

Broadbasing Process in India and Dalits

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Broadbasing is a process through which an increasing number of social groups enter the mainstream of social, political and economic activities and progressively derive the same advantages from the society as the groups already in the mainstream. Broadbasing occurs alongside and often in response to the challenge of the opposite process of marginalisation, the two processes operating at the expense of each other. Has the process of marginalisation, with the base of the power structure becoming narrower and society consequently less democratically and intensely polarised, a process which was dominant under colonial rule given way to a broadbasing process in the 50 years after independence? This paper takes a serious and discursive look at the operation of the two processes, in Indian society, focusing on the changing social, political and economic status of dalits over the period.

FOR a proper understanding of social change, broadbasing needs to be recognised as a process in its own right. Broadbasing is a process by which more and more social groups that were formerly deprived or marginalised enter the mainstream of social, political and economic life to derive the same advantages as the groups already in the mainstream. It also means that the social basis of the power structure widens, in the process becoming more and more inclusive rather than exclusive. Since broadbasing is defined here in this particular sense, the term 'development' is not used as its synonym since the latter is a too general and omnibus a term to convey the specific meaning intended. Evidently, broadbasing and development would go in the same direction. Broadbasing occurs alongside and often in response to the challenge of the opposite process of marginalisation. The two processes operate at the expense of each other. Broadbasing operates to widen the power base, with the exploited people at the periphery or margin becoming less numerous. Society thus becomes less polarised and more democratic in the bargain. In other words, marginalisation is reversed if not ended altogether. In such a case, the broadbasing process can be said to be the dominating feature of social change. If on the other hand, social, political and economic forces so operate that marginalisation is dominant, the power structure gets narrower and society becomes less democratic and intensely polarised. The most important question for a student of social change is to see which of the two scenarios prevails in the society concerned at any point of time.

This paper is an attempt to answer such a question. While in pre-independence India, marginalisation had certainly prevailed over broadbasing, has the picture changed during the 50 years of independence? This question is raised mainly with reference to dalits. They being the most marginalised section of society, the real test of the broadbasing process occurring is to see whether dalits enter the mainstream with equal rights. In

the process, the paper also intends to conceptualise, describe and illustrate the operation of the two processes in Indian society, incidentally distinguishing broadbasing from other benevolent social processes. While the operation of both processes is kept in view, the emphasis is more on broadbasing since it has been relatively ignored compared to the attention given to marginalisation. Moreover, since dalits have been marginalised through centuries of oppression, the pertinent question is whether their marginalisation is being reversed now. If it is, it should be resulting in greater broadbasing and democratisation of the Indian society. The word 'dalit', it should normally refer to all oppressed classes including not only scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs), but also the really backward among 'other backward castes' (OBCs). However, there is general agreement about the fact that the SCs and STs form the hard core of dalits who face more oppression and social indignities than the OBCs. The position of the latter was considered to be above that of SCs and STs, in terms of traditional caste hierarchy. Our main concern in this paper, therefore, is with scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

The analysis of the broadbasing and marginalisation processes is attempted here in a holistic perspective, in the sense that unless otherwise stated, the two processes are taken to be operating in society inclusive of polity and economy too. Their operation in the three spheres need not always overlap and where their coverage is recognised to be distinct in the economy as against the society or the polity, such differences would be made explicit.

It is useful to distinguish between broadbasing on the one hand and similar processes like social mobility, 'trickle-down', empowerment, integration and democratisation. Social mobility is an important means by which broadbasing occurs but is not identical with broadbasing itself. Social mobility may also at times fall short of broadbasing. For example, if a dalit agricul-

tural labourer moves to a city and becomes an industrial worker, social mobility is involved in the process. If many dalit agricultural labourers do so, it is certainly a significant step towards broadbasing. But if only a very few of them are involved in this process, it means social mobility for only those involved, but without significant accomplishment towards broadbasing involving dalits as a whole. Social mobility is often concerned with individuals or families and sometimes with individual communities, whereas broadbasing refers to the society as a whole and its power structure. Moreover, to the extent that the shifting of livelihood from one context to another takes place without any significant change of the group's relationship with the others, it falls short of broadbasing. If the upward social mobility of a community is accompanied with the downgrading or marginalisation of another community, broadbasing may not occur unless the community experiencing upward mobility is numerically much stronger than the other.

The 'trickle-down' process has a narrower connotation for similar reasons. It means that as a result of macro processes such as economic growth, certain benefits may accrue to the downtrodden who may be a little better off than before. But it may not involve reduction in differences between those who possess power – social, economic and political – and others who are deprived. 'Trickle down' does not suggest empowerment and achievement of equity.

Though broadbasing involves empowerment, it is useful to distinguish between the two terms. Empowerment of the hitherto deprived is the means by which broadbasing is achieved. Empowerment can take place in different contexts. In a revolutionary process, empowerment of the hitherto oppressed can be expected to lead to the destruction of the power structure itself. In an accommodative process on the other hand, empowerment leads to the widening of the power structure which will begin to include more and more of the hitherto

deprived. Broadbasing is an accommodative process in this narrow sense and not a revolutionary process. In fact, broadbasing may slow down or even prevent a revolutionary process.

However, I hasten to add that broadbasing is not an automatic or preordained process and certainly not a result of the 'charity' of the powerful. It occurs as a result of conscious efforts on the part of deprived social groups and their visionary peers to improve their status. It may be a slow process, but not a smooth one and has to overcome resistance at every step. It involves relentless struggles to change the existing social order, and in this context it is a revolutionary process [for a documentation of these struggles, see Rao 1978; Oommen 1990; Omvedt 1994; Zelliott 1996]. It is an accommodative process only in the restricted sense that the powerbase of society is widened without necessarily displacing those already in the powerbase. It compels the powerful to share their power more equitably.

Broadbasing is different from integration. Families of the deprived castes/classes who join the mainstream of society may retain their separate social and cultural identities and may not become one integrated mass of homogeneous people. To the extent that integration indicates inclusion in the power base of the society and sharing benefits and functions on an equitable basis, broadbasing can be said to be involving integration. The term 'integration' is also used as indicating incorporation into a system of inter-relationship. In this sense also, it differs from broadbasing. The ex-untouchables were integrated into the rural Hindu society, with certain duties clearly earmarked for them, whereby they were very much a part of the rural society and economy. Yet, they were not a part of the rural power structure and their 'integration' could not amount to broadbasing. Thus the term 'integration' is used with different connotation in different contexts, and does not exactly and unequivocally convey broadbasing.

The connotations of broad basing and democratisation come quite close to each other, but they are not identical. Though it can be an end in itself, democratisation can be taken also as a means of achieving and maintaining broadbasing. Moreover, democratisation is used more with reference to polity and to a lesser extent the society. But its connotation with reference to the economy is not always clear. Broadbasing, strictly speaking, applies to all the three spheres. It means not only the sharing of political power with the hitherto deprived and the end of social indignities heaped on them, but also the sharing of economic power and prosperity. In practice, there may be lags in the operation of broadbasing between the three spheres.

I Broadbasing Process in the Past

An important characteristic of Indian society is that it was never neatly bipolar. Though the dominant elite and the most deprived were always identifiable, there was also a vast mass of people between them who enjoyed some independent status whose support was valued by the elite. Though brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas clearly constituted the elite, others corresponding to today's OBCs placed in between the elite and the dalits were an important segment of society. They were a heterogeneous class, some of whom had control over landed property while others working as labourers. In a complex society like this, both broadbasing and marginalisation could be in operation. Peasant castes who were called upon to join the armies in support of the kings or the colonial regime could claim and even attain a higher rank in the social hierarchy. Some of them even established new kingdoms and started new royal dynasties. This upgradation of peasant castes was not necessarily a zero-sum game, and must have resulted in the expansion of the power base of society. This process was not confined only to those who had martial talent; some must have travelled to other lands taking up trade and claiming themselves to be shreshthis or vaishyas. Even the entry to the class of the learned was not entirely closed as is generally believed. The most celebrated among the Sanskrit writers – Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa – were not brahmins but came from the most deprived classes. Similarly, Satyakama Jabaala, an

eminent philosopher who wrote *Aranyakas* in Sanskrit, came from a low stratum of the society. It is clear that Sanskrit was not an exclusive domain of brahmins. Those persons who showed talents in philosophy and literature were honoured members of the class of the learned and were treated as brahmins. How could such eminent examples like Kalidasa emerge unless there was some openness of entry for the lower castes in the world of learning?

But there are also examples like Ekalavya who was denied the education he craved for and was compelled to cut off his thumb for having learnt archery though not a kshatriya. Evidently, ancient Hindu society is not amenable to easy generalisations. It was not a static society and 'religion' itself had been changing. Manu's doctrines were written at the most decadent phase of Hinduism, but his work never had the same stature in Hinduism as the *Upanishads* which were written in an age of free inquiry by all those who were interested in philosophy irrespective of class or caste. Marginalisation dominated broadbasing during the decadent phase of Hinduism, when society became rigid determining status by birth rather than by talent. Notions of purity and pollution constituted religiosity, pushing the philosophy of *Upanishads* into a distant corner. Society became so hierarchical and stratified, that it also became vulnerable to attacks by external forces. The defeat of Hindu kings with larger armies at the hands of Muslim invaders with much smaller armies would not have occurred on such a large scale in the country but for the alienation of the mass of Hindus from

TABLE 1: POPULATION OF SCs AND STs IN INDIA, THEIR LITERACY AND URBANISATION AS COMPARED TO OTHER POPULATION

	SCs	STs	Others	All Groups
1961				
Population in million	64.4	30.1	344.7	439.2
(1) as per cent to All Groups	14.7	6.8	78.5	100.0
Literacy rate (per cent)	7.5	5.1	28.8	24.0
Proportion (per cent) of urban population	10.7	2.6	20.7	18.0
1971				
Population in million	80.0	38.0	429.9	547.9
(1) as per cent to All Groups	14.6	6.9	78.5	100.0
Literacy rate (per cent)	14.7	11.3	33.8	29.5
Proportion (per cent) of urban population	11.9	3.4	22.8	20.0
1981				
Population in million	104.8	51.6	508.9	665.3
(1) as per cent to All Groups	15.7	7.8	76.5	100.0
Literacy rate (per cent)	21.4	16.4	41.3	36.2
Proportion (per cent) of urban population	16.0	6.2	27.1	23.7
1991				
Population in million	138.2	67.8	640.3	846.3
(1) as per cent to All Groups	16.3	8.0	75.7	100.0
Literacy rate (per cent)	37.4	29.6	57.7	52.2
Proportion (per cent) of urban population	18.7	7.4	29.2	25.7

Note: Literacy rates are with respect to all population in 1961, 1971 and 1981, and with respect to only the population excluding children up to six years of age in 1991.

Source: *Census of India Reports*, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991.



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the power base and the stratification of the society.¹

Yet, Hindu society did not remain static after the days of Ekalavya. Gautham Buddha was probably the first to criticise the caste system and reject the scriptures that sanctified it. After a long gap, Hinduism underwent many upheavals towards broadbasing society, thanks to the Bhakti movement. The philosophy of this movement was that any person however poor, irrespective of caste, could realise god and attain bliss through simple devotion to god. The Bhakti saints preached their philosophy in people's own local languages, rejecting Sanskrit. The roots of Bhakti philosophy go back to pre-decadent Hinduism, expressed eloquently in Narada's *Bhaktisutras*, *Ramayana* (illustrated through characters like Hanuman and Shabari) and the *Bhagavad Geeta*. The *Geeta* has a separate chapter on Bhakti Marg, a distinct path in its own right for spiritual attainment. Nevertheless, rituals and rules of purity and pollution gained dominance later, relegating all the paths of spiritual attainment mentioned in the *Geeta* to the background. It is for a historian to say what revived the Bhakti movement again, adding a distinct social flavour of anti-casteism, anti-ritualism, compassion for the poor and equality of human beings. It is possible that the entry of Islam into India and its egalitarian philosophy could have been an indirect influence. However, even before Islam could have had an impact, Ramanuja (11th-12th century) in the deep south not only revived the Bhakti philosophy but also took into his fold non-brahmins and even the untouchables. He looked upon caste distinctions with contempt.²

Approximately around the same time (12th century), a socially aware and explicitly anti-caste Bhakti movement was started by Basaveshwara, in south India, also before the impact of Islam there. He called upon people to respect manual labour and end casteism and inequality in society. He took into his fold devotees of low castes including untouchables and even inspired a marriage between the daughter of his brahmin disciple with the son of a disciple of untouchable caste. Similarly, before the influence of Islam was felt in Maharashtra, Sant Jnaneshwar (13th century) interpreted *Bhagavad Geeta* for common people in Marathi to say that for the supreme god, caste differences did not matter and all people were the same.³ A dalit saint Chokhamela (13th-14th century), and Eknath (16th century) were more explicit in denouncing caste differences. Islam had made its presence felt in Maharashtra by the time of Eknath. However, the spread of Bhakti movement almost all over the country and its use as an instrument for social uplift of the lower castes was largely a later, if not entirely, a post-Islamic phenomenon in most

parts of India and this was no accident. The revival of Bhakti and egalitarianism – whether influenced by Islam or not – enabled Hinduism not only to survive but even thrive. Hinduism ceased to be mere brahmanism thanks to the Bhakti movement.

The most interesting aspect of the Bhakti movement was that it enveloped all the castes, including the lower castes and even the untouchables. Zelliott (1966:xiii) has listed several bhakti saint-poets from among the untouchables – Nandanar, Tiruppan Alvar, Ravidas, Chokhamela, Mahar Gopal Baba, and a chambhar woman saint called 'Santbai'. There were several other saints like Gora Kumbhara and Kanakadas from the so-called lower castes, though not untouchables. Some of them could even upgrade the status of their castes. The most prominent among such examples is the movement in the early part of the 20th century by Narayana Guru Swamy in Kerala who transformed the formerly untouchable caste of Izhavas into an honoured part of caste Hindu society [Pulapilly 1976; Rao 1978:197-98].

'Sanskritisation' was another route to broadbasing Indian society. This is a concept which M N Srinivas introduced into Indian Sociology as early as in 1952 [see his *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs*, and *Social Change in Modern India* (1966), 1977]. It is a 'process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice born' caste' [Srinivas 1977:6]. It can also include the way in which the whole caste or community is reorganised. A prominent example is the way some of these communities established 'mathas' or monasteries just like brahmins and started their own 'guru parampara'. The heads of these mathas played not merely a religious or ideological role, but also a political role for extending the sphere of influence of their respective communities.

However, Sanskritisation has serious limits in achieving broadbasing. As Srinivas explained:

Sanskritisation is generally accompanied by and often results in upward mobility for the caste in question; but mobility also may occur without sanskritisation and vice versa. However, the mobility associated with sanskritisation...takes place in an essentially stable hierarchical order. The system itself does not change [Srinivas 1977:7].

What is equally significant is that Sanskritisation "enabled low castes which had acquired wealth or power to shed their low ritual status and be included among the high castes" [Srinivas 1977:93]. It is not very helpful for a caste which does not already have wealth or political power, though it has been used by such castes as a symbol of protest. By itself, Sanskritisation could not have been instrumental in obtaining material

benefits but certainly in enhancing self-respect and social stature. While the Bhakti movement dominated the pre-British period, Sanskritisation appears to be mainly a phenomenon which became prominent during the British period to compete with upper castes in extending influence.

During the British period, both marginalisation and broadbasing were in operation with renewed intensity, and it is difficult to say which of the two dominated ultimately. But at least up to the early part of the 20th century, marginalisation seems to have dominated. Marginalisation took place mainly through thousands of rural artisans losing their jobs because of the import of factory-made products and also because of the introduction of zamindari system of land tenure. Both strengthened the hold of the upper castes. The spread of modern English education on secular lines was a double edged weapon. On the one hand, it produced a new class of English educated elite differentiated from the bulk of people who could not afford access to modern education and found themselves unable to benefit from the new opportunities thrown open by technological development and

TABLE 2. WORKFORCE PATTERN AMONG SCs AND STs AS COMPARED WITH OTHERS IN INDIA

	Proportion (Per Cent) in Total Main Workers of		
	Agri-cultural Labour	Culti-vators	Agri-cultural Workers
1961			
SCs	34.5 (47.7)	37.8	72.3
STs	20.1 (22.4)	69.6	89.7
Others	12.5 (18.8)	54.1	66.6
All Groups	16.7 (24.0)	52.8	69.5
1971			
SCs	51.8 (65.0)	27.9	79.7
STs	33.0 (36.4)	57.6	90.6
Others	20.2 (30.9)	45.1	65.3
All Groups	26.3 (37.8)	44.3	69.6
1981			
SCs	48.2 (63.1)	28.2	76.4
STs	32.7 (37.5)	54.4	87.1
Others	18.5 (30.1)	43.0	61.5
All Groups	24.9 (37.4)	41.6	66.5
1991			
SCs	45.4 (65.8)	23.6	69.0
STs	32.7 (37.5)	54.5	87.2
Others	20.1 (33.2)	40.5	60.6
All Groups	26.1 (40.3)	38.7	64.8

Source: Calculated from respective *Census of India Reports*.

Note: (1) While the percentages are with respect to total workers for 1961, they are with respect to total main workers (excluding secondary workers) for other years. Thus, figures of 1961 are not strictly comparable with subsequent years' figures.

(2) Figures in brackets are percentages of agricultural labour to total agricultural workers. The rest constitute cultivators.

urbanisation. On the other hand, the influence of democratic values and entry of Christianity into India made Hindu intellectuals and leaders sit up and introspect about their society.

The influence of new values like democracy and human rights stimulated a variety of social movements. Some of them were reformist, which sought to change the character of Hindu society trying to making it more democratic, rational, humane and egalitarian. These movements like Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj sought to reorder Hindu society on non-caste lines and attracted many intellectuals. Hinduism interpreted by Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) condemned casteism and religious bigotry, and laid strong emphasis on social service and uplift of the downtrodden.⁴ Mahatma Gandhi the most prominent of them, took up with great earnestness the cause of those whom he called harijans (children of god), but within the framework of the Hindu society.

One of the spectacular success stories of transformation of an almost untouchable caste into a powerful community playing its rightful part in the mainstream of Indian Society relates to the nadars in Tamil Nadu. Being toddy tappers earlier, they were considered a defiling caste with no entry permitted into temples and were barely above untouchables. They had a landowning subcaste who took to trading also and started a process of Sanskritisation by the end of 19th century which enveloped almost the entire community. They claimed Kshatriya status, organised Upanayanams (thread ceremonies) like caste Hindus and built their own temples. But this was all bitterly resisted by dominant castes who attacked them in organised ways. When they saw that Sanskritisation was not enough to meet their objective, a caste association was formed in 1910 which played a key role in their uplift on all fronts – educational, political, social and economic. The association even discouraged their community members from continuing with their traditional occupation of toddy tapping. By the time of independence, trading and industry became the main occupation of the community. It started playing a key role in the state and even national politics, bringing forth a leader of Kamaraj's stature.⁵

Some of the movements, particularly like the one launched by Periyar EV Ramaswamy, went beyond reformation, challenged not only the hold of brahmins but also the tenets of Hinduism itself. He did not confine himself to upward mobility of one particular caste but addressed all non-brahmins. However, his followers did not quite go out of the Hindu society. The non-brahmin movement in Karnataka did not go so far as to denigrate Hinduism but they too, like their Tamil Nadu

counterparts, played an important role demanding and securing reservation in jobs for non-brahmins. The main beneficiaries of this were the non-brahmins of the intermediate castes in the first instance. Such benefits were subsequently demanded by leaders of depressed classes (SCs/dalits) for their communities too, even before independence, as they deserved these benefits more than intermediate castes [Srinivas 1996:xv-xvii]. The dalit movement under the visionary and spirited leadership of Ambedkar was also started before independence. He did not stop at demanding reservations but also gave a shock to the Hindu society when along with his followers he formally came out of it and embraced Buddhism. But this was in 1956, that is, nearly nine years after India attained independence. Protest movements and demand for reservation could not have by themselves gone far enough without access to educational facilities. Modern educational facilities were largely restricted to major cities, and even primary education was hardly available to bulk of the people. One of the major tasks which heads of non-brahmin mathas, for example the veerashaiva or Lingayat swamis in Karnataka undertook was to create facilities for primary and higher education not only for the people of their own communities but for others. It was not confined to starting schools. Hostels were also started for rural children often with freeship facilities for the poor. The richer people of these communities donated vast amounts of money to the mathas for this purpose. This process was started even before independence, and was continued thereafter. In the princely state of Mysore, the Wodeyar kings built a wide network of schools even in small towns and villages which greatly benefited rural based non-brahmins. The famous Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur started

these facilities in western Maharashtra, enabling marathas and lower castes to have access to education. However, the major beneficiaries of the spread of education before independence were hitherto backward castes fairly above the level of dalits, until Ambedkar took up this task himself in a major way. His work continued well after independence and his task is yet to be fully accomplished as can be seen from the following section.

II Broadbasing after Independence

The Bhakti movement, in spite of its vast spread both over caste hierarchy and almost all over the country, had not made its impact in terms of ending the caste system. Even the worst feature of the Hindu society – untouchability and oppression of dalits – continued unabated. How have the dalits fared at least after independence? How has the broadbasing process been operating now, in contrast to the past? Could we say that at last broadbasing has started dominating over marginalisation now?

A major problem in ending casteism, in spite of the struggle of many castes to upgrade their status, was that while intermediate castes wanted to improve their social status, they did not like those below them to come up. Srinivas has summed up this attitude as, "I am equal to those who think of themselves as my betters, I am better than those who regard themselves as my equals, and how dare my inferiors claim equality with me?" [Srinivas 1977:92]. Consequently, the backward class movement in south India (mainly Karnataka and Tamil Nadu), which demanded reservation of jobs and sought to cut brahmins to their size, did not much address itself to the plight of dalits. As Radhakrishnan observed:

TABLE 3: SIZEWISE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS AND AREA IN INDIA AMONG SCs, STs AND OTHERS

Size Class in hect	SCs		STs		Others		All	
	No (Per Cent)	Area (Per Cent)	No (Per Cent)	Area (Per Cent)	No (Per Cent)	Area (Per Cent)	No (Per Cent)	Area (Per Cent)
In 1980-81								
Below 1.0	68.9	21.8	39.8	7.8	56.2	11.7	56.4	12.1
1 to < 2	16.4	20.2	22.6	13.3	17.9	13.7	18.1	14.1
2 to < 4	9.5	22.4	20.5	23.1	14.0	20.8	14.0	21.2
4 to < 10	4.3	30.8	13.7	33.5	9.3	29.1	9.1	29.6
10 and above	0.9	4.8	3.4	22.3	2.6	24.7	2.4	23.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
In 1990-91								
Below 1.0	71.8	25.7	42.9	9.9	58.6	14.5	59.0	14.9
1 to < 2	16.0	22.8	24.1	16.5	18.9	16.9	19.0	17.3
2 to < 4	8.3	22.4	19.7	25.7	13.3	22.9	13.2	23.2
4 to < 10	3.3	19.0	11.1	31.3	7.5	27.4	7.2	27.2
10 and above	0.6	10.1	2.2	16.6	1.7	18.3	1.6	17.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Agricultural Census 1980-81 and 1990-91 (Provisional).

Overall social equality, that is, equal rights for goods and services of society, and equal treatment in social life (say, in the sense of formal equality as enshrined in the Constitution) of individuals irrespective of caste and community, was neither a central issue nor an underlying motivation for these movements [Radhakrishnan 1996:129].

The resistance of intermediate castes to the upward mobility of those below them was most often expressed in social boycott and, worse, in violence. These intermediate castes possessed wealth and power in which some of them were superior to brahmins, and what is more, they were also numerically dominant compared to the dalits. The entry of peasant classes belonging to intermediate castes into the mainstream of Indian politics and power structure contributed significantly to the broadbasing of Indian polity, but it also sharpened the contradictions between them and dalits who were mainly agricultural labourers [Nadkarni 1987: Chapters 1 and 5]. Thus the resistance from intermediate castes to the rise of dalits could not be taken lightly.

To make matters worse, even the dalits themselves were hierarchically stratified. Those who were doing agricultural labour were considered above those who did leather work, and they in turn were considered above those who traditionally did scavenging. In Karnataka and parts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, 'right hand' SCs consider themselves superior to 'left hand' SCs [Beck 1972]. This caste based hierarchical attitude was not confined to Hindu society, but covered Muslims and Christians also in south Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh included). Even Buddhists in Sri Lanka are not free from casteism. Omvedt thus finds casteism a typical south Asian phenomenon. She has observed that the influence of Hinduism in south-east Asian societies did nothing to create a caste system there. Caste system emerged out of the socio-cultural and economic features of the subcontinent, though Hinduism in India authenticated it [Omvedt 1994:31, 32].

One of these socio-economic features in India/south Asia, is the 'jajmani' system, which gave a structure and base to the caste system and sustained it over time. In this context Srinivas observes:

As long as the mode of production at the village was caste based, denunciations of inequality from saints and reformers, or from those professing other faiths, proved ineffective. It was only when, along with ideological attacks on caste, education and employment were made accessible to all and urbanisation and industrialisation spread, that systemic changes occurred in caste [Srinivas 1996:xiv].

The systemic changes weakening caste hierarchy have been operating in post-

independence India with ever increasing strength. At no time in the past history of India, have these changes been operating so forcefully and on such a wide scale. This has been a major cause of turbulence in Indian society, because these changes meet with resistance from castes who have wealth and power. But the modern forces of change are bound to weaken this resistance with the result that even if separate castes continue as mere jatis or distinct communities, ritual superiority and inferiority would no longer continue. In fact, this ritual hierarchy and ideas of caste pollution have already vanished in urban areas, and are on the way out in villages.⁶ It is useful to identify and briefly describe the changes which are weakening if not ending the caste system.

One of the important changes is the growing dissociation of caste from their hereditary occupations. Karanth mentions the breakdown of two institutions as being responsible for this, since these institutions had confined respective castes in their traditional occupations. One of them is the caste panchayat or council which had a quasi-judicial status. They were deprived of their power after the passing of the Constitution of India in 1950. 'This meant that members of any caste could choose any occupation they liked. The second is the jajmani system, under which 'members of certain castes rendered their services or supplied goods to the village community, particularly the landowning dominant castes, in return for an annual wage paid in kind, (which) was a part of a wider patron-client relationship'. Karanth (1996:89-90) also mentions that the dissociation of caste from its traditional occupation was accelerated by other forces too such as industrialisation, the spread of education, urbanisation, and the emergence of new occupations.

Karanth also notes, however, that caste mobility after independence arising out of dissociation of caste from occupation was more visible among the backward castes above dalits. He found members of the madiga or holeya castes (dalits) in rural Karnataka continuing in their traditional occupations. The land owning dominant castes have used political pressures, lies, threats and any other means at their disposal to ensure service from dalits.

Indeed one of the results of the implementation of welfare measures for the weaker sections in rural areas has been to enhance their dependence on the leaders from dominant castes: government officials often depend on the latter for identifying beneficiaries from the weaker sections [Karanth 1996:92].

Yet, it would be unrealistic to say that dalits today have stayed where they were during the 1940s and 1950s, and to ignore the progress made by them in overcoming their earlier docility, and in gaining self-respect and political strength. Unfortunately, reports of atrocities on dalits continue to pour in but most of these atrocities are a reaction to the assertiveness of dalits and intolerance of landowning dominant castes to the increasing political strength of dalits. Such atrocities, as Srinivas says, cannot any longer be suppressed from the media, legislative assemblies and the parliament, and politicians are shamed into taking action against the culprits though such action may often be inadequate [Srinivas 1992:24-25]. Hopefully, the days are not far off when other castes begin to accept the upward mobility of dalits as a fact of life if not encourage it. This is already happening in urban areas.

Obviously much more powerful factors are operating than the decline of jajmani system and the decline of caste panchayats which have led to an upward mobility of dalits. Of them, the most important is the dalit movement led by Babasaheb Ambedkar. There is reason to believe that he has succeeded where Bhakti saints failed. Apart from the fact that he was born among the very people whose lot he wanted to change,

TABLE 5: REPRESENTATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES IN KARNATAKA STATE. CIVIL SERVICE

	Proportion (Per Cent) in Total Employees		Proportion (Per Cent) in Total Population	
	SCs	STs	SCs	STs
1971	8.47	0.92	13.14	0.79
1979	9.85	1.25	15.10	4.92 (1981)
1990	13.47	2.19	16.38	4.26 (1991)
1994	14.62	2.80	NA	NA

Source: Rayappa and Sekhar 1996: Tables 1 and 2 on pp 51 and 52.

TABLE 4: AVERAGE SIZE OF HOLDINGS OF SCs AND STs AND THEIR SHARE IN TOTAL AREA OF OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS AS COMPARED WITH OTHERS IN INDIA

	Average Size of Holding (hect)		Share (Per Cent) in Area of Holdings		Ratio of Share in Land to Share in Population	
	1980-81	1990-91	1980-81	1990-91	1980-81	1990-91
SCs	1.15	1.00	7.0	7.9	0.45	0.48
STs	2.44	2.10	10.2	10.8	1.30	1.35
Others	1.88	1.61	82.8	81.3	1.08	1.07
All	1.84	1.57	100	100	1.00	1.00

Sources: Calculated from *Agricultural Censuses* of 1980-81 and 1990-91 (Provisional) respectively. Shares in population are calculated from the Censuses of India of 1981 and 1991.

he was an eminent social scientist and as such he analysed the causes behind the oppression of dalits and sought a scientific and holistic solution. His strategy rests on three pillars – education, organisation and struggle for rights. He mobilised them and raised their level of consciousness and self-respect; tried to provide them educational facilities including college education; demanded their due in government jobs through reservations, and at a cultural level shook the complacency of the Hindu society by changing his religion along with thousands of his followers. Ambedkar undertook his task of uprooting the caste system in an entirely non-violent, peaceful and constitutional ways. He did not want India to be destroyed and fragmented, and his struggle for social justice for all was a part of his greater effort of contributing to laying down the foundation of a democratic India. He wanted dalits to prosper as a part of the mainstream in India and not in isolation. His influence on dalits did not die with him. On the contrary, there is a new resurgence of his ideology inspiring the dalit movement all over the country.

Thanks to the influence of the farsighted leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar and Pandit Nehru, India chose the path of democracy based on adult franchise. This facilitated the broadbasing process like no other and imparted political consciousness to the masses. Political leaders had to go to the masses at least periodically. Leaders themselves had to emerge from the masses. Welfare programmes had to be launched for the benefit of the masses, the benefit of which went mainly to the other backward classes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, who together constitute about half of India's population. As Srinivas puts it:

...no other country in the world, poor or rich, is pursuing economic development and at the same time providing special facilities for such a large section of its population [Srinivas 1992:15].

What is more, this democracy was combined with 'protective discrimination' for the SCs and STs written into the Constitution, so that the weaker can compete with others more equitably. This benefit has now been extended to OBCs as well. More and more of the dalits are entering government jobs and educational institutions as a result of this policy. There is reservation for them in the legislative assemblies and parliament too so that they can have equitable share of power.

Not only do high caste candidates, seeking election to a legislative body, have to approach members of the scheduled castes for votes, but many members of the high castes have to approach Scheduled Caste Ministers for a variety of favours. And it is well to remember that these events are

happening for the first time in the history of India [Srinivas 1992:23].

Another powerful force which facilitates broadbasing is economic development, with its attendant forces of growth of modern technology and urbanisation. Growth of technology can raise productivity and free human beings from drudgery and work of low status and income. However, it can also deprive work opportunities and the rate of growth of employment should be significant enough to offset unemployment created initially by replacement of obsolete technology. Urbanisation can free dalits from the feudal oppression of the rural society and can give new opportunities for advancement, provided that urbanisation is not of the kind where the weak are simply pushed out of villages into urban slums. Though economic growth is not identical with economic development, it has also a great potential for facilitating broadbasing. This is because with given GNP and wealth, a person or community can advance its well-being only at the expense of others. This is a situation full of potential for conflict.

On the other hand, in a situation of higher economic growth, more and more opportunities are created for the welfare of all. When economic growth is explicitly combined with welfare programmes for the poor, a still better situation is created to see that the benefits of growth are shared more equitably. If this situation is combined with democracy based on adult franchise, freedom of expression, and conscious political movements by the weaker sections, as in India, we should have an ideal situation for broadbasing. However, the rate of economic growth in British India was close to nil, and even after independence up to the 1980s, GNP growth was only a little above the rate of growth of population. It is only from the beginning of the 1990s that GNP growth has significantly exceeded the rate of growth of population. However, unless economic growth also leads to social development through conscious policies and programmes, and its nature is such as to create more jobs rather than to reduce them, it cannot result in substantial gains for the weak. Moreover, the weak should also have the facilities to learn new jobs and skills to cope with new technologies. Otherwise, we can only have dominance of capitalist marginalisation instead of feudal marginalisation pushing the broadbasing process into a corner.

Since the beneficial effects of economic growth are subject to so many 'ifs' and 'buts', we may now examine in terms of actual data how far dalits have benefited after independence in relation to other groups. Due to paucity of data separately for SCs and STs, their status and progress is analysed here mainly in terms of their population size, their literacy rates, their proportion of urban

population, the pattern of their workforce, their landholdings and their share in government service. As far as possible, this is done from 1961 onwards up to 1991, and their status is compared with 'others' (population excluding SCs and STs). Due to non-availability of separate data for OBCs, their status is not analysed separately; they are included in 'others'. It would have been desirable to try other indicators of quality of life of dalits such as infant mortality rates, life expectancy and proportion of graduates in adult population. Regrettably these details are not available for them. However, the indicators used here can serve broadly to show the progress achieved by them. The significance of literacy as an important indicator of quality of life is now well established. A study has found a high negative correlation between literacy rates and infant mortality rates, both across different countries of the world and across different states in India [Srinivasan 1988:358]. As literacy rates improve infant mortality is found to decline; also, a sense of self-respect and consciousness of their rights would increase. Urbanisation is also very important for dalits as it represents an escape route from oppression and discrimination rampant in rural areas.

Table 1 presents the population of SCs and STs, their proportion to population of all groups, their literacy rates and the proportion of their urban population, as compared to others. The proportion of SCs in the total population of all groups has increased from 14.7 per cent in 1961 to 16.3 per cent in 1991, and that of STs from 6.8 per cent in 1961 to 8 per cent in 1991. A small part of this increase in population is due to the inclusion of a few communities into these groups in the intervening period. The literacy rates are quite lower among SCs than among others, and the same among STs still lower than among SCs. Though both SCs and STs have improved their literacy rates by over five times between 1961 and 1991, an improvement in absolute terms is not enough. It is necessary to reduce relative disparity as well. The disparity between dalits and others in literacy in terms of percentage points has remained roughly the same during the last 40 years. Naturally it requires a greater effort to spread literacy among dalits than among others to bridge the disparity. India has set the target of achieving total literacy by the turn of the century; when this is achieved, the disparity in this regard would be wiped out.

Let us take a look into the present pattern of differences in literacy rates of these social groups across different states of India. The Appendix table presents these data for 1991. The lowest literacy rate among SCs is found in Bihar (19.9 per cent). – a state having the dubious distinction of reporting the most atrocities on dalits. On the other hand, it is highest in Kerala (79.7 per cent) followed

by Gujarat (61.1 per cent), states where such atrocities are hardly reported and dalits seem to be in the mainstream. A higher literacy rate may not be enough, but this seems to be a fairly dependable proxy for their status. Literacy rates among the STs are higher in the north-eastern states of Mizoram (82.7 per cent) and Nagaland (60.6 per cent) and also in Lakshadweep (80.6 per cent), where the proportion of tribal population is also much higher than the national average. On the other hand, literacy among STs is lowest in Andhra Pradesh (only 17.2 per cent), a state known for Naxalism and atrocities on dalits like Bihar.

Literacy rates are higher in urban areas, as expected, for all social groups but the difference over rural areas is highest among STs. Thus the urban literacy among STs was 56.6 per cent while rural literacy was only 27.4 per cent in 1991. The corresponding figures are 55.1 per cent and 33.3 per cent for SCs, and 75.9 per cent and 49.9 per cent for 'others'. In urban areas, the literacy rates are almost the same for SCs and STs, but the difference between them is significant in rural areas.

Again, as expected, male literacy rates are higher than female literacy rates among all social groups, the difference being highest among SCs. In 1991, male literacy was 49.9 per cent among SCs while female literacy was 23.8 per cent. The corresponding figures for STs were 40.6 per cent and 18.2 per cent, and for others 69.5 per cent and 44.8 per cent. It is remarkable that the male-female disparity among STs is even less than among 'others' in this respect.

Literacy rates are influenced by several factors like the economic status of the concerned people, sincerity of efforts of government and non-government organisations in spreading literacy, and the way in which literacy campaigns are integrated with other development work. But across the states, it would be interesting to see how far the numerical strength of SCs and STs and also the literacy rates among other population explain the differences in the literacy rates of SCs and STs, respectively. A higher numerical strength in a state can enable a community to exercise greater influence over the government or it can attract more attention from NGOs for its welfare including literacy. Similarly, the more literate the other people are, it will have an indirect positive influence on dalit literacy. If the state as a whole is more illiterate like Bihar, dalits are also likely to have the same characteristic.

To test these hypotheses, a multiple regression exercise was carried out taking 1991 data with the following variables across the states.

SCLR = Literacy Rates among Scheduled Castes;

STLR = Literacy Rates among Scheduled Tribes;

SCPP = Proportion (per cent) of SCs in the total population of the state;

STPP = Proportion (per cent) of STs in the total population of the state;

OLR = Literacy Rate among 'Others' (excluding SCs and STs).

Of these, SCLR and STLR are dependent variables, while the rest are independent variables. The results are follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{SCLR} &= 2.0204 - 0.6393 \text{ SCPP} \\ &\quad (-3.7730) \\ &\quad + 0.8517 \text{ OLR} \quad R^2 = 0.8477 \\ &\quad (9.8251) \quad (N = 23) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{STLR} &= -4.7365 + 0.1742 \text{ STPP} \\ &\quad (1.8788) \\ &\quad + 0.6640 \text{ OLR} \quad R^2 = 0.4986 \\ &\quad (3.0710) \quad (N = 24) \end{aligned}$$

(Note: Figures in brackets below coefficients are t values.)

All the coefficients were statistically significant, and there was no problem of any significant inter-correlation among independent variables. However, while our expectations turned out to be confirmed in the case STs (with both the coefficients having expected signs), this was not so for SCs. With the literacy rates of others being given, SCs tended to have lower literacy rates the higher was their own proportion in total population. What lifted their literacy rates was the literacy rates of 'others'. The statistically significant positive sign of the coefficient of OLR suggests that the broad basing process is working. When the literacy of 'others' increases, the literacy of SCs and STs also improves. However, the coefficients with respect to OLR are less than one, which suggests that even when others' literacy improves, both SCs and STs tend to lag behind, their literacy improving more slowly than that of others. STs tend to lag behind more than SCs in this regard. What is disturbing in the case of SCs, is that a higher proportion of them seemed to lead to relative indifference to their welfare rather than to greater attention or effort for it, if literacy is taken as a proxy for their welfare or development. Actually this is true more at the village level. A SC dominant village tends to get ignored, while a village where dominant castes of the state are numerous gets more attention and welfare programmes [Rao 1981:1659]. However, this was not so in the case of STs, but even here the impact of STPP was low compared to that of OLR.

Coming to urbanisation (see Table 1), the SCs are much less urbanised than the 'others' and the STs even less so. Their relative position in this respect has hardly changed from 1961 to 1991, though of course all the social groups are more urbanised in 1991 than what they were in 1961. There are a few small states, however, where SCs are

more urbanised than 'others', which are Goa, Manipur and Sikkim, but they are exceptions. There are no such exceptions in the case of STs.

The two hypotheses tested in the case of literacy rates across states can be tested in the case of urbanisation as well, taking 1991 data (see Appendix for data). The following variables are involved.

SCURB = Proportion of Urban Population among SCs;

STURB = Proportion of Urban Population among STs;

SCPP and STPP as above;

OURB = Proportion of urban population among 'others';.

Of these, SCURB and STURB are dependent variables, while the rest are independent variables. The results are as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{SCURB} &= 6.4597 - 0.7979 \text{ SCPP} \\ &\quad (-3.8594) \\ &\quad + 0.9725 \text{ OURB} \quad R^2 = 0.9156 \\ &\quad (14.4329) \quad (N = 23) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{STURB} &= -8.4058 + 0.0901 \text{ STPP} \\ &\quad (1.4514) \\ &\quad + 0.5190 \text{ OURB} \quad R^2 = 0.6405 \\ &\quad (4.0137) \quad (N = 24) \end{aligned}$$

(Note: Figures in brackets below coefficients are t values.)

Except for the coefficient of STPP in the last equation above, all the coefficients are statistically significant at 1 per cent level, and there was no problem of high inter-correlation among independent variables. The results show a negative association between the proportion of SC population and the level of their urbanisation. In the states where the former is high, the latter tends to be lower. It surely does not, mean that the numerical strength of SCs acts as a drag on their own urbanisation and development. It, however, suggests that where their numerical strength is higher, such regions tend to neglect the development of SCs. In the case of STs, there was no statistically significant association between the two variables; though the sign is positive, it is weak.

As for the urbanisation of 'others', it has a positive and statistically significant impact both in the case of SCs and STs on their urbanisation. In the case of SCs, however, the coefficient is close to one, suggesting that the urbanisation of SCs keeps step with the urbanisation of others, though not faster. This means that the initial disparity between the urbanisation of SCs and that of others remains unbridged, though it does not widen. In the case of STs, however, the coefficient is much less than one suggesting that though the urbanisation of STs increases with that of others, it does so more slowly. The urbanisation of STs lags behind that of others as well as that of SCs. Urbanisation, however, seems to be more crucially related to welfare in the case of SCs than in the case of STs.

This becomes clear if we analyse the pattern of the workforce among these social groups. While a bulk of SCs dependent on agriculture are agricultural labourers with little or no land, the bulk of agricultural workers in the case of STs are cultivators enjoying a higher status. Table 2 below presents the proportion of SCs and STs depending on agricultural labour and cultivation, respectively, as compared with others, using the data from Censuses of India for 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991 for the country as a whole. The proportion of workforce depending on agriculture has declined only very marginally between 1961 and 1991 not only for SCs and STs but also for others. However, the decline is more significant after 1971 for SCs, suggesting that SCs are more and more taking up other occupations outside agriculture. Another feature of workforce pattern which holds for all social groups is that among those dependent on agriculture, the proportion of agricultural labour has significantly increased over the years while the proportion of cultivators has declined. In this respect, the increasing proletarianisation of SCs is not unique to them but is also shared by STs and 'others'. However, the impact is even more on the SCs since while more than half of them were cultivators (52.3 per cent) in 1961, their proportion has declined to 34.2 per cent in 1991. Correspondingly the proportion of agricultural labourers in agricultural workforce has increased from 47.7 per cent to 65.8 per cent between the same years. However, the bulk of this change took place between 1961 and 1971, and the proportions are more or less stable subsequently. How much of this change is genuine, and how much is purely statistical due to change in the definition of workers is difficult to say. While workers in 1961 are inclusive of secondary workers whose main occupation was not work, the proportions for subsequent years relate only main workers. It is difficult to construct series strictly comparable with 1961 because the classification of secondary workers is not easily available.

It should be noted however, that though the proportion of agricultural labour has increased as a per cent within agricultural workers, the proportion of agriculture labour as per cent of total workforce has steadily declined for SCs after 1971. It is more or less constant in the case of STs and 'others'. But even in 1991, 45.4 per cent of SC workforce continue to be agricultural labourers, while the proportion is 32.7 per cent for STs and 20.1 per cent for 'others'.

It would be interesting to compare the all-India position with a state which has a high incidence of atrocities on SCs and STs, as usually reported in the press, namely, Bihar. In 1991, while agricultural workers (including both labourers and cultivators) constituted

69 per cent of total workforce among SCs in India, they were 87.9 per cent in Bihar. Again, while the proportion of agricultural labourers among agricultural workforce was 65.8 per cent among SCs in India in the same year, it was 82.2 per cent in Bihar. Taking the STs, the proportion of agricultural workers to all workers was only slightly higher in Bihar (88.6 per cent) compared to similar figure for India (87.2 per cent), but the proportion of agricultural labour in agricultural workforce was much higher in Bihar (71.2 per cent) than in India (37.5 per cent). Thus the vulnerability of dalits is closely linked with their dependence on agricultural labour. Bihar is singled out here only to illustrate this point, and not because it is the only state where dalits are so oppressed.

Even to the extent that there are cultivators among SCs in India, most of them (71.8 per cent in 1990-91) are marginal farmers cultivating less than one hectare. STs in this respect are much better off not only as compared to SCs but also 'others'. Marginal holdings constitute 42.9 per cent among holdings operated by STs, while they are 58.6 per cent among 'others' holdings in 1990-91 (Table 3). Only 0.6 per cent of SCs' holdings are large (10 hectares and above), while the corresponding figure is 2.2 per cent among STs and 1.7 per cent among 'others'. It should be noted that the dominance of marginal holdings, which are not likely to be viable in the sense of providing a decent income above the poverty line, is a general feature of Indian agriculture, but this is more pronounced in the case of SCs. Over the decade of 1980s, this feature has only worsened, but this worsening is shared almost equally by all social groups.

While the total number of operational holdings has increased, the total area under them has not. This has resulted in a decline in the average size of holdings (Table 4). In absolute terms, this decline is most in the case of STs, but relatively the proportionate fall is almost the same in all groups. It is interesting that the average size of holdings of STs is larger than that of others, while that of 'others' is larger than that of SCs. This relative position is unchanged between 1980-81 and 1990-91. It is likely that the reason for STs faring better in this regard than even 'others' is that the area under shifting cultivation in forest areas which is carried out by STs may have been taken as a part of their operational holdings.

We can now examine the position of the social groups in respect of landholding *vis-a-vis* their position in total population. The SCs had a share of only 7 per cent in total operated area in 1980-81 which increased to 7.9 per cent in 1990-91 (Table 4). During the same years, their share in total population increased from 15.7 per cent to 16.3 per cent. The ratio of their per cent share

in land to per cent share in population improved, though slightly, from 0.45 to 0.48 in the decade. STs fare much better in this respect. In 1980-81, while they shared 10.2 per cent of operated area, their share in total population of India was lower than this at 7.8 per cent. In 1990-91, the corresponding figures were 10.8 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively. The ratio of their share in land to their share in population, which was already higher than one at 1.30 increased further to 1.35 in the decade. In the case of 'others', the ratio of their share in land to their share in the population was marginally higher than one at 1.08 in 1980-81, and fell slightly to 1.07 in 1990-91. We have not taken into account the *Agricultural Census* of 1970-71 for the preceding analysis since separate figures were not available for SCs and STs then. They are available only since 1980-81 *Agricultural Census*.

Thanks to the protective discrimination or reservation policy, SCs seem to have fared a little better in securing government jobs than land. Since data could not be obtained for the country as a whole in this regard, data for Karnataka are used here to illustrate the point. It is possible that the performance of Karnataka may be a little better than that of the country as a whole in this respect, since the history of reservation in Karnataka dates back to pre-independence period. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the country as a whole is not far behind Karnataka in this matter at least in the 1990s. Table 5 below gives this picture for Karnataka. Even in Karnataka, both SCs and STs have a lower share in government jobs than their share in population as the table shows, but this disparity is less than similar disparity in land. Communities which have a far smaller share in land than in the population should be compensated by an even higher share in non-agricultural jobs. Obviously, this is not the case as the table shows for SCs. What is heartening is that the share of both SCs and STs has been steadily improving over the years and the disparity is declining.⁷

III Concluding Observations and Policy Suggestions

There was a significant broadbasing of India's polity with the entry of peasant castes into the mainstream power structure after independence. It was inevitable that in a democracy broadbasing extended to dalits, though it has been much slower. There is definite evidence of more and more dalits coming into the mainstream in India. There are a lot more of those born as dalits adorning position of power, status and honour now than ever before and the trend is only accelerating. More dalits are not merely entering educational institutions than ever before, but thousands of them can be found

in faculty positions today in universities, colleges, research and other such institutions, quite a number of them on their own merit rather than because of reservation. There are several instances of dalits rising in independent business. The representation of dalits in government jobs is steadily increasing. Their share in political power is even more visible with many ministers among them both in the states and the centre. There is a clear formation of an elite layer among dalit communities. The differences among the elite belonging to different castes including SCs, STs and others have declined significantly. Not only is there increasing social interaction among them as equals, even inter-caste marriages among them are not uncommon now. Their elite can hardly be called as dalits any longer, since they are different from the bulk of dalits continuing to be poor and oppressed. The broadbasing process is evidently in operation involving dalits which can even be said to be dominating over the marginalisation process after independence. But broadbasing has been subject to serious limits.

For the non-elite dalits, life has not changed very much relatively, if not in absolute terms. They may have a little better quality of life today than what they had during 1950s and 1960s, thanks to the impact of several welfare and anti-poverty programmes. But the disparity between them and the elite has not declined, and may even have increased. While dalits have gained politically and have entered the mainstream, they are yet to have commensurate accomplishment socially and economically.

The analysis of secondary data on SCs and STs has shown that though literacy and urbanisation among them have been steadily increasing, the disparity between them and others has not declined over the years. The bulk of them continue to be dependent on agriculture. What is more disturbing, the bulk of the agricultural workforce consists of agricultural labour with little or no land in the case of SCs, though this situation is better among STs who are mainly cultivators. SCs are worse off than STs and others with regard to land held by them. The SCs have far less land than their share in the population. Communities which have much less land than their share in population should have a higher share in non-agricultural employment as a compensation, but this evidently is not so in the case of SCs. Both SCs and STs have a lower share in civil services than their share in the population. This is so in spite of a steady improvement in their share in government services in the last 50 years. While continuation of the policy of reservation may be necessary for them, it is clearly not sufficient to lift the mass of dalits who are not even literate and are forced to continue in rural areas as agricultural labourers.

Though the broadbasing process has been accelerated after independence, it has not been rapid enough yet to solve the problem of dalits. A few measures or policies are suggested below, which need to be implemented as a package. They are not a set of alternatives. First of all, a far greater thrust is needed to poverty alleviation, with a priority for improving the lot of landless labourers and marginal farmers. It is disturbing to note that the real wages of agricultural labour which showed some improvement during the 1980s seem to have stagnating thereafter. Worse still, real wages of non-agricultural rural labour have even tended to decline during the 1990s [Unni 1997:69]. One of the ways of exercising upward pressure on rural wages is to periodically increase wage rates under the Employment Guarantee programmes in keeping not only with the cost of living but also with agricultural output per worker. This has also to be supplemented by offering an opening of alternative employment during busy seasons. Minimum wages in rural areas would have no meaning unless there is a guarantee of employment at these wage levels even during busy seasons. This needs some political will as it may be resisted by landowning dominant castes. Moreover diversification of the economy of the landless rural labour and marginal and small farmers would be essential to improve their incomes. Besides the livestock sector, rural non-farm sector holds the key for promoting greater employment and income diversification among the landless and small farmers [Saleth 1997:85]. To support the dairy enterprises of the landless, common lands should be regenerated to improve their fodder productivity and given over to the management by local people with due safeguards against encroachment.

Secondly, a drastic programme to step up literacy, general education up to high school at least and also specific job skills has to be undertaken with real seriousness. This can impart greater self-confidence among dalits and improve their opportunities not only in the non-farm sector in rural areas but also in urban areas. The current emphasis seems to be more on general education in a linear path leading to usual colleges and university degrees. There is now a lot of money in skilled trades like plumbing, carpentry, auto-repair and computer programming. While there is a shortage of skilled manpower in such trades, graduates in general education tend to be jobless. It is equally important to improve numeracy and impart basic accounting skills to improve their bargaining power and ability to avoid being cheated.

Thirdly, with an increasing trend of urbanisation among dalits, particularly among SCs (as more among them are landless), housing and other facilities for the urban

poor have to be drastically improved. Cities and towns should be made more liveable for the poor, with more security of not only food but also of a roof above their heads.

Fourthly, some way should be found to take away agricultural land from those who are settled in well paying urban jobs or business and give it to landless dalits, particularly SCs. Landowning dominant castes are increasingly settling down in urban areas but not giving up their hold on agricultural land owned by them. Instead of discouraging those settled in non-agricultural professions from possessing agricultural land, recent measures of liberalisation have encouraged them through raising the eligibility ceiling on non-agriculture income. All this is blocking the way for landless dalits to acquire land. Such of the landless dalits who want to acquire land should be helped with adequate credit. The law against alienation of land owned by SCs and STs also needs to be rigorously implemented.

Economic growth of the right kind has a great potential to promote broadbasing and eliminate poverty. Prospects of stepped up economic growth rates should augur well for dalits, provided the trends of growth are job creation rather than job-reduction, are welfare oriented rather than welfare indifferent, and eco-friendly rather than eco-hostile. Dalits have to prepare themselves to take benefit from higher economic growth and also exercise pressures to steer such growth in socially relevant directions.

Caste and jati distinctions may not disappear in India in spite of the broadbasing and economic growth, but the feelings of caste/jati hierarchy are bound to weaken very much. They have already weakened considerably in urban areas. Communities organised on caste basis have in the past played a useful role by stimulating collective action for their betterment, for looking after the poorer members of their own communities, helping them with scholarships and hostel facilities for higher education, with health insurance, providing them with old age security. This has improved community welfare which otherwise may not have been possible. Community organisations have also created training facilities including preparing them for competitive examinations. They also take on the role of helping their own members to get jobs, institutional credit or other government benefits with their influence. The more enterprising even help their community members to get into business. This is promoting broadbasing within communities and castes. However, most of such community efforts are in evidence among non-dalit communities. In the case of dalits, the government has taken over such roles, which cannot be as serious and committed as community organisations. The Nadar

Appendix

Sl No	State	Population in Million		As Per Cent of Total Population		Urban Population (Per Cent)			Literacy Rates (Per Cent)		
		SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST	Others	SC	ST	Others
1	India	138	68	16.3	8.00	18.7	7.4	29.1	37.4	29.6	57.7
2	Andhra Pradesh	10	5	16.2	6.4	17.3	7.6	30.4	31.6	17.2	39.0
3	Arunachal Pradesh	Neg	0.55	Neg	63.6	-	5.8	30.4	-	34.4	53.7
4	Assam	1.7	2.9	7.4	12.8	13.8	3.4	12.1	53.9	49.2	53.9
5	Bihar	12.6	6.6	14.6	7.7	9.0	7.0	14.5	19.9	26.8	43.1
6	Goa	0.02	Neg	0.02	Neg	47.7	-	40.9	58.7	-	75.9
7	Gujarat	3.1	6.2	7.4	14.9	37.9	8.1	39.2	61.1	36.4	65.9
8	Haryana	3.3	nil	19.7	-	17.7	-	26.3	39.2	-	59.8
9	Himachal Pradesh	1.3	0.2	25.3	4.2	6.3	2.5	9.9	53.2	47.1	68.6
10	Karnataka	7.4	1.9	16.4	4.3	23.4	14.9	33.3	38.1	36.0	60.5
11	Kerala	2.9	0.3	9.9	1.1	18.5	3.5	27.6	79.7	57.2	91.3
12	Madhya Pradesh	9.6	15.4	14.5	23.3	21.9	4.8	30.3	35.1	21.5	54.5
13	Maharashtra	8.8	7.3	11.1	9.3	36.6	12.5	42.00	56.5	36.8	69.2
14	Manipur	0.04	0.6	2.00	34.4	52.3	8.4	37.1	56.4	53.6	63.4
15	Meghalaya	Neg	1.5	-	85.5	-	13.6	48.5	-	46.7	62.9
16	Mizoram	Neg	0.7	-	94.8	-	45.2	62.7	-	82.7	75.2
17	Nagaland	Nil	1.1	-	87.7	-	12.00	54.2	-	60.6	69.0
18	Orissa	5.1	7.0	16.20	22.20	10.7	5.1	17.00	36.8	22.3	61.6
19	Punjab	5.7	Nil	28.3	-	20.6	-	33.1	41.1	-	65.1
20	Sikkim	0.02	0.09	5.9	22.4	11.4	8.2	9.2	51.0	59.0	56.8
21	Rajasthan	7.6	5.5	17.3	12.4	19.8	4.7	26.9	26.2	19.4	44.8
22	Tamil Nadu	10.7	0.6	19.2	1.0	21.3	12.00	37.5	46.7	27.9	66.80
23	Tripura	0.5	0.8	16.4	30.4	15.8	1.7	23.1	56.7	40.4	72.8
24	Uttar Pradesh	29.3	0.3	21.00	0.2	11.8	5.9	22.00	26.8	35.7	45.9
25	West Bengal	16.1	3.8	23.6	5.6	15.40	5.20	33.30	42.2	27.8	65.0
26	Andaman Nicobar	nil	0.27	-	9.5	-	1.9	29.3	-	56.6	74.7
27	Chandigarh	0.1	nil	17.6	-	86.7	-	89.5	55.4	-	82.0
28	Dadra Nagar Haveli	Neg	0.1	-	79.0	-	3.2	10.4	-	28.2	73.3
29	Delhi	1.8	-	19.1	-	88.4	-	90.3	57.60	-	79.2
30	Lakshdeep	-	0.05	-	93.1	-	55.4	68.5	-	80.6	96.1
31	Pondicherry	0.1	nil	16.2	-	40.8	-	68.5	56.3	-	81.0

Source: Census of India 1991

Mahajan Sangham is a conspicuous example of how a caste substantially improved its lot with community efforts [Hardgrave 1969]. Dalit leaders also have to play the role of improving the capabilities and fighting wasteful habits like drinking among the members of their communities.

Summarising, the broadbasing process has been in operation in the Indian society since times immemorial, though this process has been relatively ignored. It became a little more prominent after the Bhakti movement gained momentum. Several depressed castes improved their status through Veerashaiva (lingayat) movement in Karnataka since the 12th century. However, broadbasing continued to be dominated on the whole by the opposite process of marginalisation in India, in spite of the Bhakti movement. The broadbasing process got a further boost since the early part of the 20th century and posed a real challenge to marginalisation. Whole castes like izhavas in Kerala and nadars in Tamil Nadu substantially improved their status and entered the mainstream.* It was, however, only since independence that broadbasing can be said to have started dominating over marginalisation. The historical accommodative capacity of Indian society has been further strengthened through democracy and forces of modern economic

development, though the process has not been free from turbulence. But intermediate castes gained more than dalits in this process. Though dalits improved their status over time, the disparities between them and others remain undiminished in hard economic terms. Broadbasing will continue so long as our pluralist democracy continues. While this democracy has given dalits immense political gains, the gains in social and economic dimensions are much less limited and slower. Such broadbasing that has occurred has thus tended to remain one-sided. Though dalits may continue to need special help and safeguards from the state to help them come into the social and economic as in the political mainstream, the elite among the dalits will have an important role to play in organising collective action for the betterment of the weak within their own communities. It is well to remember that historically broadbasing has occurred through mass movements, collective action and self-help and not merely through state help.

Notes

[I first thought of the broadbasing process when analysing the rise of peasant castes in Indian polity [Nadkarni 1987]. A brief version of how broadbasing process has been working in a broader social context particularly in Karnataka was

presented by me at a seminar at the French Institute in Pondicherry [Nadkarni 1989]. G K Karanth constantly prodded me to write a more substantiated version of it. In the meanwhile I gained greatly from M N Srinivas' work which I have referred here. The immediate stimulus to write this paper came from my young colleague at ISEC, Manohar Yadav, when he invited me to address a gathering for the celebration of 106th Birth Anniversary of Ambedkar on April 14, 1997 at Ambedkar Memorial Campus, Bangalore. He specially asked me to make suggestions for policy and action. I have benefited from discussion there. Both G K Karanth and T Kannan drew my attention to some references. The former also gave very useful comments as an earlier draft of the paper. The bulk of statistical assistance came from V R Hegde and K N Pradeep. Usual disclaimers apply.]

- 1 Seshadri mentions another reason for lack of resistance when 'Islamic hordes came to India, wave after wave, destroying Hindu temples, laying their land to waste, converting thousands by force into Islam'. He observes that Hindu saints and philosophers did not teach defence of religion, the gods and the community against vandals [Seshadri 1996:298]. Though this could be one of the reasons, it does not explain why Indians inclusive of Muslims succumbed to the British. In course of time, the Muslim society too became extremely stratified.
- 2 For an account of social significance of his life and teachings, see [Seshadri 1996].

- 3 Quoted in [Ranade 1961:8], as reproduced in [Zelliot 1996:22].
- 4 V K R V Rao called Swami Vivekanand as the Prophet of Vedantic Socialism for his emphasis on equality and the right of all oppressed people to human dignity [Rao 1979].
- 5 For a detailed account of the rise of nadars, see [Rudolph and Rudolph 1967] and [Hardgrave 1969].
- 6 On the basis of his study of a Tamil Village Alankulam, Deliege finds that ritual pollution has lost much of its importance in inter-caste relations. The pallars suffer much from their lack of education, capital and family connections in their attempt to improve their condition, but less from the traditional stigmas attached to them. Typically, people would refer to material conditions to illustrate the plight of the harijans but nobody even mentioned pollution or ritual exclusion to me [Deliege 1996:90].
- 7 STs had a higher share in civil service than their population in 1971 as Table 5 shows, but their share in population then was very low. There is sudden increase in this share subsequently due perhaps to the inclusion of a few more communities among STs. Hence, figures for STs from 1979 onwards are not strictly comparable with 1971
- 8 There may be similar examples in North India, but I have not come across their documentation.

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DISCUSSION

Central Sales Tax: Why It Must Go

Amaresh Bagchi

THE decision taken by state finance ministers at their meeting in July to scale down the level of the central sales tax (CST) successively to 2 per cent from the present 4 per cent is a heartening development as it heralds some recognition that a tax on inter-state trade levied on origin basis is an impediment to the growth of the common market in India and the realisation of the full potential of the Indian economy which is possible only when economic decisions are guided by considerations of comparative advantage alone and not by tax calculations. CST distorts business decisions regarding location of industry, sourcing of inputs and the flow of trade by adding to costs and acting as an import/export duty for goods sold in one state by producers located in another. It induces manufacturers to import inputs from abroad even when the same is produced in a neighbouring state (*The Economic Times*, April 10, 1997). This is hardly conducive to the growth of globally competitive industry in the country.

An origin-based trade tax like the CST also militates against the principle of inter-jurisdictional equity in the allocation of tax bases among the states in a federation by facilitating tax exporting – that is, taxation of citizens of other states by the states of origin a system that operates to the benefit of states that happen to be net exporters, who usually are relatively advanced, at the cost of the less developed ones. Not for nothing does the European Economic Community (now the European Union (EU) require the adoption of the destination based value

added tax as a precondition for joining the EU.

Our Constitution-makers also had the sagacity to foresee the evils that attend an origin-based sales tax at the state level and so, while conferring the powers of sales taxation on the states, provided for the taxation of inter-state sales only "in the state in which the goods have actually been delivered as a direct result of such sale or purchase for the purpose of sale or purchase in that state" (Article 286 of the Constitution as it originally stood). How the evolution of inter-state sales taxation took a different course and the CST came into being bypassing the intent of the original provisions is another story.¹ It was partly because of judicial rulings but also because of the absence of any arrangement for exchange of information among the states regarding cross-border sales and also the recommendation of the Taxation Enquiry Commission for the levy of a CST at 1 per cent as a regulatory measure. It is true that establishing institutions for inter-state information exchange is not simple and calls for greater inter-state co-ordination than prevails in India. But one would have thought that the states would take the initiative to create the necessary institutions for implementing a neutral system of inter-state sales taxation that would serve the interests of the common market to everybody's benefit. The decision to reduce the rate of CST is a step in the right direction as it will help to ease out the CST finally. Lamprooning of this wise decision reached by consensus as a case of the states being