
UNIT 1 ANCIENT DALIT THINKERS

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The rebellion against caste system is as old as the caste system itself. The unit has a assumption that *Sramanic* thinking is Dalit thinking. The historical and ideological conflict between *Sramanic* and Brahmanic system of thought are portrayed as ancient Dalit thinking. The unit tries to look at Buddhist, Jaina thinkers, Ajivikas, Bhutavadins, and Tiruvalluvar as Ancient Dalit thinkers as they ideologically opposed to Vedic Brahmanical system of thought. They were the ones who philosophized against oppression, domination, discrimination and had a vision of egalitarianism, equality, material oriented thinking, this worldly thinking. Regarding the Buddhist, Jaina, Carvaka we do not intend to repeat their ideologies, as they are dealt elaborately in other units of MA philosophy courses. We only show quickly how they are verbalizing Dalit philosophy of life.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The indigenous people, Dalits have different approach and outlook to reality and the world they encounter is quite different from Vedic Brahmanical categories of thinking. As people at the foundational ground of civil society, they have a unique philosophy, culture and knowledge system. From the ancient times, there had been strong voices and ideological systems that challenged the discriminative and oppressive structures and ideologies of Brahmanical hegemony. However, historically Vedic tradition tried to pose itself as successful in either destroying those variant strands, silencing those defiant voices or cunningly incorporating them into their scheme of thinking (if they find those ideologies cannot be totally destroyed). From ancient period onwards, there were thinkers and systems that gave rise to egalitarian society without discrimination and subjugation. This unit spells out first the conflict between Brahmanical and Indigenous Dravidian people as a background to understand the difference in ideologies. It also dwells quite briefly on Buddhist and Jaina ideologies as Ancient Dalit thinking as they remained a challenge to Brahmanic hegemonic ideology. The Indigenous wisdom is for integral liberation which does not merely attempt at mobilization for acquisition of resources and

power. It predominantly addresses the question of basic identity as dignified co-humans with others both as individuals and a people. Dalit thinking from ancient times onwards seeks to project an inclusive ideology upholding human dignity and optimistically building a new human family in which there would be no trace of any discriminatory hierarchical consciousness.

1.2 CONFLICT OF VEDIC AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Historically, it seems the story of the origins of the Dalits goes far back in history. The people known as the Dalits today had definitely a beginning, similar to the beginning of other human beings on earth. According to many scholars in history, the story of Dalits is traceable to the archaeological evidences of Indus Valley civilizations whose period is approximated fixed before 1500 B.C.E. The people of Indus Valley civilizations are the aboriginals of the then Indian continent. They are different from the people of Vedic culture and they are generally identified as Dravidians and this in turn distinctly imply the fact that the ancient Dalits belong to the Dravidian culture, that is preserved in and through Tamil language and literature. The people of Vedic culture broadly known as the Aryans do differ from people the Dravidian culture. That between these two cultures there existed continuous conflict between these two cultures. Many of the Vedic hymns evidently imply the prevalence of a conflict between these two communities and as a result the people of Vedic community were the winners of these conflicts. Most of the Vedic hymns or texts are addressed to Lord Indra and they narrate the rivalry between the Aryans or Aryas and the *Dasyas*, the excluded communities by the Aryas.

To evidence more about these two opposing groups and hostility of the Vedic People against the Dalits, few of the relevant verses from the hymns of the *Rigveda* are stated with their subsequent meaning. “*vi janihayaran ye ch dasyvo...* means ‘You (Indra) know well Aryas and Dasyus’*hatavi dusyun prarya vaarnamavata* ,, means...He (Indra) killed the Dasyus and protected the Aryan race (colour). *vadhihi dasyu dhanini..* means You (Indra) killed rich Dasyu. *akarma dasyurabhi no amanturanya-varto amanus*” means “All around us are ritual-less Dasyas who do not practice religious rituals and are alien to Vedic laws. *sajatubharma chhadadadhana ojo. ... puro vimindannacharada vi dasi ... vidana vajirna dasyuve hetimasnarya...saho vadhrya sumnamindar. . dasyu hatyaya* means ‘Armed with his thunderbolt, Indra went about destroying the forts of Dasas, ... O Indra, throw .your thunderbolt at the Dasyus, ... increase the power and glory of Aryas.”

Many scholars (Srivastava, Kapur Singh, Ambedkar, Smith, Basham, Chattopadhyaya, Chanda, D.D. Kosambi, and others) agree to the fact that the destruction of the Indus Valley Civilisation and contents of the hymns of the *Rigveda* are related. Scholars like Ambedkar, Rao, Koenraad Elst, Navaratna S. Rajaram, Shrikant G. Talageri and K.D. Sethna hold the opinion that the Aryans, the people of Vedic culture and the Dravidians that include the Dalit people belong to Indian nation and therefore both these cultures are of indigenous origin. Scholars namely Jyotirao Phule, Ghose, Srivastava, Chanda, Chattopadhyaya, Fuchs, Hutton, Swami Dharma Theertha, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Jawaharlal Nehru, D.D. Kosambi, Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund and many others are of the opinion that the Aryans are not of indigenous origin and they are invaders into the Indian. Thus, many scholars came to the belief that the Aryans are but the ancient Iranians and therefore they are not of indigenous origin which in turn meant that the Aryans were invaders in to ancient India. The Aryans during their effort to Indian

settlement waged continuous war against the Dravidians. The literature from South India suggests that the people whom the Aryans conquered were Dravidians, who subsequently moved south subjugating the indigenous people. Regarding the origin of Aryans, there are two opinions prevalent amongst the scholars: (i) they are like Dalits indigenous people (ii) they are one of the ancient invaders to India from Iranian places. There are textual and archaeological evidences of status of conflict between Aryans and Dasyas resulting the origin of Dalits as Untouchable and vulnerable community. In any theory, Aryans as Invaders or one of the North Indian nomadic groups, the inhuman subjugation of the Dravidians and other indigenous groups are clear in the Brahmanical ideology in Vedic tradition. With this background of subjugation and to some extent 'sidelining' or even alleged 'destruction' of Indigenous wisdom of the Indigenous people, the unit tries to look at Materialist, Naturalist, Buddhist thinkers, Tolkappiyar and Tiruvalluvar as Ancient Dalit thinkers as they ideologically opposed to Vedic Brahmanical system of thought.

1.3 THE BUDDHA: PRAGMATIC THINKER

Against the supremacy of Brahmins the ideological revolt of Mahavira (540-468 B.C.E.) and Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C.E.) challenged the Vedic caste categories. Dumont (a famous sociologist and a scholar on the studies Caste system) notes that Buddhism was a force till the fourteenth century. Later it was wiped out by the caste Hinduism. The Jain strategy to deal with the problem also failed due to the fact that its opposition did not express the Dalit problem as untouchables. Jainism ultimately could not divest itself from the influence of the Hindu caste system. Buddhism faced a different kind of problem, because by the time of the *Manusmriti*, the followers of Gautama Buddha were also considered untouchables. In post-Independence India, the hundreds of thousands of Mahar Dalits of Maharashtra who became Buddhists, in 1956 and later and their progeny are known as *Bauddh*, which in Marathi has become a synonym for Mahar (untouchable). Iyothee Thass, Dalit leader of Tamil Nadu in the modern period strongly promoted an idea that Adi-Dravidas were *purva* Buddhists.

The Buddhist categories of thought centered around the concept of becoming, *pratityasamudpada* (everything is in motion), rejection of concept of self (*anatta*) and unique notion of liberation (*nirvana*). The Buddha is a great anti-thesis to idealism and absolutism of the Vedic categories. *Moksa* is liberation. Liberation is considered to be the supreme aim of human beings. Liberation may be from social and individual problems. The purpose of liberation is not only to attain happiness, but also to lead a joyful life. *Moksa* does not mean emancipation of soul after death alone. *Moksa* contains emancipation of life here on earth. The main goal of liberation in Buddhism is to remove sufferings (*Dukkha*). According to Buddha every human being must attain this ultimate reality. It is their wide spread teaching. According to Buddha, desire causes suffering. He insisted two things in his teaching. They are suffering (*dukkha*) and cessation of suffering (*dukkha nirodha*). He vehemently indicated that the cosmos is full of suffering. This suffering includes all types of ills, calamities, punishment, jealousy, hatred, deception, and illusion. Therefore Buddha advised men to seek eternal peace, bliss and freedom from this transitory world. He requested men to remove the root of *dukkha*. The first sermon of Buddha was about universal suffering. They are nothing but Four Noble Truths. The noble truths lay path to get rid off pain and suffering. Birth, old age, sickness and death are painful. Painfulness is known to us through sorrow, lamentation, dejection and despair. The whole world is immersed in this

universal suffering. Buddha realized indiscernible and transcendental enlightenment. Buddha says that suffering also leads humanity towards enlightenment. Without suffering we cannot attain enlightenment. One, who seeks *nirvana*, is not afraid of suffering. In order to get rid off suffering, one has to seek the Ultimate Truth. Buddha realized the highest state of happiness. This state of happiness led him from the ordinary (worldly) state of consciousness (*lokiya citta*) to attainment of *supra-mundane* bliss. Buddha denied the existence of soul and had no place for traditional theory of *karma* and rebirth. These ideas are more prevalent in the latter part of Buddhism. Buddhism taught people to liberate themselves from their pains and sufferings. Buddhism propagates humanness, equality, and humanitarian approach to all the problems of human life. Buddhism upholds the middle path. This choice is not kind of escapism. It strikes balance between extremes, luxury and austerity. In short, Buddhist teaching focused on concrete, pragmatic and everydayness of human existence. His emphatic anti-substantial crusade, that everything is dependent and exists only for a moment, is a definite blow to Brahmanical concept of self as permanent and absolute.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) What are the historical situations of subjugation of Indigenous people by Vedic people?

.....

2) Sketch the Buddhist challenge to Brahmanical ideology.

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1.4 ANCIENT INDIAN MATERIALIST THINKERS

The materialist philosophers of India known as Carvakas believe only in the reality of the matter and none other. Though their original texts are not extant, theirs is the philosophy that has been thoroughly criticized and vehemently rejected in almost all works of other schools of philosophy in India. The human goal according to them is only material wealth and physical pleasure. Their concern is this worldly. Hence their metaphysical position is centered around only material world. Arguing that only perception is the valid means of knowledge, Carvaka builds up the metaphysical system of material monism. According to the valid source of knowledge only material world is real as it is perceivable. Regarding the substance out of which the entire physical universe is made, Carvaka accepted only the four elements which are observable viz.

earth, fire, air and water, refusing to accept the fifth, unobservable element of ether. For them different things in the world were made up of varying combinations of these four basic elements. Refusal to accept any kind of 'self' or 'spirit' which is not observed as the cause of this world, Carvaka holds that the combinations of the four material elements by the intrinsic characters of the elements themselves. Even the so-called 'self' or 'consciousness,' accordingly to them is only the combination of these elements. To the objection as to how the self which is conscious in character can be produced by unconscious physical elements, the reply is by way of the example of betel leaf, betel nut and lime, none of which is red, but still producing red colour when chewed together as in the chewing of a *pan*. When human person, according to the Carvaka, dies, nothing survives and the body disintegrates into the original four elements. Anything 'super-natural' or 'super-sensuous' is out rightly rejected by Carvaka as they are beyond the purview of sense perception and cannot be validated by it. Totally trusting in the human senses, even though criticised for its limitations by all others, Carvaka emphasized on the verifiability of truth only by ordinary sense experience.

1.5 NATURALIST THOUGHT IN INDIGENOUS TRADITION

Ancient Tamil Dravidian community developed a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the material world in which they were living. In the largely agricultural based Tamil society nature posed as a background for the philosophical tradition. The concept of nature becomes a specific thread of thought that characterizes something unique to the Tamil tradition. Philosophy always engages itself with the concrete experiences of reality. In the classical Tamil literature, called as *cankam* literature, nature is portrayed as directly involving in the life of the humans and influencing the human living and thought patterns. All the descriptions of Nature and its surroundings in both *akam* and *puram* poems deliberately speak of the intertwining of human life with that of nature. All these external aspects of Nature are very much reflected as the internal human aspects. The external material world, according to classical Tamil tradition, participates in the world of humans.

From the beginning of human history nature played a vital role in the life of human community by creating the ambience for the human beings to live and to think. Interestingly, classical Tamil literature has recorded the ancient Tamils' approach to Nature slightly different from many of world's cultures. More than the 'fear-factor,' it has been the 'wonder-at' attitude of the Tamils that aroused human curiosity to know Nature. Evidently ancient Tamil tradition has focused its attention more specifically on both aesthetical and rational aspects of human understanding of Nature than on ending up in ritualistic and religious rendering of natural powers. The influence of Nature on Tamils thought pattern is very decisive and far-reaching. Naturalism and romanticism are the two great thought pattern that pervades the entire classical Tamil literature. These two witness to Tamil thinking as 'nature-dependent'.

Tamils had a unique feature of Naturalism. *Bhuatavada* is the result of it. Tolkappiyar mentions about it while speaking on '*pirappin akam*' from the air, the sound is produced and then it gave rise to letters. Tamil philosophical journey started with 'from external to internal' in the ancient period. *Kula teivam* (gods of the clan) and *nila theivam* (gods of the land) were there. *Nila theivam* is to be understood against the background of emergence of the *bhutavada* which created a unison thought about the life of people with Nature.

The world is not an abstract entity, but a concrete tangible expression of nature. For the Tamils, physical world is true, real and existing. The universe is the amalgamation of five gross elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether. “Though the products are ephemeral, the primordial matter is considered to be a reality.” The physical world is constituted of the five elements, which contains within it the seeds of decomposition. The world is of a composite structure and there is a possibility of it being reduced to its constituent parts later.

The philosophical tradition of ancient Tamils has been pragmatic existential philosophy. Earthly life with body is for the sake of enjoying the fruits of previous *karmas* and to work out one’s own liberation. The bodies, material aspects of the world are thus necessitated so as to make the soul reach its destiny of attaining perfection. In ancient literature, besides the literalism with imagery and poetic expressions realistic approach to nature is found throughout Tamil literature that Nature is out there, existing by itself and influencing the human living and thought patterns. The external material world participates in the world of humans. The appreciation of Nature arose not just out of interest to be associated with human events or to be viewed as the background to human emotion and action. It is philosophy of here and now which characterizes Tamil concept of human life in the material and physical world.

Nature has been defined as the outer, external and objective world of sense perception. It is non-human and is not the product of human either in material or mental sense. It exists by itself having its own uniqueness of its existence and it is an independent reality without any ontological dependence of human existence. Realism in ancient Tamil tradition is neither naïve realism nor representationism but a common-sense realism and critical-scientific realism. External world is a real, independent existent whose truth could well be established by virtue of its own existence and by perception of it by human senses and mind. Ontologically human and external world are independent realities and pragmatically they are interdependent and interconnected realities for their sustenance. They co-exist with each other with relationship of mutual and complementary nature.

1.6 TOLKAPPIYAR: GRAMMARIAN AND PHILOSOPHER

Tolkappiyar is the author of *Tolkappiyam*, grammatical work of Tamil language. According to *Tolkappiyar*, the world of nature is divided into word and substance or categories. The natural objects are classified as *uyir*, *mei*, *uyir-mei*. Time, world, soul, body, God, action, elements, sun, moon and the word are included in the substance (*porul*). The *Tolkappiyam* upholds the reality of both soul and matter. The classification of the alphabets indicates uniquely the relation between soul or spirit and matter. The Tamil alphabets are known as *Uyir* and *Mey*, vowels and consonants. Etymologically they stand to mean the soul and body. The twelve such ‘soul’-letters, conjoin with the consonants to give meaning and life. Spirit animates the body, the matter to be alive. Meaning of any existence, either it be any word in a language or any life in the world, is derived out of the combination of soul and matter, *uyir* and *mey*. In the process of conjoining with the consonants, the vowels do not change their nature. Vowel appears only through the medium of body, consonant. *Tolkappiyar* is well aware of the differences in the nature of the two realities, soul and matter. Analysis of the concepts of soul and matter, as metaphysical principles

found in *Tolkappiyam*, leads one to find that the spirit and matter continuum is essential for meaningful expressions in terms of language and in ordinary existence of the humans on earth.

While discussing on the personhood, it is always important that the dichotomy of soul and body would not serve our purpose. Human being is a holistic personality having equal status and importance given to body and soul. Personality for *Tolkappiyam* insists on the importance of having a sound body. Only a body that is fit can adequately respond to the surroundings and externalize the thoughts and feelings. Such externalization (*meypattu*) being a basic function of a persona, what the body, and looks mean to a persona cannot be underestimated. *Tolkappiyam* shows clearly the significance of the physical aspect of human being. The philosophical tradition of ancient Tamils was pragmatic existential philosophy. *Tolkappiyam* provides us the insight that meaningful existence is possible only with due recognition of spirit and matter. One cannot underestimate and throw away the existence of either of spirit or of the matter. *uyir-mei* combine together to form meaningful words and existence. *Uyir-mei* is not just combination of *uyir* and *mei*, it is *uyir-mei*, having spirit and matter as constitutive of each other. In Tamil tradition human nature is not just body or soul alone, but the right combination of both spirit and matter. Human or worldly nature is both spirited matter and materialized spirit.

1.7 TIRUVALLUVAR: DRAVIDIAN GENIUS

Tiruvalluvar is said to be from the *valluva* community. (There are some scholars who say that he was a Brahmin) His monumental work in Tamil, called *Tirukkural* portrays a Dravidian philosophy of life which is totally different from the Vedic, Sanskrit tradition, especially in its conception of supreme goals of life and in its outlook of life here on earth. For the details of this text we have already dealt in the course on Indian philosophy. Here we would try to present Tiruvalluvar's life in line with the general philosophy of life from the Dalit perspective. The popularity of the *Tirukkural* is limited to Tamil Nadu and southern parts of the subcontinent. The most likely reason for the limitation is that it was written in Tamil and not reflecting the Brahminical ideology, as per the view of some Tamil Dalit thinkers. *Tirukkural* reflects the genius of the Tamils in a remarkable way. It is secular and neutral towards all religions. Hence, *Tirukkural* can be very well accepted as a universal ethical text on the art of living. "*Muppai*" meaning three parts, of which the first deals with *Aram* (virtue or the moral values of life), the second discusses *Porul* (wealth or socio-economic values of life), and the third on *Inbam* (love, depicting the psychological values of life). Therefore, the three books of the *Tirukkural*, respectively, deal with the ideal approaches to virtue, wealth and love, covering all the major aspects of life.

Centrality of *Aram* (Rigtheousness)

In *aratupal*, the main aim is to speak of *aram*, righteousness. The fourth chapter emphasizing on *aram*, gives a key as it were to unlock the treasures of *Tirukkural*. Valluvar believes that *aram* helps one in all ways. To Valluvar, *aram* is omnipresent, is the material, intellectual, domestic, spiritual and moral perfection of the man. He believes in the perfect men who are the embodiments of this *aram*, the standing examples for the world to follow. He also believes in nature's help in the path of righteousness. In his descriptions of the three-fold goal of life, Valluvar does not want to force others to accept his fundamental beliefs. He also may be

presumed to lay down his ideas of the three fold goal of life without reference to God or Nature. This is not to say that he relinquishes these fundamental ideas. Though he is tolerant enough to appreciate other points of view and to lay down the scheme of life as acceptable to all, his inner inspiration cannot be hidden completely; but he explains it in a way suitable for others.

Valluvar is more concerned with the problems of life and ideal solutions of moral choices. He was totally opposed to killing. He is a real supporter of righteousness. Valluvar's main preoccupation was with the inculcation of ethical values; 'the idealization of values geared to conformism, uniformity and stability. Tiruvalluvar has a consciously conceived structure to plan and execute moral life and its enhancement in personal as well as social life. Moral virtues aim at the refinement of the individual. But the refinement of the individual is not an end in itself. It is only a means to an end. So, Tiruvalluvar defines *aram* as that which produces happiness of the society. In other words, *aram* is the ground of moral practice as envisioned by *Tirukkural*.

Meaningfulness of life or good life is not something given as actuality, but an ideal that can be realised only through a continued effort and *aram* as a principle of life would be a sure way of realising that good. Therefore, considering *aram* as the nucleus of the authentic life does not amount to relegating either *porul* or *inbam* to a secondary place. Whether we consider *porul* and *inbam* as indispensable for the pursuit of *aram* or look at them as outward manifestations of a principle inherent in human nature, *aram* does not suffer devaluation nor does its significance get diminished. In the case of *porul*, the establishment is in the large arena of economy and polity and in the case of *inbam* the process of establishment is in the comparatively smaller area of two human persons coming together in love. Therefore, *aram* as a moral principle in life permeates the entire life of a human being both personally and interpersonally and, thus, enables him/her in living an authentic human life on earth. Thus, *aram* itself becomes the fundamental principle of virtuous living.

Upholding Material Affairs

Tirukkural in *Porulpal* (material wealth) deals with the economical and political values of life. This is the largest section of the *Tirukkural* and covers almost all the material aspects of life. As moralist-poet Tiruvalluvar was not a mere impractical visionary unfamiliar to the ways of the world, but had a deep insight into human nature and possessed great practical wisdom. He lays down with characteristic brevity the principles that should govern the conduct of wise and good men in the affairs of the world. Some chapters are particularly addressed to princes and those around them, while others are applicable to all persons engaged in secular affairs. In dealing with nobility of social life, devotion to social causes, qualities of dignity and pride, sublimity, mannerism and sensitivity to shame, he highlights the primacy of farming as a devoted service to society. The concluding chapters expose the harmful nature of futile wealth, the pains of poverty seeking alms, dreadfulness of beggary and the meanness of cowardice which harm human dignity. Therefore, to sum up, the various requirements of a welfare state and the qualities to be cultivated by the rulers, administrators and others are covered exhaustively in the *Porulpal*.

Regulating Family Life

According to *Tirukkural*, a good house holder alone can be a good citizen. A major division of the *Arathuppal* is *Illaraviyal* (family / domestic virtue) consisting of 20 chapters of two hundred couplets all of which present the virtues of both the house holder and the citizen. The Tamil word '*illaram*' literally means "virtue at home" or "virtuous family life." It is a natural state of life for

practising virtue (*aram*). It is meant for fulfilling the social and religious duties. The order of family life transforms the crude self-centred egoism into self-sacrifice and concern for social welfare. The home is the centre of love, compassion and self-sacrifice. It is the centre of fulfilment of virtue (*aram*). The chapters 5 to 24 of *Tirukkural* are grouped as *Illaraviyal*, which present the virtues of the householder and citizen emphasizing or stressing certain noble qualities in one way or other. All the two hundred couplets on domestic virtues explain the primary importance of family and social life, the role of spouses, the wealth of children, kindness of love, words, charity, duty to society, gratitude, hospitality, equity, uprightness, humility, discipline, and forbearance. It also warns against the evils of adultery, envy, covetousness, slander, vanity and idle talk. While taking on *Thuravaraviyal*, ascetic virtue, Valluvar says it is not renouncing the world because it is impossible to get away from the world. The attitude of non-attachement and giving up of the egoistic sense of I, me, mine, and sublimation into dispassion and universal love is what he means by *Thuravarm*. It implies a positive state of mind and a life of purity and virtue. When he speaks of *uzh*, destiny, it is not as commonly interpreted as 'fate' or law of *karma*. His understanding is that human person is the architect of his or her own fortune. Tiruvalluvar does not believe in the overriding influence of fate. He is mainly concerned with the present and this world. To him, how one lives is a matter of supreme importance. Hence, in the *Tirukkural*, he advocates strenuous self-effort as part of one's life irrespective of success or failure.

Extolling Love and Marriage

In *Inbathuppal*, Tiruvalluvar speaks of premarital love (*Kalaviyal*) and marital love (*Karpiyal*). Tiruvalluvar very delicately portrays the blossoming of love between a young man and a woman, their joys of embrace and the depth of their love and the tender emotions of their hearts. The whole of *Kalaviyal* and *Karpiyal* in *Tirukkural* has reference to the indigenous system of marriage with all its premarital norms. '*Kalavu*' and '*Karpu*' are two of the unique concepts developed on the Tamil soil based on a system of marriage in which free love was permitted. The marriage itself was solemnized between two young persons deeply in love with one another and not as between two strangers brought together in wedlock to iron out their temperamental differences later.

The literal meaning of the Tamil word '*kalavu*' is 'theft'. Tiruvalluvar gives a different connotation and meaning to '*kalavu*' in the realm of premarital love. It is generally accepted that 'theft' connotes basically a 'loss' of something without the 'owner' being conscious of it. In the realm of the hearts which are in love, *kalavu* means precisely that the 'lovers' find their hearts being 'stolen'. Hence, *kalavu* connotes the experience of the lovers of 'the stolen heart'. It gives us also the underlying implication of the relationship between the lovers before marriage. The 70 couplets in *kalaviyal* section complement 'romance in love', with the lovers admiring and extolling beauty and charm of each other, revelling in the language of signs, enjoying the joy of intimacy and ecstasy of love. In the process, there is a wailing on the loss of decorum and a longing for the clamour of relatives and society to speed up the process of wedlock.

In the analysis of '*Karpu*' (love in the married state), *Tirukkural* describes in detail the mental experiences of the husband and wife when they have to accept the inevitability of periodic separation in the course of their married life. Considerations of duty may impose even prolonged periods of separation on lovers, but this they must bear with a sense of sacrifice, enduring all

personal hardships. Tiruvalluvar points out how the lovers prove equal to the task by reliving the experiences they shared and by expectantly longing for the time when they will be reunited. Though the strength of their love makes the endurance possible, its inevitability leaves the mark of physical and emotional changes and these are described in the *Tirukkural*, particularly from the point of view of the 'beloved'.

The section on marital love (*Karpiyal*) elaborates the situation after the charm of bridal union in wedlock. When the male goes off on duties and avocations, trade and business to amass wealth for a better life, he leaves the spouse forlorn. The passion of love and pangs of separation manifest in different forms of pain to the mind and body, such as pining in sorrow, wailing in paleness, pallor of loneliness, cursing the eyes, the evening; relating visions of dreams, withering of limbs, conversing and chiding the soul, failing in modesty, signalling symptoms of passion, throbbing and longing for reunion. The concluding chapters on the section of *Karpiyal* converse on the situation when the lovers meet after long separation, expression of resentment and pleasure in the form of feigned sulking and pouting that enhance the pleasure of love. Thus, on the whole, the marital love between the couple is not mere lust or physical pleasure, but an elevating human love of spiritual and ethical grandeur. It is a complete integration of the physical, mental, moral and spiritual aspects of human life. Therefore, *Tirukkural*'s theory of love stands as the highest pedestal of human perfection.

Veedu: Bliss here and now

Life is a journey. It is a journey towards destiny. We human beings dedicate our life in journeying towards our destiny and strive to reach it. Thinkers have various opinions on human destiny and the means to attain it. Tiruvalluvar deals elaborately with *aram*, *porul*, *inbam*. However, he does not explicitly express his thoughts on *veedu*. *Veedu* means liberation. His thought is based on ethics as applicable to all. He gives meaning to the family life by showing how a person leads the life with common good as goal in one's life. Tiruvalluvar's instructions would direct the society and the individual towards holistic development.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

Ancient materialist, Buddhist and Dravidian thinkers have left a great legacy of stressing the this worldly, natural and concrete living against which the Vedic-Brahmanical system developed its own idealistic conception and dominated the entire Indian philosophical discourse.

1.9 KEY WORDS

Uyir-Mei : Vowels and consonants

Aram : Righteousness

Veedu : Bliss here on earth.

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UNIT 2 MEDIEVAL DALIT THINKERS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The unit brings to the attention of the students about few Dalit thinkers and ideologues in the medieval Indian society through Bhakti movements in both South and North India. The line of thought and interpretation of medieval bhakti movement in this unit might be odd, divergent, and / or even controversial, as almost all scholars on these movements present them differently. We try to interpret the bhakti movement as a subaltern, Dalit assertion through religious philosophies. The poetic expression of individual bhakti saints is also seen as Subaltern challenge to ritualism and intellectualism, by emphasising the aspect of love, service and surrender as way to liberation. For a change, the unit looks at not individual thinkers as such but collective thinkers in the mass movement.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Bhakti movements transformed not only the religious but also the social thought and life of the people in India. (Chinnathambi 1994, 8). Medieval bhakti movement is a concrete rising of the indigenous wisdom and a mass movement. The proponents of these are mostly from the so-called lower strata of society. Even though the elements of Sanskritization and brahmanical influence characterised in Bhakti movement we only consider them as hijack of subaltern philosophical and religious rising by the brahmanical forces. In fact one could interpret the medieval bhakti as a collective, assertive and affirmative aspect of indigenous people towards their own identity. It is a cumulative effort of the community of people. The rise of Saivism, Vaishnavism and Saktism expressed in these movements all over the medieval India is only a resurrection of buried traditions of the people. There have been individual champions who are luminaries in Bhakti movements.

Even in the strong polemic attitude towards *sramanic* traditions like Buddhism and Jainism, we see the challenging attitude of the subaltern towards the political and ideological powers that crushed their own traditions. The tendency of leaning towards the Vedic tradition, accepting the Vedas as generic scriptures could be interpreted not as accepting the Brahmanical hegemony but as trying to get a support, though from a 'wrong' ally. Here it is good to think of a proverb, 'out of pan, into the fire.' To escape from the political and ideological hegemony of the Buddhist and Jaina rulers of the South, the saints and thinkers of bhakti movement took the support of another culturally and religiously alien tradition, Vedic culture. The consequences are far more vivid in the history when Brahmanism idealised bhakti and incorporated all these 'little' bhakti traditions into its 'great' Vedic and Vedantic tradition. The concept of cultic worship, service the people and the Divine, surrender, love and devotion are seen as the concrete philosophical contribution of the subalterns through Saiva, Vaishnava and Tantric traditions. In the individual saints or poets we find such an expression of love and devotion, as contrary to hegemonical ritualism and intellectualism.

2.2 MEDIEVAL BHAKTI TRADITION: MASS MOVEMENT

One of the remarkable features of medieval India was the development of the *bhakti* movements. The saints of the *bhakti* movement did not create a new religion or attach themselves to a particular sect or caste. It only strengthened their own bonds, be it religious or social. They did not insist on the study of scriptures. They believed in oneness of God who may be called by any name, Rama, Siva or Krishna or even Allah. They were against caste system and image worship. It was indeed the golden age of revivalism of Indigenous tradition in south India. The shrines visited by these saints and celebrated by them in their hymns became particularly sacred as Kings and Religious leaders regarded them as worthy of special attention. Even though Brahmanical hegemony through bhakti tradition assimilated (or rather swallowed) the indigenous village deities into either Saiva or Vaishna traditions, still bhakti as a mass movement is rightly considered a subaltern movement.

2.3 NECESSITY, EMERGENCE AND IMPACT OF POPULAR APPEAL

Any dry speculative thinking could be hailed as high intellectual product of human community. When philosophical thought have become property of certain group of people who claim to be highly intellectual, they become stumbling block for all to have access to it. The classical period of Indian philosophical system one witnesses such a situation. The ordinary emotions and concerns of the people were not very well addressed. They felt alienated in those discussions. There was a dire need to address their concerns. The Upanisadic teachings were about abstract and speculative concepts, far from the perception and thinking pattern of ordinary people. There arose a necessity to popularize these teachings. Even within Vedic and Vedantic tradition, all the secondary literature, *smṛti*, are written to fulfil this need. The epics, *puranas* are essentially different from the Vedic literatures. They arose not among the priestly classes but among traditional bards called *sutas*. They are martial poetry, concerned not with the praise of deities but of kings and nobles, not connected with the details of sacrifices, but with events like wars, and imbued not with higher philosophical motives, but with the practical purpose of gaining

some reward from the audience before whom they were recited. We do not have them in their original and untampered form. They are added to by different hands at different periods. They are people's literature with common authorship. To the nucleus of each story, many pieces of the indigenous poetry containing legends were connected or unconnected with the life of the epic heroes, of sacred poetry dealing with numerous myths and legends of brahmanical origin. There are large sections devoted to philosophy and ethics, cosmologies and genealogies in the fashion of ancient stories, legends, fables and parables. These additions indicate the great popularity these people's literature has enjoyed at all times. The zealous spirit of compilers to bring together all that could be collected in it is vibrant. These poets, 'are using every means in their power to expound, illustrate, and popularize, what the philosophy of the self, a lofty philosophy of ethical autonomy, with emphasis on the application of these principles to the problems of daily life.'

2.4 COUNTERING SOUTH INDIAN JAINA AND BUDDHIST POLITICAL POWERS

During the Kalabhras in south India Buddhism began to flourish under their royal patronage. Kanci is referred to as a great seat of Buddhist learning during the time of Hiuen Tsang in 7th Cen. CE. In Pallava Country there were one hundred monasteries where 10000 *bikshus* lived, while there were only a small number of Bikshus in the Pandya country. Jainism also had its influence in the Tamil country from very early times. References to Jaina monasteries at Puhar and Madurai support the prevalence of it. Kanci, has been also a seat of Jaina culture from 1st Cen. CE. Till the 7th Cen. CE, Jaina monasteries were very influential. Jainism and Buddhism attracted people by appealing to logic and reason and began to make rapid strides in south. People accepted the teachings of those traditions and respected and welcomed their ideas. The cruelty of slaying the dumb animals in sacrifices was openly condemned, as non-killing was the backbone of the ideals of those religions. In addition there were condemnations of the unnecessary rituals and practices. Regarding the caste system, Buddha differentiated the individuals according to their qualities and not according to their birth. This gave the superiority of religion.

Hostility prevailed between Jainas and Saivas. Preaching against Jainism and Buddhism, counteracting them, the intense emotional devotion to Siva and Vishnu were characteristic of south Indian bhakti movement. Calling for public debates, competing in the performance of miracles and testing the truth of the doctrines by means of ordeals, became the order of the day. The once predominant religions, Buddhism and Jainism, lost their ground. The exponents of bhakti brought about the decline of the Jaina and Buddhist sects in the south. They established the superiority of the Vaishnava and Saiva faiths, mainly through their advocacy of bhakti, emotional surrender of the self to personal God. In 7th cen. Jainism had the royal support of the Pallava king Mahendravarman and Pandya king Arikesari Maravarman and a great art of Tamil Nadu was under the influence of the Jains. To set out to safeguard their religion, the indigenous Saivaites and Vaishnavaites felt the call to revive their tradition. A great wave of religious enthusiasm for Saivism and Vaishnavism attained its peak in the early part of the 7th C. While the early Pallavas and Pandyas patronized Jainism and Buddhism, later Pallavas, Vijayanagara kings and later Cholas did the same either to Saivism or Vaishnavism. Conversion of the kings

along with the people, encouraging the saints and rise of building the huge temples (typical south Indian temple-culture) were seen as the triumph of local traditions.

One cannot be blind to the fact that the same thing turned out to be oppressive system. It is another sad fall out of bhakti movement, when this revivalism was hijacked by hegemonic priestly-political-economic powers. Bhakti movement is interpreted usually by many scholars that it is a reclaiming the Vedic and Vedantic tradition from the popular front. The egalitarian outlook of Buddhism and Jainism gave a blow to caste ridden Hindu society. The anti-Vedic temper along with new vision of social order in these traditions become very attractive. To regain the hierarchical power the priests of Hinduism tried bhakti as a means. The saints emerged from various castes and that portrayed a picture that the bhakti is above discrimination. Though the Alvars, south Indian Vaishnava saints, did not actively preach against the caste system, they disregarded caste distinctions; in fact Tiruppan Alvar belonged to the *pana* caste. South Indian Saivism and Vainavism have always depended for its strength on the support of the masses. Besides this mass revivalism, a strong sanskritization process influenced by bhakti tradition was witnessed in the medieval period. Revivalism of Vedic ideas and structures was in a success. A move to give a Vedic touch to everything including Indian languages, religious traditions and sects, was found during bhakti period. This is also a reason for many scholars to neglect the bhakti movement as indigenous people's uprising and movement. While we do not intend to brush aside this aspect, we try to emphasise on the mass appeal.

Important among the bhakti saints of Karnataka are Madhva and Basaveswara. Basava led a crusade against the caste system and popularized the worship of Siva in Karnataka. His followers were known as lingayats. They do not observe many Hindu practices like *shraddha* and the cremation of the dead. They bury the dead bodies. Lingayatism is a force to reckon with even today.

2.5 BHAKTI SAINTS OF NORTH INDIA

In the north India, the movement arose as a result of the Muslim establishment. Except for the political tyranny of few Sultan and Mugal kings, the egalitarian outlook of Islam and the conception of equality of all the followers were more appealing. *Bhakti* is one of the three ways to attain salvation the two other being *jnana* and *karma*. The saints emphasized the one, the other or the third at different times. The saints eulogized the *bhaktimarga* as it suited the needs of the time. They said there was no necessity to worship images to attain salvation, as the Muslims were iconoclasts and disregarded temples and images of gods. The feature of bhakti movement in North is different from the bhakti of south. The leading reformers in the north rejected image worship, rituals and other ceremonies and positively opposed the caste system. Secondly, they had to contend with Islam; but they did not oppose it. They tried to harmonise the two religions, Hinduism and Islam. Various forms of this conciliation and combination could be seen from the teachings of Kabir and Nanak. Subalterns are very great thinkers and humanist in this sense of adoption, reconciliation North Indian bhakti movement is the witness to it. Guru Nanak's movement that became a religion of Sikhism is a clear witness of subaltern upraising of equality and unit.

Namdeva, a tailor 1270-1350, was a robber-chief in early life. He became an ardent devotee of Vithoba, god of Pandharpur, but later considered Vithoba as no more than a symbol of the supreme soul that pervades the universe. He was opposed to idol worship and he condemned fasts, pilgrimages, sacrificial ceremonies and all external observances.

Ramananda, hailed from the Vaishnava sect, was born at Prayag (Allahabad) and lived during the last decades of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th century. He popularized the bhakti movement in the north. His disciples hailed from different castes, In fact, his twelve disciples including a jat, a barbar, cobbler and a Muslim. Chief among them were Dhanna, Saindas, Ravidas, Kabir. He gave equal status to women. The most famous disciple was Kabir who tried to bring harmony between the Hindus and Muslims. The disciples of Kabir hail from both religions. The sayings of Kabir are collected in a book titled *Bijaka*. Ramananda stressed the unity of god and eradication of the various differences. He condemned caste. On his study of the *sastras* he proved that the observance of caste discriminations was unnecessary. Their devotion to God was devoid of rites and ceremonies. He was thus the harbinger of a rational and coordinated form of religion, and it appealed to the masses in all parts of north.

Kabir of the 15th century was the greatest follower of Ramananda. He tried to harmonize Hinduism with Islam. He thought that Rama was not different from Al Rahim of the Muslims. His emphasis was pre eminently on strict moral conduct. Besides condemning the caste system, idol worship, sanctity of baths in sacred rivers and other formalities, he disapproved the orthodox Muslim practices like adherence to mosques, performance of *sunnat*, and the practices like *Namaz* and *Roza*. In fact, his creed resembled that of the Sufis, for like them he laid stress on ardent love towards the supreme God. In his propagation of sincere love regardless of formalities and in his stress on religious tolerance, Kabir may be said to have worked towards universal religion. He was not dogmatic at all. He condemned narrow creeds and sectarianism.

Vallabha 1479-1531, stressed on the value of detachment from worldly pleasures. He preached devotion to Krishna and urged unconventional love condemning carnal pleasures to appeal to God. Caitanya, was strongly opposed to caste distinctions and ceremonials of the Hindus. But he did not condemn idol worship or pilgrimages.

Nanak 1469-1538, became the founder of Sikhism, harmonized Hinduism and Islam. He had no faith in the caste system or in bathing in sacred rivers. Sikhism and Sufism resembled each other closely. He was a strong advocate of monotheism. According to him God does not belong to any particular people, Muslim or Hindu. Rightly it has been said that Kabir was the spiritual ancestor of Nanak. He urged that the only way of worshipping God is to sing His praises and to meditate on His name. He laid stress also on practical morality. Nobility of character was emphasized. Sincerity and honesty were given a lofty place.

Tukaram (1608-1650) in Maharashtra, was a prominent saint and spiritual poet during the Bakti movement. He denied outrightly caste hierarchy in Hindu religion and attacked rituals present in Hindu Dharma. His public religious discourses used to be mixed with poetry. He preached focussing on everyday behaviour of human persons. For him, true expression of religion was in a person's love for his fellow human beings rather than in ritualistic observance of religious orthodoxy including mechanical study of the scriptures. In his poetic compositions he touched

upon various issues of society, religion and human personality. He worked for the society's enlightenment emphasising community service and musical group worship which is called, *warakari* tradition. (Wikipedia 2011)

2.6 PHILOSOPHY OF POPULAR LITERATURE

The popular Tamil Saiva *Tevaram* and other *Tirumurais*, Vaishava *Divyaprabandam*, are the collection of bhakti hymns of the saints. Singing popular hymns marked by high literacy quality and at times by great philosophical insight were the remarkable feature of bhakti saints. The spiritual exaltation experienced by them as they stood worshipping at the various shrines of Siva or Vishnu is reflected in the hymns. While these hymns satisfied the intellectuals, they also intensely appealed to the masses on account of the emotional outpourings. Devotional hymns had created a new literary genre of lyrical poetry and devotional music. They became also the basic material for modern Saiva Siddhanta and Visistadvaita philosophy. Philosophy as the systematization of the experiences and institutions of the sages and saints was fulfilled here. They moulded the characters and outlook of generations of the people and their culture.

The *Divya Prabandham* is the collective corpus of the passionate hymns of the Alvar mystics (5th-8th centuries A.D.). Nathamuni in the 10th century, retrieved and compiled this *bhakti* treasure. Their works enjoy the status of "*dravida*" or Tamil Veda. The *Divya Prabandham* is in the form of adoration of the deities of 108 temples (*divya desams*) situated in different parts of the country, and employs every form of poetics (*aNi*) and prosody (*chandam*) available in Tamil. The bhakti expressed in these hymns is deeply emotional. The devotion calls for absolute loving surrender to the Lord who, though supreme and transcendent, makes himself accessible to his devotees through his *avatas*. In his tense concern for the world, he descends from time to time in the form of an incarnation, *avatāra*. According to tradition, there have been only nine such incarnations; there is one yet to come. In each case the god descended to earth when the world was in dire danger of being overwhelmed by the ocean of chaos or of perishing from the attacks of evil persons. God is with them. Krishna, as God becomes the chief object of worship among the ordinary folk of India, a divinity of remarkable psychological completeness, standing to his worshippers not only in the relation of father, friend and elder brother, but also of lover and husband and even of son.

Saiva Bhakti

Unlike Visnu, Siva is not generally believed to incarnate himself for the welfare of the world, but he is said to have manifested himself temporarily in many disguises in order to help his devotees or for other worthy purposes. Siva is looked on their deity as a god of love and grace. The literature of Tamil Saivism describes him in very exalted terms and with strong moral emphasis. In the finished form of Tamil Saivism all the capricious and harsh elements of the old Siva have practically disappeared, and the god has become the compassionate father of all things living, who cares for them in his love and justice and defends them from evil.

Saiva *bhakti* propagates *carya*, physical act of service as *Dasa marga* that leads to *saloka*, to be in the abode of God. Bhakti is the basic power of Saiva religion which has a deep root into Dravidian and subaltern people. The sole aim in bhakti is to reach God through Love. God is Love and the soul has to transform itself into Love for complete Union. Ceremonies, rituals,

temples, are but means to establish human in the love of God. God's Form is Love; His attributes and knowledge are Love; His five functions, namely, creation, sustaining, obscuration, destruction and bestowal of grace, are Love. His organs like arms and feet and His ornaments like the crescent moon are also Love. These things are assumed by the Nirmala God, not for His own benefit but for the benefit of humankind. (Sivajnana Siddhiyar, Sutra 1.67)

One of the surest means of attaining God Siva is Bhakti by the practice of love, love to God, love to His devotees and love to his creatures. None of the innumerable ways or religious practices will be of any use if not accompanied with Love. No amount of penance, self-torture or asceticism will of any use if without love. Tirumular in his *Tirumandiram*, 10th Saiva *Tirumurai*, says, "Even if people practice religious austerities to the extent of offering slices of their own flesh as oblation and roast and fry the same in the fire with their bones as fuel, it is impossible to reach our precious Gem, Śiva, except to those whose hearts are mellowed and melt with Love." Appar in his *Tevaram* says, "Even though in million waters he bathes, if for the Lord he bears no love, He appears the fool who water pours, with a pot holes, and shut the lid and thinks the water safe." The quality of Love is such that the lover becomes completely merged in the beloved. He had become transformed into Love itself. *Tirumular* further states, "Love and God are, fools say, not one; Love and God, they know not, are one; Love and God, when men know, are one; As love they merge in God as one."

Four Margas

Saiva bhakti promotes four ways of reaching God, they are known as *dasamarga*, *satputra marga*, *sahamarga* and *sanmarga*, associated with *carya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnana*. These four means lead one to *saloka*, *samipa*, *sarupa*, *sayujya* respectively. The *dasamarga* is service oriented, which expresses the entire labour class of subalterns. Labour itself is a way to attain liberation. Though one can extend this as a slavery interpreted and propagated by later caste hegemony, there is a deep philosophical insight in this. Labour is not regarded as useless and meant for this worldly and despised as low, as in Brahmanical categories. Menial labour and service is great and itself is a means to liberation. *Dasa marga* in Saiva bhakti is described as washing and leaning God's temple, gathering flowers and making garlands of various types for adorning God with, burning lights in temples, and praising God and carrying out the behest of Godly Saints. By these duties the followers of *dasa marga*, attain liberation, which is to be in the world of God. The four paths deal with the physical and mental activities of a devotee who has dedicated his life for the realization of union with God or liberation. Devotion and loving service is the fundamental background on which all these activities are based and it is necessary to vivify all acts of worship.

2.7 BHAKTI AS PEOPLE'S PHILOSOPHY

Personification and anthropomorphism of God

The saints of the bhakti movement tried to create a feeling of personal rapport between the devotee and god. God is a person, not a concept or an abstract reality. God is experienced in the concrete situations. God shares the experience of people. God is seen as any human being. He loves, gets angry, protects, needs a house, has a family, needs rest at night, comes to visit people

in their streets. All of these express the personification of God in terms of human experience which is typical of Dalit religious philosophy. Concept of God is purely anthropomorphic.

In the last analysis, the love of the devotee towards God is like that of a lover towards his beloved where there was no place for any other person. The bhakti movement became an instant success as devotion was preached and practised in the languages of the people. Bhakti saints emphasized that bhakti was the only means to attain salvation. *Prapatti* is quicker means to *moksa*. Bhakti is *patti*, total surrender to the deity, unceasing meditation and devotion to God.

Temple culture

Bhakti movements influenced the emperors from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries and the Colas studded the country with temples for Siva in granite, which are still existing in all their glory, even after the lapse of thousand years. The number of such huge temples has caused foreign critics to remark that 'the Tamils are a race of temple builders.' Having stressed the importance of the *avatara*, the Alvars paved the way for the exaltation of image worship. The temple became not only the centre of social life but also a rich storehouse of Vaishnava iconography

Deification of Saints

The deification for the Alvars and especially woman saint, Andal is an important feature of Vaishnavism and influenced the Vaishnava iconographic development to a great extent. Images of all the Alvars came to be set up in all the Vishnu temples and worship offered to them on special occasions. Andal, in particular, acquired the honoured position of Vishnu's consort and came to be accepted as an incarnation of Bhudevi.

2.8 SAKTISM AND TANTRISM AS PEOPLE'S RELIGION

The worship of Sakti is very ancient in India and very much indigenous. Although the mother goddess seems to have been venerated in the Indus valley civilization, little place is given to goddesses in the Vedic literature. Female deities were worshipped on the popular level from earliest times. She is considered as a consort of Siva. She is known variously as Sakti, Devi, Chandi, Chamunda, Durga, Uma, Amman and Mahamaya. Etymologically, Sakti is the power of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. She is the power of Maya, makes Siva determinate, endowed with the attributes of knowledge, will and action. Sakti as a name used to identify a number of local goddesses. Sakti worship is the deity's power in the form of his consort. This has taken various forms, from simply representing the deity with his consort to singling her out as the chief object of worship. The concept underlying worship of Sakti is that since the eternal Siva is inactive Sakti is active. The creation of the world and the work of grace and liberation are her functions. Hence Sakti becomes more important than Siva himself, who is static and ineffective without his wife. Although erotic practices might well be expected, not all Saktism is erotic. Some forms are highly philosophical. Rites and rituals of a sacramental and magical nature accompanied with diagrams and gestures comprise a wide ranging practice which has not been

sufficiently studied for us to get an overview or a very penetrating understanding. The texts which describe the elaborate rites and theories connected with saktism are called *tantras*.

In *Tantra* the development of psychic powers is sought by special yogic practices, depending upon physiological identifications. There are said to be six cakras, concentrations of psychic power, at different points along the chief vein, *susumna*, of the body which runs up the spinal column. At the base is the serpent power, *kundalini*, which is normally quiescent but can be awakened by yoga. Being aroused the serpent power goes up the great vein, passing through the six *cakras* of power, and unites itself with the great center of psychic energy, *sahasrara*, which is at the top of the vein inside the skull and is generally symbolized as a lotus. The awakened serpent power is supposed to give supernatural knowledge and magical faculties, and many of the claims to yogic and tantric marvels are justified from this dubious physiology. Complete union of the serpent power with the psychic centre in the skull is thought to bring liberation. The union of Sakti and Siva, by means of *kundalini* is the most advanced form of tantric *sadhana* or practice. In *kundalini* yoga, the body is the manifestation of Sakti and the *kundalini* is the most powerful manifestation of Sakti's sexual force. This sexual force is not denied; it is used to activate the *cakras* and bring about union.

2.9 FOLK TRADITIONS: EXPRESSION OF INDIGENOUS WISDOM

As India is rich with plurality of cultures and folklore, folk philosophies should be unearthed, especially in the context of subaltern studies. Generally so-called 'little' traditions are ignored and unfortunately due to the absence of records in writing, the philosophical reflections of folk thinkers were not preserved effectively. The ordinary people express their philosophy not in a written form but through their proverbs, myths, celebrations, rituals, worship, etc. Hence it is an unarticulated philosophy which belongs to this 'little' tradition. Folklore denotes the rituals, worships, beliefs, tales and proverbs of the folk. It is the residue of the antique culture. In certain stories people express that their rights were taken away by others by cheating, conspiracy and that's why they are now made economically poor and socially backward. Since they are subservient and docile, they keep silence. In all folk stories, in beginning there was one community, equality, fraternity, happiness; no division, no suffering, etc. It could be called 'a golden period'. In folk consciousness, there is always a golden period in the past. Seeing the present ('dark age') reality which is full of problems, sufferings, divisions, cheating, inequality and what not, people not only dream about the golden future but also retrospect a golden past.

2.10 TAMIL SIDDHAS' SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION

The siddha movement in the south India, displays a move intense anti ritualistic, even anti establishment attitude, combined with a radical social attitude with an expressed disregard and contempt for the rigid social structure of medieval Indian society. **Against temple worship:** They preached against the temple worship itself to save the people from the exploitation of the priests. The Siddhas denounced all external forms of worship, sacrifices and rituals since they were convinced of the need to realize the supreme God within the heart of man. They spoke against bogus priests with a very drastic attack asking for whom they are performing these *poojas* when God is within. Sivavakkiyar says that neither God nor even the devils would accept the offerings made by the priests. He accuses them of extracting money from the people by

uttering lies. Karuvurar condemns that persons who collectively devise methods for performing rituals do not derive any benefit. **Against Vedas and mantras:** God cannot be realized just by recitation of the Vedas and other holy books. They suggest that only by renouncing desires, God be realized in the mind. Pampatticittar criticises that Vedas, *agamas*, *sastras*, *tantras* and *puranas* are useless. Those who preach them do not know even their real meaning and such preachings are useless. They accuse the Vedas are written for earning the bread of some persons.

On idol worship: Ordinarily idol worship is only symbolic of the personified God. The temple expresses the individual character of the vedic rites. The presiding deity or God dwells in it in human fashion, in an image or symbol. The priest is an intermediary between the god and the devotee. But it would appear that the symbolic nature of idol worship would have been lost sight of and the common masses would have been exploited in the name of God by those in charge of the temples. Sivakkiyar rejects the idea that God will reside in idols made of stone and metals and he says the god will not be found in stones. He rejects the performances of sacrifices by offering oblation and taking baths in tanks and rivers. The bodily impurities are removed, but that of the mind will still persist and by taking bath one becomes a saint. They wanted to save the common masses from the exploitation of the organized but degenerated priest and temple managers. **Revolt against caste:** the caste is vehemently condemned. The cruelties committed by the high caste is strongly condemned. Among human beings there is no difference and laments over the differences observed.

2.11 LET US SUM UP

Bhakti movements transformed not only the religious but also the social thought and life of the people in India. Subalterns are very great thinkers and humanist in this sense of adoption, reconciliation. North Indian bhakti movement is the witness to it. Guru Nanak's movement that became a religion of Sikhism is a clear witness of subaltern upraising of equality and unity.

2.12 KEY WORDS

Dasamarga : Path of service to liberation as promoted in Saiva bhakti movement.

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UNIT 3 MODERN DALIT THINKERS

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to familiarize the students with few Dalit thinkers and ideologues in the 18th and 19th century modern Indian society, like Phule, Iyothee Thass, Narayana Guru, Rettamalai Srinivasan, M.C. Rajah and their contribution to Dalit emancipation.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The socio-cultural climate of 19th Century in India, during the British rule aroused sentiments of nationalism among the elite as well as the common people. The privileged classes and castes launched their struggle against colonial rule for self-determination drawing inspiration from dominant traditional social-cultural resources. The persons influenced by the western philosophies not only wanted to challenge the British rule but also questioned the thought-patterns, customs and manners of the upper classes and castes. They had recourse to the socio-cultural traditions that promoted equality, freedom and dignity of human person. New quest for social reform came from people who had experienced more bitterly the inequalities and injustices of the Indian social system. Unlike the dominant cultural tradition that maintained and supported a hierarchical thinking, the values of equality and fraternity were promoted by alternative cultural traditions of Buddhism, Siddhas and so on. The social thinkers and reformers such as Iyothee Thass, Mahatma Phule, Narayana Guru, reinterpreted the world-views of classical Indian traditions (Buddhism, Advaita etc) for the betterment of the society. Some of them imbibed the spirit of Buddhism and expressed their alternative world views for a society based on justice and righteousness. Narayana Guru interpreted the classical concepts of Advaita in a modern manner as an expression of their own existential aspiration and hope. The theory of non-differentiation was applied to the discriminatory social reality and it was argued that caste differentiation had no basis in reality and that humanity is non-differentiated. This was against

the hierarchical view that differential natural elements dominate the different caste or *varna* groups.

3.2 JYOTIRAO PHULE (1827-1890)

Known as Mahatma Jotiba Phule was an activist, thinker, social reformer, philosopher and a revolutionary. His main interests were on ethics, religion and humanism. He was the pioneer of women's education in Maharashtra. He is one of the most important figures in social reform movement in Maharashtra and is rightly called as the father of Indian social revolution. Phule was born in a Mali family in a caste perceived to be inferior caste by certain sections of the society. From his experience of being insulted by family members of his Brahmin friend he faced the divide created by the caste system. He developed the sense of social justice becoming passionately critical of casteism. He firmly believed in education as of vital importance in addressing social inequalities. His influence and remarkable contribution towards education, eradication of caste, empowerment of women and widow upliftment and removal of untouchability are commendable. He is a well known reformist for his efforts to educate women and Dalits. Phule advocated a perspective from Sudra and Adisudra social location situated in the duty soil where they toil and moil against high class or Brahminical perspective to preserve their domination, promoted by the writers of his time who very much influenced the British Government.

For Phule, freedom is very essential for human beings. "When man is free, he can clearly convey his thoughts to people through writing or speech. But if he does not have freedom, then he is unable to communicate his thoughts, however, beneficial they might be to the others, and consequently, they just evaporate into thin air." A free man will never hesitate to claim his rights which are granted by God to all humans. He rests happy only when he gets his rights back.

He formed a Society of Seekers of Truth, *Satya Shodhak Samaj* with the objective of organising masses to liberate the Dalits and to prevent them from exploitations and atrocities done by the dominating castes. He believed in and propagated education to attain equal rights for peasants and lower castes. The main objective of his Samaj was to prevent people's exploitation by the upper caste like Brahmins. Through the *Samaj* he refused to regard the Vedas as *sacrosanct*. He opposed idolatry and denounced thoroughly caste system. He wanted to create a new social system based on freedom, equality, brotherhood, human dignity, economic justice and value devoid of exploitation.

He wished that the present society overthrow the old, unequal and exploitative social system and the values based on it. He attacked blind faith and the faith in the exploitative and oppressive religious books that come up with dominating people in name of gods. His samaj propounded the spread of rational thinking and rejected the need for a Brahmin priestly class as educational and religious leaders. With help of Shahu Maharaj, the king of Kolhapur the Samaj spread to the remotest parts of Maharashtra. It carried on the work of removal of superstition vigorously.

Phule tore to pieces the misleading myths from the minds of people. He showed people that yielding to fate, astrology and other such rituals and God-men are irrational and absurd.

According to Phule, “God is Creator, Governor, and Protector and who is all Holiness himself.” But Manu and others of his class have distorted the idea of God by attributing the most immoral, inhuman, unjust actions and deeds to the Supreme Being. From this idea of God emerged a social order that dehumanizes the Sudras and the Adisudras. They were exploited in all levels. The Brahmins under the guise of religion controls all spheres of life of Sudras. He tried to remove the factors that breed blind faith. The religious texts and activities are to be tested with rationalism. He characterised blind faith as outwardly religious but in essence politically motivated. He accused them of upholding the teachings of religion and refusing to be rational. At the root of all calamities, maintains Phule is the blind faith in religious books that are said to be created or inspired by God.

3.3 IYOTHEE THASS (1845- 1914)

In the beginning of 20th century, political consciousness in colonial India had two faces; one from the elite-led nationalist movement and another from the subordinated people’s quest for freedom. Both groups posed two kinds of independence. While the former sought freedom from the politically powerful British the latter yearned for it from the socio-cultural and religious domination from within. Subaltern consciousness emerged out of this aspiration for freedom from socio-cultural oppression. They sought freedom from the age long oppression of caste hierarchy. Tamil Buddhist Movement initiated by Iyothee Thass a century ago had a similar objective. Tamil Buddhist Movement has not gained much attention of academicians for several reasons. Many collective attempts of subordinate people and their movements have been sidelined in history. An observation made of such sidelining of subaltern emergence would portray a grim picture that those movements, which challenged the dominant ideology, suffered very much in this regard. They lost their significance before the culturally, religiously and politically ‘strong’ and ‘powerful’ traditions.

Iyothee Thass Pandithar was born on 20th May 1845. His original name was Kathavarayan. After obtaining expertise of Siddha medicine from his guru Iyothee Doss Kaviraja Pandithar he called himself as Iyothee Doss after his guru. He was well-versed in Tamil, Pali, Sanskrit and English languages. He established Advaitanta Sabha at Nilgiris in 1870 and Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1891. A search for a paradigm was found in Thass’ transition from Advaita to Buddhism. We find In advaitananda sabha his objective was for organizing the downtrodden. By 1890, he preferred to revive Tamil Buddhism, giving an identity to subalterns and constructing a collective consciousness; a construction indeed for their empowerment. Unless one, whether Brahmin or non-Brahmin, has to totally reject Brahman, the absolute, there is no total liberation, Human emancipation, Human Concern. Human liberation is possible only by shattering Brahminical cunning plots. This wisdom emerged in the mind of Iyothee Thass a century ago, for the Tamil Siddhas few centuries ago and for the Buddha two thousand five hundred years ago. Rational and Morality based values; ways and means are the only ways to Human liberation.

Thass had preferential concern towards the children of the marginalized and established educational institutions for them at Chennai. On 19th June, 1907 he started a weekly known as “Oru Paisa Thamizhan” and established Sakiya Bouddharkal Sangam that changed the direction of social and political thinking of Tamil society. At a time when there was opposition from several quarters, it was he who established that Buddhism was the religion of the Tamils particularly that of the Depressed classes. He supported his thesis with documentation and interpreted Tamil literatures from this angle. It was his belief that the famous *Tirukkural* is a Buddhist work and its author, an untouchable poet. Essays in *Tamilan* were published establishing Tamil classics like *manimekalai* and ethical works like *tirukkural* and *atticcuvati* as Buddhist works.

Thass’ *Puttaratu Adhivedam* 1912, is his magnum opus, written to explain Buddhism to new converts. The book based on Tamil and Pali works is a standing testimony to his scholarship and erudition. It narrates Buddha’s history and Buddhist religious doctrines. *Buddhist Doctrines – Question and Answers*, 1912, had been published several times. *Indirar Desa charithiram* 1931, narrates a new history that India came to be known as Bharat even before the advent of the Aryans and Buddhism was the religion of the rulers of this country. Avvaiyar and her *Atticcuti*, *konraiventan* and *vetri nanam* are interpreted in a new light. *Vivaka Villakkam* 1926, tells what the reformed marriage procedure was. Denial of rights to widows and unwanted marriage rituals are condemned. *Harichandran Lies* 1931, special *sangai thelivu*, *yathartha Brahmana* and *vesha Brahmana – vetanta* details, *Nandan History Trick* – all these contain Buddha’s preaching in Tamil and pali. He has also written a book on logic in Tamil.

3.4 MODERN REVIVALISM OF BUDDHISM

Iyothee Thass’s meeting with Olcott was a turning point not only in his life but also for the Tamil Dalit movement. In many ways, Thass was a forerunner of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. He led a delegation of prominent Dalits to Olcott and pleaded for his help in reestablishing Tamil Buddhism. With Olcott’s help Thass visited Sri Lanka and got diksha’ from Bikkhu Sumangala Nayake. On his return, he established the Sakya Buddhist Society in Chennai with branches in many places including Karnataka. The contemporary Tamil Dalit movement has rediscovered its Buddhist roots through Thass. Thass launched a weekly called *Tamilan* in 1907 and published it till his demise in 1914. Here, he devoted his energies in critiquing the Swarajya politics of the Congress. Thass was the driving force behind the establishment of several panchama schools in Chennai. He focused on education and the land issue. He interpreted Indian history in an entirely different light in the work *Indirar Desa Sarithiram* (History of India) which can be classified as subaltern history in a true sense.

Choice of Buddhism was to create a counter culture against revivalist tradition of the time. Indeed, it was a paradigm for critiquing the metaphysical frame work of traditional thinking. Buddhism was seen as a critique of oppressed caste hierarchy. In search for a specific identity, the subalterns tried to take recourse to Buddhism. In an era of awareness of liberty, equality and human dignity, Tamil Buddhist movement strove hard to give distinctive identity, to create collective consciousness of their oppressed state and to enable self-esteem. For Ambedkar Buddhism proposes a social reconstruction for alleviating suffering of the oppressed. Embracing Buddhism is not for its fighting nature, but as an ideological revolution, a counter culture and

ethics. Speaking out the suffering and social injustice and raising against them for the liberation of the people. A cultural weapon for dalit struggle for identity. (Muthumohan 2007, 1086).

Tamil Buddhism remained a construct, conceptual framework, like that of 'Hindu' or 'Tamil Saiva' constructs. After Thass, there were no takers for this conceptual framework. Although Tamil Buddhism failed to become a strong mass movement, Thass' contribution is praiseworthy for he had powerfully and forcefully argued for constructing a consciousness for the subalterns. Iyothee Thass made strenuous efforts in constructing a collective consciousness for the subalterns as '*purva* Buddhist' and as original Tamils. Certainly it initiates a lively discussion of consciousness, individual or collective identity, as contested and constructed reality, not as a given or naturally emerging one. Giving the oppressed people a religious identity, he affirms that religion becomes an ideology, socially determined and as culturally constructed phenomenon. Having understood that religious symbols are influential and authoritative, he tried to create new worlds of symbols and their meaning, worldviews and ideologies. The construction of different worldview and religious identity happen in concrete living situations. In subaltern awareness it is the unjust, inhuman and oppressive caste structure that stimulates the aspiration for constructing distinctive identity. Necessity of self-assertion and self-determination is very much felt. For him, Emancipation is not in just socio-political field but in affirmation of the collective self.

Revivalism of Buddhism has played a vital role in emergence of Subaltern consciousness. There was always a connection between these, as Buddhism was taken as an adequate challenging tradition to the caste-ridden tradition. Consciousness of oppression and freedom from oppression was sought by having recourse to reviving Buddhism. As dominance was equated with Vedism, Buddhism was sought after for emancipation. As a counter movement, Buddhism was seen as the pointer, inspirer and action oriented philosophy.

3.5 SUBALTERN RELIGION

While critically analyzing the texts on God and soul, Iyothee Thass came up with a new discourse on God. The term God refers to those men and women, who through their own morally right conduct towards their fellow human beings and society have become immortalized in history and inspiration for subsequent generations. God is an ideal term and invitation to all similarly raise themselves morally to the status of the Divine. Veneration of these gods is neither out of fear nor for favor but a celebratory remembrance to strengthen one's own resolve to become like them. A righteous life taught by Buddha is religion for him. The three fundamental ethical teachings of Buddha are: Don't sin (*Kanma Bhaagai*); Do good (*Artha Bhaagai*); Purify you heart (*Gnana Bhaagai*). These fundamental teachings are further explicated in the four (*Bhedas*): *Aram*, *Porul*, *Inbam*, *Veedu*. Each *Bhaagai* has got eight deeper understandings which are called *upanidam*. Apart from three *Bhaagai*, the fourth one is called *Niruvaana Bhaagai* which emphasizes renunciation. He mentions about *Devanilai*, which means completely removing the evil desires and deeds in oneself, engulfed in virtues of compassion, love and forbearance and loving relationship with all creatures. Those people who have obtained the status of *Devanilai* are called *Devars*. The Buddha was the *Adidevan* and *Adinathan*. Brahminical religion introduced a hierarchical society in the form of caste system. It elevated Brahmins to the

level of gods and divided the society into upper classes and lower classes and treated women as inferior groups.

3.6 RESTORING SUBALTERN IDENTITY AND PERSONHOOD

Thass' move to urge the Government to register the so-called untouchables as 'casteless Dravidians' in the first Census was a conscious attempt to identify oppressed people in Tamil Nadu to be the true descendents of the anti-Brahmin legacy. Necessity of self-assertion and self-determination is very much felt. For him, emancipation is not in just socio-political field but in affirmation of the collective self. His success in insisting on untouchables to register themselves as "casteless Dravidians" instead of identifying themselves as Hindus, was indeed constructing an identity of the subalterns. Iyothee Thass is a case of Subaltern Historiography pointing to the significance of the everydayness in life and society, bringing to surface the concerns of the oppressed and initiating a process of building a new people. Thass reconstructs their identity by asserting that they were Dravida Buddhists, once high in social status but later termed as low castes. (Iyothee Thass, *Iyothethasar Sinthanaigal – Thoughts of Iyothee Thass (Tamil)*, Vol.I, 132) Subaltern history emerged in India with the interest in the close reading of the social text of India. Reading this text one wonders at the failure or non-start of a revolution in Indian society. The reason may be well linked caste-religion duo. The casteist identity was an invention of the elite applied on the subaltern to keep them relegated to the downside of society. (David Ludden 2001, 9.) It is interesting to note that Thass was convinced of a fact that south Indian Dravida Buddhist considered the invading Aryans as aliens and polluting their dwelling places. (Iyothee Thass, Vol.III, 128. Thass gives an account of a custom among the downtrodden, *parayars*, to purify the places polluted by Aryans, with cow dung and water.)

With his commitment to work at the grass roots level, with the real life of people is indeed a project of constructing community, with certain identity and restoring a collective personhood. If classical traditions aimed at individual liberation and the human being constructed in terms of individualism, Iyothee Thass projected liberation for the community, collective consciousness and *moksa* as communitarian. For him, self is never an individual, but rather collective, communitarian, interdependent, mutual correlated and mutually influential. If Classical Indian systems try to envision a liberation from this world, it is justifiable that Thass who tried to envision an utopian world of freedom and liberation tried to articulate that vision in terms of social liberation and emancipation of the oppressed. It is a reassertion of 'parayar self' from a world of bondage and oppression. He pleaded for giving a suitable name for the subalterns that would be unique and identifying them separately as a community. He even went to the extent of saying that Buddhists were the one who gave the term 'Hindu' to non-Buddhists, thus reclaiming the 'parayar self.'

Contribution of Thass

"Consciousness of oppression" is an uneasy, disturbing consciousness. It is an urge, a will to change the so far held normative and structural social relations. As a praxis oriented consciousness of oppression in all socio-political, religious spheres, it is a strong aspiration to challenge and change the strong normative and structural social relations. The rise of consciousness of oppression is "process by which the different individuals and groups become

conscious” The nationalist surge was seen as reassertion of the hierarchical ideology. While Dravidian movements and Tamil Saiva movement raised voice against Brahminism, they did not touch the basic caste structure. But for Thass, shattering the caste structure is basic for giving an identity for the subalterns. To constructing an identity other than Brahmin/non-Brahmin, Thass preferred Buddhism. (Aloysius 1996)

Against the practice of exclusion by the dominant caste groups, he promoted idea of inclusion and pleaded for democratization of traditional religion. He said: “We have heard that God and temples are common for all castes of the world. If that is so, why people of this community following Vaishnava or Saivaitic tradition cannot be allowed to enter Vishnu or Shiv temples. By allowing them, won't they prosper through mutual love and the religions also be strengthened?”

He tried to unmask the distorted meanings of religious beliefs and practices and reinterpreted and reconstructed the caste in the course of self-affirmation and erected a new sacred universe. He highlighted the differences between Sankritic-Shasthraic Brahminism and Sramanism-Buddhism. Iyotha Thass, after epistemologically and historically deconstructed the current status of Dalits, he took ethical steps to regain their lost subjectivity.

Like Thass, P. Lakshmi Narasu, (1860-1934) has contributed to Neo Buddhism, as Engaged Buddhism, in the socio cultural situations. He was a writer and missionary who worked as a Professor of Physics and Chemistry of Madras Christian College. He published a well-known book ‘The essence of Buddhism in 1907, reprinted in 1912 with an introduction by Anagarika Dharmapala. The third printing came out in 1948 with a preface by B.R. Ambedkar himself showing the prestige of the book and the subject. His research and conclusions on Buddha emerged from His teachings on Non-violence and ahimsa. In Buddhist teachings, there is only compassion, morality, equality and causality, but not violence, domination, ritualism, caste, religion or God.

3.7 NARAYANA GURU (1856-1928)

Narayana Guru was a Dalit thinker, social reformer and a sage in the modern period of India. Born as a Ezhava which was a caste considered in between the upper and lowest strata in the caste hierarchy, he and his society suffered social injustice. He revolted against casteism and reformed the society by rejecting caste divisions in the society. He was fondly called as Gurudeva. The Guru's philosophy is exemplified in his mystical writings that are truly interchanging warps and wefts of ethics, logic, aesthetics and metaphysics woven into masterpieces of silken rich poetry. The Guru's literary works are in Malayalam, Sanskrit, Tamil languages, and these works are of a conceptual and aesthetic quality at par with the Upanishads.

He was instrumental in transforming the society in Kerala. He used the Advaita Vedanta as a tool for transforming the society. Guru's philosophy, which is fundamentally of Advaitic and non-dual wisdom in principles, further extended Advaita concepts into practical modes of self-realisation through spiritual education, compassion and vision for peaceful co-existence of the human race, whilst promoting social equality and universal brotherhood. His philosophy of non-violence and ahimsa strongly denounced discrimination in the name of caste or religion, and emphasized focusing on education and private enterprise for the ongoing uplift of the quality of

life. The Guru's philosophy emphasized the consistency between true existence of the "common reality" on Earth and one Divine behind the creation and sustenance of the universe, dismissing any concepts of illusory worlds or any mid-way "city on high".

At the time of its conception, Guru's philosophy was in many respects ahead of its time and focused on a futuristic world order that could be shaped from his philosophical connotations that are underlain with transcendental aesthetics and logic embodied in knowledge and pure reason. He provided the inspiration for a movement of social transformation in Kerala. Born in Ezhava community he was deeply interested in social reform, in the plight of the low castes. Basic philosophy of him is that of Advaita. Using the advaitic philosophy he drew out his plan for reform of religion and society. It is based on his triple principle of One Caste, One Religion and One God for man. All belong to same castes; the unity is due to the fact that all have been created alike; all are of the same species. There is no difference between man and man, there is no reason why they should not eat together and inter-marry.

Oneness of religion is based on the fact that all religions agree in spirit in the most essential teaching. All have a common goal; why should they fight for their faith. Religious divisions are due to the fact that each one tries to see things from his own angle and fail to see the basic unity that is there beyond all these views. The oneness of god is more an expression of advaitic monism than an expression of monotheism. This oneness has to be understood in the light of the general teaching of him. The teaching of Narayana Guru has continued to influence the mentality of people, in Kerala. (Wikipedia 2007)

3.8 RETTAMALAI SRINIVASAN (1860-1945)

Rettamalai Srinivasan was a Dalit activist and freedom fighter. He is one of the pioneers of the Dalit movement in India. He was born in a *Paraiyar* Dalit family. He was a brother-in-law of Iyothee Thass. He established and led the Paraiyar Mahajana Sabha in 1891 which later became the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. He founded a Tamil newspaper called *Paraiyan* in 1893 with great difficulties in the initial days and later faced a case filed against it. In 1930, he represented the Dalits at the Second Round Table Conference in London along with Ambedkar. Along with Ambedkar and M C Rajah, he joined the board of the Servants of Untouchables Society established by Gandhi, from which all three of them withdrew. He established in 1939, with the support of Ambedkar, the Madras Province Scheduled Castes' Federation. His legacy is carried on today with Tamil Nadu political party called Viduthalai Siruthaigal. (Wikipedia 2011).

3.9 M.C. RAJAH (1883-1943)

Rajah was a Dalit politician, social activist born in a poor Dalit family. He was the leader of Dalit in the Justice party from which he quit in 1923 over the party's treatment of Dalit. He allied with Ambedkar and represented the Dalits at London Round Table Conference. He was the secretary of Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and the founder member of the South Indian Liberal Federation. He was the first member of the Dalit community to be elected to the Madras legislative Council in 1920, as Justice Party candidate. In 1922, he passed a resolution

demanding that the terms, *paraiya* and *panchama* be dropped from official usage and instead be substituted with *Adi-Dravida* and *Adi-Andhra*. When reservations for backward classes in government jobs were introduced Rajah led a delegation of Dalits to press their demand for inclusion. Justice Party government did not respond and riots broke out, owing to which he quit the party. He created and became the president of the All India Depressed Castes Association. He made a pact with B.S. Moonje of Indian National Congress to offer a reserved seats to Scheduled Castes, a demand prompted Ambedkar to make an official demand for separate electorates on an all-India basis. (Wikipedia 2011)

3.10 LET US SUM UP

Although subaltern movements have been termed as protest and rebellious ones, they were truly transformatory in nature, at least for the subalterns. They were actually responses to the changing contemporary scenario. Mahatma Phule's inspiration and reform work towards Dalit emancipation are commendable. Using the advaitic philosophy he drew out his plan for reform of religion and society. It is based on his triple principle of one caste, one religion and one God for all. Iyothee Thass being inspired by Buddhism, challenged the dominant brahminical thinking. He critically evaluated the non-brahminical movements and their parochial interests of protecting the interests of backward castes and ignoring the plight of the Untouchable people. He pointed out that in non-brahminical movements there were caste-arrogance, religious-arrogance, knowledge-arrogance and money-arrogance. More than boycotting foreign goods renouncing caste-arrogance was important for him. Rettalmalai Srinivasan and M.C. Rajah worked with and took the ideology and movement of Thass further. Buddhist revival project of Thass for the emancipation of Dalits became a great force and popular with Ambedkar's *Navyayana* – Neo-Buddhism.

3.11 KEY WORDS

Navyayana: Revival of Buddhism for Dalit emancipation

Adi-Dravida: Iyothee Thass brought in the consciousness of Dalits that they were original inhabitants of the land and they were Buddhist, in terms of anti-brahmanism.

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UNIT 4 CONTEMPORARY DALIT PHILOSOPHERS

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To realize the importance of the struggles of three eminent personalities, Ambedkar, Periyar and Kancha Illaiah
- To bring to awareness that Dalit philosophy is a philosophy of struggle
- To admit the fact that liberation of the oppressed can be derived only from praxis oriented philosophy
- To show the relevance of these three philosophers for the contemporary generation
- To remove the prejudice and suspicion associated with these revolutionary personalities
- To present the truth that Dalit philosophy is a type of philosophy which emerges from life situations, especially when the human mind, ego and body goes through trials, tragedies and oppressions from fellow human beings.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The term 'Dalit' is used today to denote those people who are marginalized, oppressed and separated from the society's established welfare. In the context of traditional Hindu society, Dalit status has often been historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure. The Dalits are discriminated against socially, religiously, politically, economically, and above all, ideologically. They are treated as polluted people destined to live in humiliation, pain and constant suffering.

Dalit philosophy is relatively a contemporary branch of philosophy emerging from the philosophizing of the 'wounded psyche'. It arises from the cries, sufferings and struggle of the oppressed. Rational thinkers from the non-brahminical strata of the Indian society are responsible for the evolution of such a philosophy. This philosophy is the war cry of the oppressed raised against the oppressing social structure of the Indian Hindu society.

4.2 DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR: THE LIBERATOR OF THE DALITS

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (14 April 1891 — 06 December 1956) is a great example and a motivational factor to the downtrodden Dalit Indians. Though being born in the then untouchable caste known as the “Mahars”, he achieved amazing heights in the areas of education and politics. Ambedkar was a versatile personality. All through his life he suffered discrimination at the hands of the upper castes. His life was devoted to the fight against *untouchability* and caste system.

The Philosophy of Ambedkar

Ambedkarian philosophy aims at giving life to those who are disowned, at elevating those who are suppressed, and ennobling those who are downtrodden, and granting liberty, equality, and justice to all irrespective of caste, creed, and gender. Ambedkar's focal point is always the oppressed and the depressed. Ambedkar knew that only through proper education one can climb up the social status, especially in an oppressing society in which religion (Hinduism) dictates the how of everything in relation to societal solidarity. He became a hardcore critic of the caste system. It was his firm belief that the caste system in Indian society is the base for all the atrocities being perpetrated on the Dalits in India. He had the view that only education can give self-respect to the wounded psyche of the downtrodden Dalits.

Ambedkar became a recognized leader for the oppressed. He motivated the oppressed to fight for self-elevation. Ambedkar can be counted among few Indians who struggled to restructure Indian society with humanitarian principles. He was an advocate of social and economic freedom. He struggled against the social discrimination and the economic exploitation faced by the oppressed community. Ambedkar felt that the eradication of the caste system will build unity in the segmented Indian society. Ambedkar believed that the untouchables, Dalits, and tribals should be considered as separate from the Hindu fold.

For Ambedkar, religion is an indefinite word with no fixed meaning. He also understood that religion, if it to survive, it must be in consonance with reason. True religion must uphold liberty, equality and fraternity. Further, the function of a true religion is to uplift the individual. He applied the test of justice and the test of social utility to assess the relevance of religion. He counted religion as a social force. He denied the infallibility of religious texts as sources of divine authority. He was much attracted to rationalistic godless religion.

Ambedkar renounced Hinduism because he thought it to be irrelevant for modern human society. Even as early as 1927, he burned the Manusmriti and denounced it as oppressive literature. This shows his courage and determination to fight against injustice even though it is considered to be divinely sanctioned. He was a vehement critic of Brahmanism. For him casteism is Brahmanism incarnate. Brahmanism is the poison which has spoiled Hinduism. To save Hinduism the only way is to kill Brahmanism. Ambedkar viewed the Hindu religion as a multitude of commands and prohibitions. Spiritual principles which are truly universal, applicable to all races, to all countries, to all times, is not to be found in Hinduism exclaims Ambedkar. Hinduism through its various codes tends to deprive the moral life of freedom and spontaneity from its followers. The Varna system of the Hindu religion gave much discourage to Ambedkar. He felt it to be oppressive and inhuman. The Varna system isolates people. Isolation means want of sympathy, want of consideration and the want of fellowship. Ambedkar believed that the caste system is the cause of disunity among Indians which has

led to foreign oppression. The abolition of caste was the only solution Ambedkar gave to achieve swaraj. Ambedkar believed that Hinduism is the root cause of this inhumane caste system. He wanted to promote inter-dining and inter-marriage in order to achieve his goal of caste abolition.

In his magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, he highlights the central issues which concerned him all through his life. He not only promoted the teachings of Buddha but gave new interpretations suitable for the present context. His picture of Buddhism focused more on the social message of Buddha. Ambedkar preferred Buddhism over other religions because he found in Buddhist teachings: *prajna* (understanding against superstition and supernaturalism), *Karuna* (love), and *samata* (equality). Ambedkar chose Buddhism because he felt it to be a religion of liberation especially for the oppressed, down trodden and despised society. He felt that Buddha was satisfied to be the *margadata* (guide). He rejected Christianity chiefly because of the supernaturalism attached to it.

Ambedkar's philosophy of life reflected clearly in the Indian Constitution. According to Ambedkar, the ultimate goal of the Indian Constitution was to render political justice, social justice, and economic justice, equity of status and of opportunity to all, dignity of person, fraternity, unity and integrity of the nation. Ambedkar also thought that the Constitution should not tie down its people to live in a particular type of society. Freedom of choice is a must. The needs of the society must be readily met. The heart of the Indian Constitution is that fundamental rights are given to all citizens. The Constitution upheld the dignity of the human. Its focus is on creating a casteless, classless, homogenous society. The fundamental rights are designed with the chief objective of elimination and abolishing inequalities and prejudices. In this connection special mention may be made of Article 17 of the Constitution which abolishes the practice of untouchability in any form. In a simple and brief way this article abolished the age-old anachronism of Indian society. It seems that Ambedkar was predestinated to uplift the oppressed from the social evils they went through. By being the brain behind the Constitution of India, Ambedkar can be called the 'Manu' of the 20th century. The contrast is that Manu through his code of laws stood for a divided society based on caste and Varna. Ambedkar shines as a supreme social architect who stood for the establishment of integrated liberty, fraternity and justice. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar passed away on 16th December 1956. His demise was a great loss to India at large and particularly to the oppressed classes. They lost their champion. The whole country mourned the death of this great humanist. Ambedkar can be rightly portrayed as the greatest social reformer of modern India. Reform was in his blood. He was a protestant of Hindutva and its cold orthodoxy. He had really understood that rights of the oppressed cannot be gained without struggle. He upheld the view that caste-system killed the public spirit and castes are antinational. Ambedkar was a true patriot, a great visionary, a man of iron heart, great wisdom, huge foresight and hard endurance.

4.3 PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGION

Dr. Ambedkar in his work, 'Philosophy of Hinduism' held, 'for Dalits, Religion is a live-wire'. He pointed out that for Dalits, religion as cultural phenomena is necessary; it is a social necessity to provide a moral unity. "Religion is a social force ... religion stands for a scheme of divine governance. The scheme becomes an ideal for the society to follow. The ideal may

be non-existent in the sense that it is something, which is constructed. However, although non-existent, it is very ... it has full operative force, which is inherent in every ideal”.

In the process of his analysis of Hinduism, one could infer the truth that Ambedkar has developed his own theory of (indigenous) analysis of religion in his attempt to understand the nature of Hinduism and evaluate its social function. By specifically analyzing Hinduism as practiced in the Indian Society Ambedkar contributes to a critique of religion for societal liberation by developing a specific theory of analysis or a philosophy of religion in the contemporary Indian Socio-philosophical tradition. Ambedkar suggests that a ‘philosophy of a religion must be judged, based on its “*Revolution*” because the mother of Philosophy is revolution. He says, “To me the best method to ascertain the criterion by which to judge the philosophy of Religion is to study the Revolutions which religion has undergone. That is the method I propose to adopt’. However, what does he mean by revolution should be clarified here in order to understand Ambedkar’s philosophical analysis of religion. By revolution, he clarifies that it is meant to be both a conceptual or theoretical and social in nature. By social revolution he means alternative changes in structures of society towards an egalitarian social order. If any religion does not pass the test of ‘such revolutions’ both theoretical and social then, it tends to be not positivistic.

Ambedkar talks of two types of revolution: the external and the internal types of revolution. The external revolution refers to the factors responsible for conceptual changes in religion regarding its idea of God, morality and social order. The scientific factors like the Copernicus revolution, Darwin’s ideas of evolution are cited as examples. The internal revolution refers to actual conceptual shifts in the understanding of religion as the result of its response to the challenges or revolt provided by scientific factors. That a true religion should undergo these changes in order to be relevant to contemporary needs of human society, is the point of insistence that Ambedkar brings home here. Ambedkar proceeds to spell out that the other norms or criteria to judge the authenticity of a religion are the concepts Social Utility, Justice and Equality.

Having pointed out the types of norms as to be adopted for a critique of religion, Ambedkar proceeds to adopt the norm of Justice to testify the truth of Hinduism both as religion and a social order. Because, according to him, Justice as a criterion is appropriate to the modern world in which the individual in the society is the end and the moral good of the society does justice to the individual. The norm or the criterion of judging the appropriateness of religion according to Ambedkar should not only be ‘Godly’ but also be earthly. These concepts of Ambedkar very well advocate that he is a lover of religion and not a denier of religion.

Ambedkar is not a denier of the need of religion. For him, religion is necessary; it is a social necessity to provide a moral unity. ‘Religion is a social force ... religion stands for a scheme of divine governance. The scheme becomes an ideal for the society to follow. The ideal may be non-existent in the sense that it is something, which is constructed. However, although non-existent, it is very ... it has full operative force, which is inherent in every ideal. The norm of utility in religion would promote unity of society as a whole. For Ambedkar, religion must progressively be secularized according to the dictates of the conceptual and scientific changes that occur in human society. He says that religious ideal has hold on humankind, irrespective of any early gain. Its power is to be extended to material benefits. Therefore, to ignore religion is to ignore a live-wire’.

According to Ambedkar, the Philosophy of Hinduism is neither based on the notion of revolution nor would allow the possibility of any revolution. Because of its insistence on the infallibility of Vedas as only revealed truth, Hinduism does not contain the possibility of accepting any criticism or theoretical revolution in its thought-pattern. In contrast to Hinduism, the very basis or the philosophical foundation of Buddhism lies on the acceptance of the reality of Change as the ultimate fact of reality. Ambedkar points out, “The Hindu is not prepared to face any inquiry” and the fact that he is not prepared to face any inquiry implies that he is not ready to change from his Vedic belief system. In short, the Hindu way of life is deterministic; it is against the principle of any change or revolution or freedom. He is enslaved to his thought-pattern and its resultant social system called Casteism. For Ambedkar, Religion being a social force, is an institution or an influence, which could either be oppressive or not conducive to the growth of the individual in the society. A religion could also be liberative. Whether a religion is oppressive or liberative is revealed only by a methodological rational analysis only and not by any unconditional acceptance of the dictates of that religion. Ambedkar says, “Religion (as) social institution and like all social influences ... may help or harm a society which is in its grip”

4.4 QUOTES OF AMBEDKAR

1. My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can loose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is battle for freedom. It is the battle of reclamation of human personality.
2. Freedom of mind is the real freedom. A person whose mind is not free though he may not be in chains, is a slave, not a free man. One whose mind is not free, though he may not be in prison, is a prisoner and not a free man. One whose mind is not free though alive, is no better than dead. Freedom of mind is the proof of one's existence.
3. Caste cannot be abolished by inter caste dinners or stray instances of inter caste marriages. Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease. We practice casteism and we observe Untouchability because we are enjoined to do so by the Hindu religion. A bitter thing cannot be made sweet. The taste of anything can be changed. But poison cannot be changed into nectar.
4. I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved.
5. So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by the law is of no avail to you.
6. The basis of my politics lies in the proposition that the Untouchables are not a sub-division or sub-section of Hindus, and that they are a separate and distinct element in the national life of India.
7. Cultivation of mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence.

8. The sovereignty of scriptures of all religions must come to an end if we want to have a united integrated modern India
9. What are we having this liberty for? We are having this liberty in order to reform our social system, which is full of inequality, discrimination and other things, which conflict with our fundamental rights.
10. A people and their religion must be judged by social standards based on social ethics. No other standard would have any meaning if religion is held to be necessary good for the well-being of the people.

4.5 E. V. R. PERIYAR: THE TAMIL RATIONALIST

E. V. Ramasamy (1879-1973) is popularly known as Periyar (great soul). Periyar was a rationalist par excellence. He stood against all exploits made in the name of religion. Periyar exposed the false religiosity of the Brahmins. Periyar said, "The Brahmins are making you fools in the name of God. They make you have faith in superstitions. They lead a very comfortable life while condemning you as untouchable. They bargain with you to offer prayers to God on your behalf. I strongly condemn this brokerage business and warn you not to believe such Brahmins anymore." As a polemic against Brahminism Periyar developed atheism. He boldly asserted, "There is no god. There is no god at all. He who created god is a fool. He who propagates god is a rogue. He who worships god is a barbarian." He is rightly called as the father of Dravidian rationalism.

Periyar had the habit of questioning the mythologies and superstitious beliefs from a relatively young age. Periyar even from his early days mixed with children of other castes. He also from childhood began abhorring castes and questioning religious discriminations, superstitious beliefs and rituals and spoke of the equality of the people. Rationalism according to Periyar was, "the critical analysis of all things pertaining to the functioning of the human mind and not take anything for granted. Rationalism is not just atheism but the questioning of assumptions and certainties that had been handed down to us from ages past."

Later in his political career Periyar adopted methods like agitation, opposition and criticism to create awareness among the masses. He also started journals in Tamil: *Kudiarasu* (People's government), *Puratchi* (Revolt), *Pakutharivu* (Discernment), and *Viduthalai* (Liberty). Periyar from this time started to wear black shirt to symbolically announce the degraded situation of the Dravidians. Periyar stressed that the Dravidians are in a, "compelling need to preserve the self-respect of their race, language, and culture which had been degraded by the brahminical dominance through their caste-system and superstitions of the Hindu religion." The Self-Respect Movement initiated by Periyar stood against "Brahmin supremacy and domination of certain castes in the name of religion... It demanded the abandonment of caste bigotry and intellectual arrogance". It was a rationalist movement launched, "to liberate people from theological thinking and to secure for all people equality in life irrespective of sex and status." The entire agenda of the Self-Respect Movement rested on five pillars: "(1) No God, (2) No Religion, (3) No Gandhi, (4) No Congress, and (5) No Brahmins." When Periyar held the first Self-Respect Provincial

Conference at Chengalpet, several resolutions such as, “eradication of untouchability, encouraging of inter-caste marriages, boycott of *purohits* (priests), dropping of caste suffixes to personal names, ensuring equality to women with property rights, widow remarriage, etc, were passed.” Periyar’s Self-respect Movement was without doubt a barricade for the Hindutva ideologies and a barrier for the vested interest of the Brahmins. The downtrodden were highly guided and enlightened by the various speeches Periyar and his associates delivered. In south India, we can say that Periyar literally brought self-awareness and self-respect among the then subjugated masses. He taught self-esteem and helped millions to come out of their inferiority complex and slave mentalities infused for centuries by the Brahmin overlords.

4.6 CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

In the eyes of the general public, Periyar is seen as an avowed atheist. Though Periyar was an atheist, promoting atheism was not his principal task. Periyar’s chief agenda was to democratize the Dravidian society. When he saw that Brahminism was the chief opposing force which hindered him to achieve his goal, Periyar turned against Brahminism by using atheism and rationalism as his two cardinal weapons. Periyar was motivated by a reconstructive vision. He wanted to rouse the Dravidian society from its dogmatic slumber and cleanse their minds the incredulity perpetuated by Brahminism. Periyar was much critical of the notion of God. He says, “of all the foolish notions which ruined the human race on earth, it is the thought of god that is of foremost significance. Periyar was too bold for his day when he declared that ‘god’ is a myth. For the followers of Periyar, to believe in God is, “to believe in irrational beings who exercise autocratic powers over the destiny of man and the world of nature. Periyar feels that the concept of god is in itself humanity’s projection of its own desired self-perfection. God is seen as perfect or privileged ‘HUMAN’. So humans see their god in anthropomorphic expressions. The god of a particular people reflects their particular characteristics.

Anita Diehl a researcher on ‘Periyar’s thoughts’ has analyzed many anti-religious sayings of Periyar. She has said that, “the religion Periyar repudiates is the religion which according to him, upholds and gives sanction to religious, social, and economic injustice.” Periyar’s objective in promoting atheism was not to make a anti-god society. Periyar aimed more on the, “reformation of religion from its superstitious and irrational divine elements. The society in which he lived makes it clear why Periyar did not accept God. We can say “if he accepted God, he had to accept Hindu religion. If he accepted Hindu religion, he had to naturally accept the tie, i.e. *Varnasrama Dharma*, the high and low birth etc. So as a rationalist, Periyar was not prepared to compromise even a bit with the God or Godhead.”

4.7 QUOTES OF PERIYAR

1. If god is the root cause for our degradations destroy that god. If it is religion destroy it. If it is Manu Darma, Gita, or any other Mythology (Purana), burn them to ashes. If it is temple, tank, or festival, boycott them. Finally if it is our politics, come forward to declare it openly.
2. Our country would be considered to have gained independence only when the villagers are completely rid of god, religion, castes, and blind beliefs.

3. If we can divert the wealth of the temples and the income accruing to the temples, to start new industries there will be no beggar, no uneducated man, and no man with a low status. There will be a socialist society with perfect equality.
4. Wisdom lies in thinking. The spear-head of thinking is rationalism.
5. Devotion is nothing but one's private asset. But morality is a public asset. If there is no devotion nothing is lost. But if there is no morality everything is lost.
6. It is the duty and responsibility of a rationalist to think freely using intellectual faculty, without any attachments to the terms of 'country,' 'language', 'god','religion', 'caste' etc., but attached to the humanity, before he/she engages in any activity.
7. I am a plain person. I have merely spoken out my mind. I do not say you should believe what I have said because it alone is certain. Accept such ideas as can be accepted, with the help of your reason, after a sound enquiry. Reject the rest.
8. Everyone has the right to refute any opinion. But no one has the right to prevent its expression.
9. The very word, 'caste', 'Jathi', is from Sanskrit. In Tamil there is no word to describe caste. It is customary in Tamil, to ask for one's 'sect', or 'class'. Birth is not conditioned by caste distinctions and caste marks. There cannot be any caste among mankind. To speak of 'caste', differences among us who are of the same country, is sheer mischief.
10. He, who does not care for dignity, is no better than to a prostitute, however highly educated he is. His education will only endanger those that care for dignity.

4.8 KANSHI RAM (1934-2006): DALIT POLITICAL ICON

He was born in Punjab with Dalit Raidasia Sikh background. His parents were Bishan Kaur and Hari Singh. He completed his Bachelor's degree in science. He joined the Defence Research and Development Organization. During his career in that organization he joined the agitation by Scheduled Caste Employees of Government of India. In 1984, he founded a political party called Bahujan Samaj Part (BSP) as a political party with the stated goal of serving the traditionally lower castes and those who were considered as untouchables. His political vision of empowering the Dalit had got realized under the leadership of Mayawati who became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Kanshiram himself was elected as Member of Parliament. As an author Kanshiram wrote two books, namely, *An Era of the Stooges (Chamcha Age)* and *New Hope*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanshi_Ram/ accessed on 8th Feb, 2011.)

4.9 KANCHAI LAIAH: SOCIO-POLITICAL CRITIC

Kancha Ilaiah (1952-) is an Indian activist and passionate writer. He often writes related to contemporary Indian society, religious fundamentalism, Dalitbahujan ideology and condition. He is a very famous Indian political philosopher with much controversies attached to him. He is counted as a hardcore critic against the Hindutva movement. He advocates the "Dalitization" of Indian culture. Ilaiah is one of the key figures in the international movement for Dalit emancipation from caste oppression - often described as a 'hidden apartheid', due to the caste segregation throughout Indian society.

Kancha Ilaiah is a powerful writer, teacher, social activist and a visionary for the Dalit bahujans in Contemporary India. He is avowed critique of Hindutva, Brahmanical power structures, Spiritual fascism. He is a great motivating factor today in the ideological movement against caste system that perpetuated oppression in this country. His polemic writings have great impact on anti-Hindu sentiments. Along with severe criticism on Brahmanical hegemony, he goes deeper into the Dalit life-world and brings out ideological layers embedded in Dalit civil society. His recent work, *The Post-Hindu India*, brings out the Dalit intellectual, cultural and communitarian ethics, engineering and spirituality. Being born in a Kuruma Golla caste which is scheduled as Other Backward Caste, OBC, in Andhra Pradesh, he earned his doctorate degree in political science based on his thesis on Gautama's political philosophy. His famous works are *Why I am not a Hindu – A Critique of Hinduutva from a Dalit-Bahujan Perspective*, *God as Political Philosopher: Buddha's Challenge to Brahminism*, *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* and *The Post-Hindu India*. (Wikipedia 2010)

In his writings, especially in *Why I am not a Hindu* he emphatically proposes Dalitization of Indian culture. Dalit philosophy is productive oriented economy and culture in contrast to 'leisure' culture and ideological frame work of brahmanical philosophy. This he believes would pose a radical change in ideological shift in societal thinking. It would enable India to become a more prosperous and egalitarian society. He internalizes the issue of Dalits and is critical of existing untouchability. His critique of *Namaste* in Hindu practice of welcoming a person is an indicator of social inequality persisting still in India. By folding the hands to greet someone it remains a powerful symbolic statement of expressing that one recognizes the other but does not touch the other, since one is not sure of the caste of the other. (Wikipedia 2010)

In his *Buffalo Nationalism*, he strongly advocates the Dalitization of Indian society which would undo the spiritual fascism. He recommends the positive values of the buffalo as productive animal epitomizing the qualities of Dalit-Bahujans. The tackles the issues of right to conversion, role of OBCs providing muscle power to the Hindutva, spread of English language and education among all, reservation quotas in education and employment, globalization and gender. His writings possess intellectual rigour as they present his vision of a more just society.

One of the reasons for lack of concerted efforts on part of the Dalits to build a casteless society is lack of credible leaders who could lead them to liberation and freedom. By and large, they are reduced to be the sheep without a shepherd. Not to say that there are no leaders among Dalits in history but mostly they are unsung heroes. In general, leadership is defined from the dominant perspectives in history. Leadership is associated with the qualities like domination, power, control, intellect, riches or success. But from Dalit perspectives, leadership has to be constructed through one's contribution for the protection and welfare of the society at large. This is possible only by placing oneself with the people suffering humiliation and asserting themselves for achieving the human dignity. It enables the leader to genuinely to journey with his people with a sense of belonging. What matters here is not the power to dominate but to have the credible solidarity with the people whom s/he seeks to accompany in their journey towards emancipation for all.

4.10 QUOTES OF KANCHHA ILAIAH

1. Hinduism is a religion of violence. All Hindu gods killed their enemies and became heroic images. This is the only religion in the world where the killer becomes god. Whom did they kill? From Brahma to Krishna, those who were killed were Dalitbahujans. Now these images and the stories and narratives and everything is out there in the civil society. Now, because of this, the consciousness of worshipping the killer or worshipping violence did not give any space for human rights. So my question is the human rights discourse must start with an anti-warrior position.
2. I am bound to take up critical writing because, unless there is critical writing, social science does not mean anything.
3. If you go on saying that India is getting Dalitised, Brahmanism will die a natural death.
4. Dalitisation is historically a productive, creative and constructive process because it is rooted in the dignity of labour.
5. Among the Dalit-Bahujans, women have an important role within the family and the caste. They set the moral norms themselves, through interaction with the productive process and in the process of struggle with nature.
6. Dalit literature has the power to change the Indian social structure, but Indian society is yet to recognize that power.
7. Once violence crosses the boundary of self-defence and is used to “punish” others for perceived crimes, it becomes terrorism.

4.11 LET US SUM UP

The Dalit discourse on oppression, dehumanization and discrimination from the Hindu socio-religious-political powers has not only exposed the ugly face of Indian society, it has also made the contemporary Dalit thinkers like Ambedkar, Periyar and Kancha Ilaiah and many others, to construct an ideologue for people’s emancipation. Their contribution is valuable in working towards the vision of equality, liberty and fraternity.

4.12 KEY WORDS

Dalitization: An emancipatory project proposed by Kancha Ilaiah towards equal society where the high ideals of Dalit civil society ensure all peace and prosperity.

Pakutarivu: Rationalism of Periyar where intellectual discernment takes place, rejecting blind superstitious beliefs propagated by cunning Brahmins.

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