-cow slaughter law, distraction of Ayodhya mosque issue and so on. A crucial state of social fascism is on a vertical heap. Even the new government headed by Congress is of the same view in these aspects, except some patchy shows.

Fourth is the cultural fascism. This is growing in two different means; one is the culture imbibed by market and consumerism and another is the establishment of the Brahministic supremacy over other marginalized communities. The former has affected the whole of the third world nations and even many within the first and second worlds. Any system, which allows greed to grow and selfishness to spread is a severe threat to human existence. This growing trend had badly influenced human life and culture. Eventually, a new culture of commoditization and consumerism has emerged within the last two decades – breaking the community life, cultural identity and dignity of masses. But the second one has a greater adverse impact on the marginalized communities like Dalits. Among Dalits it is the establishment of a new culture and value systems over that of the existing ones. Brahmanism is on an outrageous and rampant drive to establish its supremacy over other faiths and beliefs. This is not only with reference to other religions, but also with the faiths and beliefs, customs and traditions of Dalits as well as other marginalized communities.

Fifth is the global fascism of globalisation. Globalisation is ragging over the people, exclusively, over the marginalized strata. State has turned out to be a feasible instrument in the hands of the corporate sector in legitimising the concentration of wealth in MNCs and TNCs. Even the minimum space provided for Dalits through reservation has been constantly shrinking by virtue of privatisation and other manifestations of globalisation.

Modern manifestations:

In recent days these crisis have been manifested in different forms in Indian society. Hence many of these aspects could not be directly understood as it is being mentioned above. One has to closely look into the various aspects of it and its depth. Paradoxically most of these are sponsored by the state itself. I would like to bring to notice a few of those aspects and trends, particularly from the Dalit perspective.

I. Hinduisation of Dalits:

The whole process of Hinduisation of Dalits is drastically increasing in the present situation as a part of the Sangh Parivar's strategy of bringing them under their fold. Urgency of Hinduisation is felt essential by the Hindutva catalogue primarily for six reasons.

1. The threat that if the Dalits and other weaker sections of the country rise up to the situation and understand the politics of casteism, it would be difficult for the communal fascist forces to survive.
2. Secondly they could easily mobilise the gullible masses against those forces, who challenge the authoritarian and dominant dispositions of Manuvada and Brahminism. The best instance is the Babri Masjid demolition, Dalits were pushed into the forefront and through this they were trying to cash the Dalit sentiments. Illustration of similar kind could be observed in the case of the Gujarat carnage, where Dalits and Adivasis were pushed into mass killing of Muslims.
3. By keeping them under the fold of Hindutva, they could easily have a stranglehold on their culture, faith and other aspects related with the society. This could help to develop an internal colony over the larger segment of the country through a slow but strategic process.
4. This could pave ways to keep them deprived off their primary right to livelihood as a human being or citizen of the country, thereby proving the fact that their state of poverty is due to their caste status and therefore it is God given.
5. In the present context the Hindutva catalogue have become the evangelists of the global capital forces. They are the ones who are propping up the globalisation and its agendas. With globalisation there are two things coming into the core – one is the deliberate pushing of anew crisis in the midst and second is to covert, and divert the root problem of casteism so that no one could challenge it.
6. Last but most importantly it is to perpetuate the political power and right over their life though legitimising the social system by establishing an unquestioned command over the resource zones of the country.

All these have added impelling force to the Hindutava card among Dalits and Adivasis. By and large this consists of concepts like de-Dalitisation and de-Adivasisation. Eventually this tendency empowers the fascist forces and broadens its space.

This has crucial implications. Hinduism as asserted through Manuvada and Brahminism has severe implications on the society at large. It has got the tentacles of fascism at large and these forces are currently the most fascist by its very nature and character. For more than seven decade the RSS along with its operative wings have been working out different methodologies to implement this.

II. Controlling Indigenous Life:

Manipulation of Dalits and Adivasis is well on the agenda of the Hindutva catalogue. All the possible institutions of civil society, right from the electronic media to primary schools, were applied by the champions of Hindutava to create a sensation of inferiority and thus to manipulate the masses. Among the indigenous people two processes were induced in parallel. One was the

deliberate formation of philanthropic institutions such as Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and Dalit Sanghs and second to train-up youth cadres through RSS Shakhas. Thus a feeling that indigenous tradition and culture is inferior to that of Hindu religion grew among the new genera of Dalits and Adivasis. Both these processes went in parallel and are consummated each other. One of the outcomes of these trends is the crucial osmosis of Hindu strings and civilisation with all its flaws among the indigenous people.

Communal-fascism is exploring its way to elaborate its base and activities and action. It appears that building of philanthropic and religious institutions like Saraswati Sishu Mandir, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Sanghs, Deen Dayal Shodh Sansthan, Sanskriti Bihar, Vikas Bharit, Gayatri Pariwar, Brahmakumari Samaj, etc. are some of the strategies adopted to create inroads among the Dalits & Adivasis. Another strategy applied is the steady and systematic capturing of the community panchayats and organisations. The best example of this is Gujarat where the communal fascists have got their stranglehold and successfully executed the carnage against the Muslims by communalising the Dalits and Adivasis. This is the result of decades of brain washing and psychological manipulation

Resultant is the perpetual assurance of control over these communities plus a bonus of sustaining casteism. Expansion of caste fascism has so far and is disintegrating the Dalit ideology, theology, and identity and intimidated their very existence. Apparently this ruptures the community, deteriorates the noble notions of sharing, caring and co-operation, expansion of patriarchy and battered the inkling of community ownership over resources.¹

III. Conversion, Re-conversion Debate:

A whole range of question on conversion of Dalits is taking place in different parts of the country. The common agreement that the mainstream comes to is that the Dalits are and were Hindus and they are now being manipulated by other faiths and religions. In this regard first of all it is essential to understand who the Dalits are, what is their history and tradition of faith and belief, whether the Dalits were Hindus or not. In what sense are they Hindus? For this purpose I turn to Dr. Ambedkar's writing "The Untouchable are not Hindus but a separate element".

"In the first sense the word 'Hindu' is used in various senses and one must know in what sense it is used before one can give a proper answer to the question. It is used in territorial sense. Everyone who is an inhabitant of Hindustan is a Hindu. In that sense it can certainly be claimed that the untouchables are Hindus. But so are the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jews, Parsis, etc. The second sense in which the word 'Hindu' is used is in a religious sense. Before one can draw any conclusion, it is necessary to separate the dogmas of Hinduism from the cults of Hinduism. Whether the untouchable are Hindus in the religious sense of the word depends upon whether one adopts as his tests the dogmas or the cults. If the tests of Hinduism are the dogmas of caste and untouchability then every untouchable would repudiate Hinduism and the assertion that he is a Hindu. If the test applied is the acceptance of a cult such as the worship of Rama, Krishna, Vishnu and Shiva and other Gods and Goddesses recognised by Hinduism, the untouchables may be claimed to be Hindus. The congress² as usual maintains a body of agents from among the untouchables to shout when need be that the untouchables are Hindus and that they will die as

¹ George, Goldy M. "Fascism the emerging threat to indigenous people", a paper presented for the Chhattisgarh Church Leaders Consultation on 6-8 March 2003. For further details log on to <http://www.countercurrents.org/dalit-george011003.htm>

² Dr. Ambedkar always believed that congress is a bunch of upper caste people and the congress acts based on the caste hierarchy even as a political movement. But today this role is largely overtaken by the RSS and its ancillary organisations.

Hindus. But even these paid agents will not agree to be counted as Hindus if they are asked to proclaim themselves as Hindus, if Hinduism means belief in caste and untouchability.³

The only test, which can be of use, is its social sense as indicating a member of the Hindu society. Can an untouchable be held to be part of the Hindu society? Is there any human tie that binds them to the rest of the Hindus? There is none. There is no coenobium. There is no commensalism. There is not even the right to touch, much less to associate; instead, the mere touch is enough to cause pollution to a Hindu. The whole tradition of the Hindus is to recognise the untouchables as a separate element and insist upon it as a fact.⁴

The separation, which Hinduism has brought about, between the Hindus and the untouchables by its dogmas of untouchability, is not a mere imaginary line of separation. It has both depth and width. Factually the Hindus and the untouchables are divided by a fence made of barbed wire. To put the matter in general terms, Hinduism and social union are incompatible.”⁵

From the above three paragraphs certain basics of Hinduism and Dalit is clear; in no way Dalits are Hindus. They are altogether a separate unit. How could a social and religious system, which argues a down line for a large section even below the bottom line become the faith and religion of those who are either on the line or below it? Even Dr. Ambedkar along with more than 2 lakhs of his followers embraced Buddhism due to the unequal human relationship propagated by Hinduism and also due to the fact that Buddhism was historically a challenge to Brahminism and of course the political ideology of the broken humanities.

The Constitution of India upholds religious liberty to all citizens, then why is such a tussle on conversion.⁶ There are reasons for this. One is that the communities that get converted to other faith are also stepping out of the clutches of the caste lords. No more the caste domination could be continued. Secondly through conversion they get educated through which a discontent for the caste system grows, which leads to originate Dalit rebellion and third is they attain a better space for affirming their identity, culture and dignity. Fundamentally when the very realisation that Hinduism is at stake without sustaining the caste structure, disparity and untouchability all these dramas are wrought.

IV. Beef-eating, Dalits & banning of cow-slaughter:

This is another issue that is a matter of discussion in the national circles. This question could be understood in three different ways. One is the history of beef-eating in India, second is the culture of beef eating and third is why are Dalits and other marginalized sections are targeted under the guise of beef-eating today.

A survey of ancient Indian scriptures, especially the Vedas, shows that amongst the nomadic, pastoral Aryans who settled here, animal sacrifice was a dominant feature till the emergence of settled agriculture. Cattle were the major property during this phase and they offered the same to propitiate the gods. Wealth was equated with the ownership of the cattle.⁷

³ Ambedkar, Dr. B.R. *“The Untouchables are not Hindus but a separate element”*

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For further reference refer to the various articles, sections, sub-sections and clause within the Constitution of India related to the personal liberty and individual freedom.

⁷ Puniyari, Ram *“Beef Eating: Strangulating History”*, The Hindu, 15th August 2003.

With the rise of agricultural economy and the massive transformation occurring in society, changes were to be brought in the practice of animal sacrifice also. At that time there were ritualistic practices like animal sacrifices, with which Brahmins were identified. Buddha attacked these practices. There were sacrifices, which involved 500 oxen, 500 male calves, 500 female calves and 500 sheep to be tied to the sacrificial pole for slaughter. Buddha pointed out that aswamedha, purusmedha, vajapeya sacrifices did not produce good results. According to a story in Digha Nikaya, when Buddha was touring Magadha, a Brahmin called Kutadanta was preparing for a sacrifice with 700 bulls, 700 goats and 700 rams. Buddha intervened and stopped him. His rejection of animal sacrifice and emphasis on non-injury to animals assumed a new significance in the context of new agriculture.⁸ In fact it was Brahmins who promoted this system through the process of sacrifices, the lower strata were obliged to eat the flesh of dead cow only.

The analysis of the working of the laws of the sacred which is the core of religion should enable any one to see that the answer to the question why beef-eating should make the Broken Men untouchables is the correct one. All that is necessary to reach the answer I have proposed is to read the analysis of the working of the laws of the sacred with the cow as the sacred object. It will be found that Untouchability is the result of the breach of the interdiction against the eating of the sacred animal, namely, the cow.⁹

As has been said, the Brahmins made the cow a sacred animal. They did not stop to make a difference between a living cow and a dead cow. The cow was sacred, living or dead. Beef eating was not merely a crime. If it were only a crime it would have involved nothing more than punishment. Beef eating was made a sacrilege. Anyone who treated the cow as profane was guilty of sin and unfit for association. The Broken Men who continued to eat beef became guilty of sacrilege.¹⁰

Once the cow became sacred and the Broken Men continued to eat beef, there was no other fate left for the Broken Men except to be treated unfit for association, i.e., as Untouchables.¹¹ However today it is the principle source of protein at an affordable rate to the Dalits and other marginalized communities.

For instance, in Kerala, beef accounts for 40 percent of all meat, and is consumed by four-fifths of the people. They include 72 Hindu communities. In India, beef is at least twice cheaper than lamb or chicken. Absence of beef will raise the food bills of Dalits and marginalized sections.

Banning the slaughter of cows will violate two fundamental rights at the heart of India's Constitution – the freedom to live and act (and eat) as one wishes (provided that doesn't infringe other people's rights), and the right to carry on any occupation, trade or business. This violation is all the more egregious because it panders to a particular group in India's multi-cultural, multi-religious society – under the false pretext of respecting the religious sentiments of a community.¹²

To start with, a cow-slaughter ban will impose a heavy economic burden on society equivalent to more than half the grand total India annually spends on primary education in all schools put together. If the 10 million cows slaughtered each year are to be kept alive for only five years (that is, 50 million for one year), they will need as much additional pastureland as India currently has.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ambedkar, Dr. B. R. "Who were they and why they become Untouchables?", Chapter 11-14.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bidwai, Praful "Milking the cow politically", The News International, Pakistan, 4th September, 2003.

If a paltry Rs 10/- is spent on each animal daily, that will annually cost over Rs. 18000 crores! India's total primary education spending is Rs. 3500 crores.¹³

Keeping economically useless, ailing, old cattle forcibly alive will mount further pressure on land and people. Worse, the bill imposes a blanket ban on killing the cow and also its progeny – including bulls. This will compel farmers to keep alive a class of useless animals, resulting in higher milk prices. There will be the additional burden of over \$1 billion from lost exports of leather and meat products, mainly beef. Besides, at least 15 million people associated with the bovine-livestock economy, from trade of animals to leather making and trading in bones will lose their livelihoods. This means an annual value addition loss of Rs. 15000 crores.¹⁴

It is doubtful if either the Hindus as a whole, or those who owe cattle want cow slaughter banned. Many, but not all, Hindus believe the cow is sacred in some sense. But that's not reflected in the way it is treated. Most Hindus have the farmer's attitude to cattle. They sell them to the butcher once their useful life is exhausted. The vast majority of India's cattle owners are Hindus. So the cow slaughter issue is related to intra-Hindu politics. Cattle breeds of cow (which cannot serve as draught animals) are butchers young. It is wrong to claim that Hindus don't eat beef, and their principal scriptures prohibit its consumption. Numerous Hindu communities, and the low castes and Dalits, regularly consume beef, as do India's 180 million non-Hindus.

The question of cow slaughter is also related with the tanning of leather. This is another symbol of pollution and impurity of Dalits. What was essentially scientific was constructed as spiritually bad and sinful in Manudharma Shastra. Such superstitions keep getting passed off as spiritual and scriptural. More shocking is that Hindutva organisations such as the VHP want to implement them. They killed five Dalits for skinning a dead cow on a roadside in Haryana. They say the Hindu scriptures prohibit such an act. To bolster their case, for the modernist legal context, the murderers say the Dalit youth were skinning a live cow.

The leather industry was one of the first that Indian society had established, much before the Europeans and Americans. Instead of being proud of them, society rendered the builders "untouchable". There is some thing basically wrong with this mode of understanding divinity and spirituality. The problem is deeper than present behaviour of the VHP and its ilk shows. An anti-scientific temper runs deep in the Hindu psyche. Does this not deserve much more serious debate? Is the struggle against such a spiritual psyche to be carried by only the Dalits?¹⁵ Undoubtedly this is another concoct of the Hindutva fold to define what is sacred and what is not, what is sanctified and what is not, who are unpolluted and who are pollutants. Emergence of these definitions in the socio-political sphere is vital to them for the continuity of domination.

V. Reservation Tussle & the Lantern of Privatisation:

Reservation in the educational institutions and the financial assistance in the form of scholarships and freeships constitute perhaps the most important factor in the development scheme for Dalits. For, it is primarily responsible to make the basic input of education available to them. Without education, all the constitutional safeguards including the reservation in services would be infructuous. Under this scheme the Dalit students whose parental income is below a specified level, get freeship, reservation in admissions to all the colleges getting grants-in-aid from the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ilaiah, Dr. Kancha "Cow and Culture".

government, and scholarships. Without this assistance, even today, it would be difficult for Dalits to send their children to school.¹⁶

The Reforms have already resulted in freezing the grants to many institutions and in stagnating, if not lowering, the expenditure on education. The free market ethos has entered the educational sphere in a big way. Commercialisation of education is no more a mere rhetoric; it is now the established fact. Commercial institutions offering specialised education signifying the essential input from utilitarian viewpoint have come up in a big way from cities to small towns. Their product-prices are not only based on the demand-supply consideration in their market segment but also are manipulated by their promotional strategies. In a true spirit of globalisation, many foreign universities are invading the educational spheres through hitherto unfamiliar strategic alliances with non-descript commercial agencies, of course at hefty dollar equivalent prices. Many elite institutions like IIMs, IITs, and suddenly facing fund crunch had to raise their fee structure and other prices many fold. They were already beyond the reach of Dalits. When they eventually turn self-financing, their prices would be benchmarked against their international counterparts, which any way would be affordable to the same top market segment that constitutes the focus of all the Reform-talk. As the job markets become acutely competitive, owing to a sharp decline in job opportunities, the polarisation between the elite and commoner has sharpened. Various kinds of price barriers would be erected to thwart the entry of downtrodden.

Even the sphere of primary education the coverage of which has been so miserably inadequate as to leave out multitude of children in villages as illiterate, could not remain unaffected, notwithstanding its already existing divide between the vernacular and English schools. Corporatisation has entered this arena, transforming the education into an enterprise for profits. Today educational sector is more commonly known as education industry. The quality of input these expensive schools provide will benchmark the products in the contracting job markets. Even today, because of preponderance of the English language in business circles, the divide between village and towns is almost complete in the field of education. It is so difficult for a village student, educated in vernacular medium to compete with his convent educated counterpart in cities and towns. If this is the situation of general village population, the plight of Dalits who besides being the poorest of the village population carry additional Bretton Wood of social discrimination, is indeed a worrisome matter. Despite several kinds of State assistance, Dalits are plagued with alarming rate of school dropouts. This may be explained out as much by the need for Dalit children to supplement their meagre family incomes for meeting the two ends as also the erosion of their faith that education could be the instrument to change the pathetic course of their lives. This sense of alienation is going to grow with the progress of the Reforms.¹⁷

Whatever may be the other costs, the government policy of reservations in employment sphere has undoubtedly played an important role for Dalits. The policy broadly envisages representation of Dalits in proportion to their population in all the public services, which includes the government, public sector, autonomous bodies and institutions receiving grant-in-aid from the government. A cursory glance at the figures of this representation is enough to get a pathetic state of implementation.

Howsoever, unsatisfactory the results of the implementation may be, the importance of reservations from the Dalit viewpoint cannot be overemphasised. As could be evidenced by the organised private sector, where it would be difficult to find a Dalit employee (save of course in scavenging and lowliest jobs), without reservations Dalits would have been totally doomed. The

¹⁶ Teltumde, Dr. Anand “*Impact of New Economic Policy on Dalit in India*”, page 16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

importance of reservations thus could only be assessed in relation to situations where they do not exist. Whatever be their defects and deficiencies, they have given certain economic means of livelihood and some social prestige to the sons and daughters of over 1.5 million landless labourers. Whether they get real power or not, over 50,000 Dalits could enter the sphere of bureaucratic authority with the help of reservations. Besides these tangible benefits promised by the policy, it has instilled a hope in Dalit community. This hope predominantly manifests in the form of spread of education among them. Their emotional bond with the nation and its Constitution despite heaps of injustice and ignominy they bear every moment of their life may also be significantly attributable to the Reservation Policy.¹⁸

The winds of privatisation under the Economic Reforms have already shaken the very foundations of the Reservations. The Reforms clearly envisage the minimalist government. Wherever the Reforms patterned on the Structural Adjustment Programme of the World Bank were carried out, denationalisation of the public sector and privatisation have come in a big way. Being the late starter, India has not reached the scales achieved by others, say, the Latin American countries.¹⁹ However, is not unimpressive. Almost all sectors of economy stand opened up for private investment. Initially the disinvestment of public sector companies began with 49 per cent by the policy. The public stake being more than 50 per cent, the public sector as such was not dismantled in policy. However, the reform package has already crossed all boundaries by disinvesting PSUs like BALCO by 51%. Now all PSUs are open for disinvestments by 51% or more. Even the case of the transformation of telecommunication department to BSNL is the same story. Hence reservations had been wiped off through these politics.

In the name of preparing the PSUs for global free market regime, the PSUs were allowed/encouraged to have strategic alliances with private companies from India and abroad. As such, over the last five years, many profit making PSUs have formed the joint venture companies (JVC). These JVCs are strategically structured as not to fall in the ambit of the PSU-framework. The typical equity stake for the PSU and private could be 49:51. There appears to be a great deal of receptivity for this scheme in the government circles. There are no policy barriers on the business to be pursued by these JVCs. Theoretically, an existing PSU can hive off its business divisions into private JVCs and transform itself into a financial holding company with a skeleton staff. Even if technically it remains a PSU, and assuming that it followed the reservation policy sincerely, it would have little scope to absorb Dalits in its staff. Whatever may be the strategic considerations, the fall out of this process practically amounted to shutting the doors of these new age companies to Dalits and to potential neutralisation of the reservation policy.

The policy of limited disinvestment of PSUs not being in conformity with the spirit of the Reforms, is bound to be relaxed in favour of privatisation any time. But still, all the PSUs may not get privatised at once. The bigger sharks would gobble the better ones up. The worst ones may be closed down or distress-sold. And the middle ones may for quite some time, continue to be the relic of their past. Whatever the scenario, the residual structures of the 'reformed' PSUs are never going to be the same, as far as Dalits are concerned. The ethos of privatisation and the excuse of competition, superimposed on the traditional caste prejudice, will never allow reservations to happen, any more.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid, page 17

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Other public services are also bound to slip out of the reservation policy. Most of the sectors, which were the traditional domain of the government investment, have already been released for the private investment.

VI. Land & Dalits:

Land is a productive asset but people are more emotionally attached with the land in many ways. For many it is the symbol of their freedom. To some it is the image of their fight against the upper caste. It also represents the mark of reiterating the lost identity. To many it is the icon of self-determination, co-existence and community feeling. But to the corporate sector and agents of development it is a commodity to be consumed. The state also takes side with these so-called think tanks. Land can be purchased and sold for commercial purpose. Or even it could be acquired forcefully. Every time the common man sacrifices himself for the relish and enjoyment of the elite.

The owners of the land are today landless; that is Dalits. Historically they are one of the long persecuted humanities betrayed of rights over land and any form of resources. In an age of globalisation and marketisation, the life values sustained through the community life and love are constantly diffusing and substituted with competition. Globalisation is nothing but the spreading of capitalistic regimes all over the world controlled by a few.²¹ This will end-up the remaining space of Dalits within the existing system.

In most part of the country Dalits are either landless or small/marginal farmers or landless. Analysing it from the historical viewpoint they are the first plebeian community of the country. Presently due to the obvious alienation from land or resources or employment, the largest number of migrants from one state to another is Dalits. Sizeable numbers among them are bonded labourers too. Their life condition is wretched and extremely inhuman. Women and children are subjected to atrocious harassment and torture, particularly in the migrated workplace.

Looking back into the history of land struggles in the past the participation of Dalits in land movement is quite sizeable in various parts of the country, particularly in the left movements. In fact the character of the ruling class and their approach towards Dalits remained the same in almost every part of the country. One of the principal reasons of the Naxalbari march, by hundreds of rustic poor and landless peasants with arms in their hands, was the growing unrest among the Dalits against the upper caste Hindus in West Bengal.²²

Undeniably this process was very attractive to bring rural Dalit youths under its fold and therefore it had a heavy replication in various parts of the country, where the masses were brought under the banner of Communist parties and of late in Marxist-Leninist movement towards the end of sixties. Hundreds of youths came under this fold, as this ideology entered the scene as the only alternative to the dominant crisis. Thus in Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and in parts of Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Kerala the Marxist-Leninist movement became a movement of Dalits.

In Bihar Musahari and Bhojpur were the first places where the silence of the peasants was decisively broken. Heroic Dalit figures like Jagdish Mahto, Ram Naresh Ram, Bhutan Musahar, Rameshwar Ahir, and Dr. Nirmal Mahto were some of the early leaders struggling to ignite the single spark that would light the prairie fire. By late seventies many central and some northern

²¹ George, Goldy M. "Cultural History and People's Search for Alternatives", in People's Reporter Vol. 11 No. 15 August 1-15 1998, Bangalore.

²² George, Goldy M. "The Politics of Land & the Besieged Lot", A paper presented during the Annual Get-together of Chethana at Madnapalli in April 2002, page 7.

districts of the erstwhile Bihar (now in Jharkhand) were raging with the peasant struggles.²³ However the ideology of Dalit as the lowest social strata and original inheritors of the land could neither be recognised nor gain any momentum within the movement.²⁴

Four reasons have come to dominate the armed struggles in Bihar. The first and perhaps the most successful reasons has been the relentless struggle on social issues. 64 percent of Bihar's population is composed of the backwards and Dalits,²⁵ the majority of whom have nursed a justifiable historical grievance against the upper caste (13 percent), who dominated the economic, cultural and political structures. The constant battle waged by the rural Dalits in acquiring social dignity or "*Izzat*" against the bloodthirsty and avaricious behaviour of upper caste landlords and rich farmers has been indefatigable and quite measurably successful.

However non-of these movements emerge into a Dalit land movement with a perspective of social change in the basic fabric of the structure. One prime factor of the failure of the Indian working class movement was that upper caste bourgeoisie who never wanted to change the basic social frame that mostly led the movement. Therefore the realisation of change in the Brahminical social order could not be internalised.

At present a strategic method of further seizure of their land and property is lucid and visible. In many places the land occupied by them is deliberately targeted under different guise such as rural development programs, building schools, road construction, etc. Another method is through the intervention of middleman, who provides them with loans during the occasion of marriage, death, birth, festivals and celebrations, and in return mortgage the land. Many such cases have come into light.

With the arrival of privatisation policy, the employment facility under reservation is wiped-off the surface. Battering the growing consciousness among the Dalits is the primary agenda of this. It is by all means to put the Dalits into more and more trouble. For this reason large number of people keep migrating in search of livelihood. If we look at the rate of migration of Dalits, it has gone up to alarming heights.

As globalisation and fascism compliments and strengthens each other, it also affects the land-property relationship. Caste polity is corroborating its grip in new forms and the people stand without much of options. Outbreak of communal tensions is also aimed to make the Dalits realise that they are Hindus; thereby to bring them under the Hindutava fold. This will divert the Dalits from the core issues of being powerless, landless, resourceless, etc.

In Tamilnadu, Dalits of Chockadevanpatti hamlet in Madurai district have been waging a battle since 1981 against powerful caste Hindus who refuse to vacate the land assigned by the Government for constructing houses for Adi Dravidars. The Dalits, who were allotted two cents each to build houses, says that the district administration of confining its role to erecting a warning board on the disputed land, which says it belongs to the Adi Dravidars. Sixty five-year old Vellaiyan, who has taken up the issue, says he has exhausted all his savings to sustain the

²³ George, Goldy M. "*The History of Land Issue & Land struggles – The case study of Bihar*", page 21-22.

²⁴ George, Goldy M. "*The Politics of Land & the Besieged Lot*", A paper presented during the Annual Get-together of Chethana at Madnapalli in April 2002, page 7-8.

²⁵ Jha, Shishir K. "*Prospects of Radical Change in Bihar: Recuperating the Diseased Heart of India*", page 3.

fight against the powerful 'occupiers.' He has already mortgaged his piece of land. The Dalits still wait, after 22 long years, to get possession of the allotted land.²⁶

The situation is not different in Chhattisgarh. Here they are mostly landless or marginal farmers. Dalits, one of the prime inheritances of land are today on the streets. Their right to land has been historically betrayed time and again. Quite before the settlement of the land in this area, they were defied of their right to land. Currently the land issue is the most complicated. It has become a multi-facet issue in the present context. The display case of this could be better illustrated through the common land issues such as:

1. People have occupied the land since long but they don't have any land entitlement (patta) of their own. They are also cultivating on it but they don't get any sort of basic facilities and subsidies due to the fact that they don't hold the patta of their land.
2. In some other cases, they hold the land entitlement (patta) but do not have the occupancy. Certain cases of this character have got all sorts of co-related problems such as no mutation and even they don't have any idea of its location.
3. Land acquisition has not left its draconian fangs and teeth for industrial purpose and other mega-developmental projects. In Chhattisgarh 10 major projects have already been completed, for which 257032.585 acres of land have been lost. In all 238 villages have been affected by these dams and their rehabilitation has not yet been done. In addition to this there are 30 medium projects affecting 123 villages, for which 32745.13 acres of land have been acquired. Further there are 8 projects pending and 6 medium projects have been proposed affecting 150 villages for which 261314.59 acres of land is to be occupied.

These are the statistics till 2000 when the state was about to be created. This chart has probably grown much higher.

One of the major sources of people's livelihood is land. In the last one-decade, as an integral part of globalisation-liberalisation policies people have lost their right over land and on the other hand large area of land have been taken away from the people for various purposes – mega industries and developmental projects being the major ones. While acquisition of the land from the people is a major issue, for the industries – most of them being private including both national as well as multinational – it is a means of multiplying capital. Dalits are the most effected by all such projects, as they are already resourceless and powerless.

VII. The imbalance of Panchayati Raj:

Panchayat Raj institution was envisioned to be one method of decentralisation of power to grassroot people. After the new generation of panchayats have started functioning several issues have come to the fore, which have a bearing on human rights. The important factor, which has contributed to the Dalit situation vis-à-vis the panchayat system, is the nature of Indian society, which of course determines the nature of the state. The Indian society is known for its inequality, social hierarchy and the rich and poor divide. The social hierarchy is the result of the caste system, which is unique to India. Therefore caste and class are the two factors, which deserve attention in this context.

At another level it is essential to look into the question: who are the victims of the social system and nature of the state? They are women, the Dalits (former untouchables), tribal people and the poor. How can the process of decentralization through strengthening the democratically elected local bodies tackle these issues? Does the decentralization process and the decentralized

²⁶ Illangovan, R “Denial of land drives Dalits to Islam”, The Hindu, 14th November 2002.

institutions increase human rights violations or enhance the possibility for respecting and observing human rights?²⁷

There has been a sharp increase in violent manifestations of casteism in local communities ever since the local government system got strengthened through the Constitution amendments. When the panchayati raj institutions have been seen by the upper castes as the tool for the lower castes to assert their right as individuals living in a democratic polity the latter have become targets of caste based discrimination and violence. This rising unrest at the local level has become a common phenomenon.

It is evident that the upper castes that have been controlling the affairs of the village and the community and the rural economy cannot tolerate the changes that are being brought about by the decentralized democratic institutions. Therefore, from the beginning of the implementation of the panchayat system, tensions, violence and killings have taken place in order to resist the transformation.

The elections to the local government bodies have been the first and foremost point of attack by the casteist groups. From the very first election under the new system, the rights of the lower castes to participate in the democratic process and hold positions were questioned by the upper castes.²⁸ The classic case is that of a village in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu, a southern state in India. In Melavalavu, the dominant castes of the area murdered the panchayat president and the vice-president who both belonged to a Dalit community, merely because they dared to fight the panchayat elections. When Melavalavu was declared a panchayat reserved for the lower castes in the October 1996 local body elections, the dominant castes resented this and the polls could not be held. The second attempt to hold elections was also foiled by violence and booth capturing. Finally, when the elections were held on December 30, 1996, the upper castes boycotted it. Members of the lower caste were elected as president and vice-president amongst others despite stiff resistance from the upper castes, but they were never permitted by the dominant caste to enter the new panchayat office. Finally on June 30, 1997, the president and vice-president along with three others were murdered in broad daylight; their only crime was that they had been elected through the democratic process.²⁹

These kinds of violations continue unabated even today. The local body election in the same state the upper castes suppressed the rights of the lower castes to exercise their franchise.³⁰ Similar incidents have occurred in most of the states. The northern states, which are prone to more caste conflicts, are witnessing human rights violations after the introduction of the new phase of panchayats. There are a number of instances indicating the presence of powerful caste elites that continue to thwart attempts for a constitutional resolution of social justice issues at the village level. The frequent reports on the killings of Dalit men, women and children are not only restricted to backward states, where the process of decentralization of power to the local level has not really taken off. Caste violence is part of the social reality.

In the last panchayat elections in Bihar, over 96 people including a magistrate and several candidates were killed during the polling and more than 40 candidates were murdered in different

²⁷ Mathew, George “*Panchayati Raj institutions and Human Rights in India*”, The International Council on Human Rights Policy Decentralisation, Local Government and Human Rights, Project 116.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sengupta, Arjun “*Right to Development*”, Economic and Political Weekly, 7th July, 2001.

³⁰ Shivaraman, Mythily “*Blow to Goodness*”, The Hindu, 18th May, 1997.

districts between notification of polling and filing of nominations. Studies have shown that most of these killings were the result of 'caste war'³¹

Even after duly getting elected, the Dalits are not getting the power and status they deserve. They are made to sit outside the panchayat offices, on the floor while the traditional village headmen occupy the chairs. Even when upper caste groups are committing atrocities against the Dalits, the latter do not have a supportive redressal mechanism. It may also be mentioned that the police (law and order machinery) is not under the authority of panchayats. The people belonging to the lower castes are being subjected to unabated atrocities particularly through the connivance and collusion of the state administration and the local police. In many instances, cases are not even registered against the perpetrators (who are mainly the upper castes) by the police who are greatly influenced by the upper castes or majority of whom belong to the upper castes.

The Constitutional amendment did not simply devolve powers to the panchayats. It added a very significant provision of reserving almost one third of the seats to the Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/STs) and women. The amendment thus at once gave more powers to the local ruling elites and aspiring elites and also sought to create a counter point to them. It seeks to set into motion autonomous political action by the hitherto marginalised groups. It should be remembered that these marginal people had participated in electoral politics as appendages of the rural power holders and upper caste landed blocs. By making them compete for crumbs at the local level with the rural elites the Act seeks to push them into a more assertive role. This counter balancing of the local elites is of strategic significance to maintain the overall balance of power in the hands of the centralised Indian State and the ruling bloc behind it.³²

In states like Rajasthan a movement has sprung up to make public in the presence of the entire village the accounts of the panchayats and review the work done by the Panchayat. This has created some control over overt corrupt practices. To what extent this can effectively curb corruption and build a democratic accountability remains to be seen.³³

In conclusion one may say that the new Panchayati raj in so far as it will weaken the bureaucratic stranglehold is welcome and attempts should be made to strengthen it against the feudalist casteism, bureaucracy and state government. But how far it has helped the Dalits to come into the centre stage is absolutely questionable.

VIII. Economic crisis:

In simple terms the economics of Dalits is simply related to that of being powerless and resourceless both socially and politically. The very historical status of Dalits is continued and perpetuated by the new models of capitalism. They are landless. With the dramatic saviour like entrance of New Economic Policy through the Structural Adjustment Program the minimum substantial livelihood that they used to have is also diffusing.

Due to the globalisation policies of giving a free hand to all potential resources to the global investors, small portions of land is also taken off. With WTO's Doha and its follow-up conference at Cancun water had more become a commodity for corporate exploitation eventually leading to the privatisation of river in Chhattisgarh and Kerala. Corporatisation of water already exists for the past one and half decade. Hence at the village level people are short of drinking

³¹ Optical cit. George Mathew.

³² Subramaniam, C.N. "*Observations on the new Panchayati Raj Experiments in Madhya Pradesh*", <http://revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv4n2/panchay.htm>

³³ Ibid.

water but the nearby factories have in plenty since direct passages or bundings are made for such purpose. The riparian communities on the banks of Sheonath river in Chhattisgarh and the people's struggle against Coca-Cola in Plachimeda in Kerala gives similar indications. This is quite ironical by all means. Hence there is not water for the fields of the poor and marginal farmers and even those who used to eke out a substantial income annually have been suffering due to this.

Likewise, the Structural Adjustment Program, induced as a part of the New Economic Policy, has closed all options for agriculture subsidies. Particularly the small and marginal farmers are facing the result of such a shift. In addition, the politics of *mandi* (local paddy market), which is controlled by the local business lobby (usually belonging to the upper caste), is keeping them deprived from getting the support value for their product even. In compulsion they sell it to the grain merchants at a much lower price. Those engaged in sharecropping are also not left out; since they don't have the *patta* of the land in their favour, the money nowadays given in cheque is not in their favour but in the name of the original landowner. Now it depends upon the mercy of the master whether to give the money or not.

Dalits who are landless or marginal farmers are the most affected by this. We could sense this fact by looking at the massive and extensive outflow of people in search of employment in the last few years. Looking at the records there has been large-scale reduction in the productivity of the paddy in the entire Chhattisgarh. Obviously this is one major reason for the unstoppable migration of Dalits to other parts of the country in search of employment.

IX. Cultural changes:

With the new forms of culture, where consumerism has become the god of the market and money and power has taken the centre stage of all spheres of human action and activity, human relations have deteriorated and this is affecting the already hampered communities like the Dalits. Day by day they are dragged into new models of competition and this eventually amplifies their problems within the community in terms of relationship also.

Order of worship has taken new shape and form, particularly among those who are closely interacting with the non-Dalits. Many of them are either city-dwellers or in semi urban township or living near the cities or townships. Due to the increased Hinduisation, Dalits are more interested in worshipping the dominant Hindu gods than their own forms of worship and offerings. In fact this virus is infecting the mindset of the cream and also the intellectual section among Dalits. Unable to understand the fact that they are badly co-opted by the dominant social and political system their inwardness has accelerated.

The classical example is of Chhattisgarh. Ganesh pooja and Durga pooja were never a part of Dalit faith order. But today in every Dalit village or Dalit lane or colony Ganesh pooja is celebrated with greater fervour than it is celebrated by the dominant caste Hindus. Another aspect is that in Chhattisgarh Dalit women enjoyed a greater degree of freedom in taking her own decisions in terms of selecting her life partner. If after getting married she has any dislike towards the man or she starts liking another man without much of conflicts she gets separated from him and joins the other man. It was done through a ritual known as '*Chudi-pratha*', according to which the new man offers her a set of bangles to join him. Even if she eludes with that man it never creates a conflict within the community. Even holding bigamous or polygamous relationship was not a problem. But today all these are seen as malign.

Consequent to this there is an intrusion of alien art forms too. In certain cases even traditional instruments are looked upon with indignity. On the contrary non-traditional instruments like Banjo, Keyboards are much used in these art forms like Panthi, Mangal Bhajan, Gammat, Ganda

baaja, etc. This transforms the wholesome spirit of Dalit art itself. Along with this, another change is the shift towards the demands of market. Subscribing the market demands a shift in their songs, music, and rhythm is also absorbed. Hence as a whole a lot of changes have appeared in the last few years in terms of the culture and values of Dalits. The process of globalisation is bringing in a new culture of market and domination of Hindutava forces through strategic process of induction and inculcation. However there are still many groups and communities that preserved the original one.

Diversification in the name of difference within the communities has grown at large. Their social masters time and again tell various Dalit communities that they have nothing in common and hence there should be no point of co-operation in-between. In the result different communities are looking at each other as enemies. Hence the forces of globalisation and fascism are blocking Dalits from coming together to identify and acknowledge the commonality.

Women are the most effected in this whole process. Insecurity among them has increased and the roving nature of this has put them under severe threat to their very survival. Expansion of the manifestation of patriarchy has increased. Looking at the elite world, their men are also trying to control and subvert which is extremely dangerous and also giving birth to a new culture of domination. Wife beating is increasingly becoming quite common. Demanding dowry is also escalating. Status quo becomes the modus symbol. So are the other consequences of this trend turning it more anti-woman.

These are some of the major changes in the cultural attitudes of Dalits due to the rampant ravage of globalisation and fascism. There are many other modes by which the people at large are affected. Hence a process of resistance to this is very much needed and vital, unless the people of this hinterland stand up and fight against all such tendencies from its roots, the fate of Dalits will remain the same.³⁴

³⁴ George, Goldy M. “*Globalisation, Fascism & Dalits*”, in Goldy M. George edited, “*Globalisation & Fascism: The Dalit Encounter*”, page 102-104