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**CASTE VIOLENCE AND
DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS :
A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION
OF DOMINANCE**

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CASTE VIOLENCE AND DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS: A CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF DOMINANCE

T Kannan*

Introduction

"It is however our sad duty to report that forty-three years after independence and thirty-five years after the Protection of Civil Rights Act, the atrocities against scheduled castes and tribes are still occurring with distressing regularity." (National Commission for SC & ST 1990, p vii)

The increasing violence against dalits in post-independence Indian society in many respects shows the failure of Indian governance to safeguard life and property, and civil and human rights of the most oppressed subaltern section of Indian society. The following decade after independence saw a total of 2,911 cases of atrocities against scheduled castes, which were mostly registered under the Untouchability (offences) Act 1955. But in 1980s, it has risen to 28,796. That there is a steep increase in the violence against dalits in the country is drawn not by merely looking at these figures in government reports because these are registered and reported cases. There are many cases of atrocities that go unregistered by the police and there are many that are not reported to the police. Several cases of atrocities are completely suppressed because they are police atrocities against the dalits.

"One species of atrocity which deserves special condemnation is when the guardians of the law themselves become perpetrators of crime against scheduled castes and scheduled tribes" (NC for SC & ST 1990, p 26.)

These remarks are made specifically on the police by the Commission. It does not mean that the police force is the only aggressor; the violence against dalits is unleashed also by the caste Hindus. The police force often enters into violence in the name of enforcing law and order in society where, in its view, no order prevails because of the caste clash, whereas caste Hindu violence against dalits is largely a reaction to the emerging political identity of

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1 I am using the classification "Caste Hindu" to denote all non-untouchable castes. It includes numerically, politically and to some extent economically dominant castes like Kallars, Maravars (Thevars), Kammavars.

the dalits because it is perceived as a constant threat to their privileged position in the existing power structure. The formation of political identity of dalits towards the realisation of autonomy is often expressed in two forms: 'war of manoeuvre' and the 'war of position'. These Gramscian theoretical notions are used not only to explain the changing caste relations but also to explain the political significance of the formation of dalit identity. I argue in this paper that the war of manoeuvre as a frontal attack politics against the traditional power structure and domination has provoked the caste Hindus to become violent against dalits in Tamil Nadu. And the process of broadening the political identity and mass base in the Gramscian sense of war of position not only mobilised the whole non-dalit caste Hindus against dalits, it also brought out the caste Hindu biases of the State.

The following two sections, 'violence as punishment' and 'violence as disciplining', cover extensively both the violence of caste Hindus and the law and order machinery of the State. The incidents of violence, classified under 'violence as punishment', cover those acts of violence that are often unleashed to punish the dalits for violating the traditional caste rules and norms. The material life of dalits is often targeted in this type of violence. Those acts of violence that have direct implications for the moral life of dalits are classified here as 'violence as disciplining'.

The experience shows that not only these violent incidents result in punishing and disciplining the dalits but also make the dalits understand 'dominance' in physical terms, if not in ideological terms. Ideological dominance is not perceived by the dalits because it is far removed from the processes of realisation of power. I call this understanding of dominance in physical terms 'immediate dominance' because it falls very much within their intuitive grasp of immediate social reality. The dominance that falls outside their intuitive grasp is called 'distant dominance'. I derived these two concepts from the Gramscian theory of 'coercion' and 'consent' and the reflections of Arun Patnaik on Gramscian conception of contradictory 'common sense' to understand how the ideological dominance manages to escape or elude the dalits and their understanding of oppression. The result of the elusion of distant dominance is that it reproduces violence against dalits as it ideologically hides the sources of oppression by distancing itself from the instruments of oppressions. How does ideological dominance distance itself from the immediate power? Or how is it not perceived by the dalits? I have tried to answer these questions in this paper with the help of Gramscian theory of common sense and the Hegelian theory of State as an ethical community. Gramscian theory of contradictory common sense explains partially how the distant dominance or ideological dominance eludes the dalits. It eludes through uncritical acceptance or consent of the dalits to the dominant ideologies of the State and the brahminical Hindu social

order because that is not its own but borrowed from another group. But to answer the question as to how dominant ideology gets consent from the dalits I move on to the Hegelian theory of State as an ethical community because Gramscian Marxism does not believe in the theory of false consciousness or dominant ideology thesis. For Gramsci, ideology is not based on false consciousness of some class, rather it is the space where a class attains its consciousness. I quote Mouffe here to support my point. "For him (Gramsci), ideology is not the mystified-mystifying justification of an already constituted class power, it is the 'terrain on which men acquire consciousness of themselves', and hegemony cannot be reduced to a process of a ideological domination" (Mouffe, 1979, p. 196).

Yet I see the relevance of the theory of dominant ideology in explaining the world-view of dalits or their understanding of dominance. The Hegelian theory of State as an ethical community is used here to understand the nature of ideological dominance of the State and the brahminical Hindu social order. Ideological dominance is achieved or consent of the dalits obtained through the creation of an ethical community. The meta-communal identities of ethical community like citizens finally forces the dalits to understand and believe that it is the immediate dominance of the State and the brahminical Hindu social order and not the distant dominance of the former, which is responsible for the oppression.

I. VIOLENCE AS PUNISHMENT

The political action of subaltern dalits at the levels of 'war of manoeuvre' and 'war of position' provokes the caste Hindus to react violently against the dalits. The Gramscian notion of war of manoeuvre cannot be understood without the notion of the 'war of position'. Though Gramsci had borrowed the concept from military science, he applied it in an entirely different political context to explain the transition in the subaltern politics i.e., the transition from the politics of frontal attack against the State (ie. 'the war of manoeuvre') to the broader construction of ideological struggle against the State and other forms of hegemony (ie. the 'war of position'). In the counter hegemony politics of the dalits the political formation and the struggles at the levels of the war of manoeuvre exist until the political formation at the level of war of position takes concrete form in terms of broad ideological leadership which transcends class specificities. Thus, the forms of struggles and political formations change according to the changes in the character of the State and the civil society. To counter the ideologically sophisticated State and other forms of hegemony, an ideologically sophisticated counter hegemonic political force in the form of war of position is inevitable. The act of subversion of traditional caste rules and rituals can be called war of manoeuvre here. It turns

the symbols of subjection upside down. The acts of subversion include: (i) the defiance of 'impure' ritual duties such as removing carcasses, digging graves and beating funeral drums; (ii) the assertion of rights over public spaces like temple entry, temple honours and refusing to use separate glasses in tea shops; (iii) the abandonment of submissive body gestures, and dress codes like walking through the village main street with chappals on and (iv) the installation and consecration of statues of dalit leaders like Baba Saheb Ambedkar and Thiyagi Immanuel Sekharan (The deified leader of Pallar Community who lost his life for the community in 1957). Every act of subversion is an attack on the caste system in general and caste Hindu ego in particular. The reaction of the caste Hindus to these acts of subversion or war of manoeuvre has at times been very violent, even to the extent of physically eliminating local leaders and destroying the sources of their livelihood. What follows are two such incidents of violence against dalits.

Melavalavu Massacre, 1997²

The village Melavalavu is located about 10 kms. away from Melur town in Madurai district. The total population of the village is 5,190, out of which 1,424 are scheduled castes (Paraiyars). The Kallars are the dominant caste in terms of numerical strength, large landholdings and political power. The castes other than Kallars and Paraiyars, are Pillais, Asaris, Valaiyars, Chettians, Vannars, and also Muslims. Most of the Paraiyars of Melavalavu are landless labourers.

Prior to conducting elections to local political institutions, the government of Tamil Nadu declared in October 1996 that the Melavalavu would be a Panchayat constituency reserved for scheduled castes. Trouble started with that announcement. The declaration of Melavalavu as a reserved constituency for scheduled castes in a predominantly Kallar area was viewed as an insult to their community by the Kallars. The dalits who had filed their nominations were forced to withdraw by the dominant Kallars. Elections were then postponed. When the elections were held sometime later with fresh nominations, booth capturing by the Kallars compelled the government to conduct a repoll. Murugesan, a dalit leader was elected as Panchayat president in that election, but was prevented from taking office by Kallars, who locked the door of the village Panchayat office. The office is located in the main village where the upper caste people live. When Murugesan and five other dalits were coming by bus from Madurai after meeting the district collector, the bus was forcibly stopped by a gang of Kallars near Melavalavu. All the passengers fled.

2 Information drawn from the reports of Frontline (dated July 12-25, 1997, vol 14, No 14, pp 112-113) and the observation from the author's own fieldwork.

the gang chased these six dalits and attacked them with sickles. Murugesan and the other five died on the spot on June 30, 1997. Murugesan's head was chopped off and thrown into a well, located one km away from the spot of the attack.

The brutal killing of six dalits was the final result of the war of manoeuvre. The political participation of the dalits at the local level was constantly viewed as an attack on the traditional village power structure.

"The new panchayats are perceived by the traditional powerful groups as a threat. When the panchayats had neither power nor finance and existed in the form without content, their membership was just a status symbol. Now they have status plus power. The panchayats control local resources and their presidents are the first citizens of the villages, during temple festivals they are honoured" (Mathew, 1997).

Apart from this immediate factor, there was another, i.e. the withdrawal from the traditional service roles. The process of withdrawing from the 'impure' service roles was started in Melavalavu in the late 80s. Now the Paraiyars of Melavalavu have completely withdrawn from such roles and duties. The act of withdrawal has created a kind of socio-psychological crisis among the caste Hindus, particularly the Kallars, because they were forced to appoint substitutes from their own communities in the place of Paraiyars. The act of withdrawal cannot be treated or interpreted as a mere change in occupation because it has not only broken the ritual purity of the caste Hindus but also hurt the caste Hindu ego.

Oonjanai Carnage, 1979³

Oonjanai village is located 10 kms. away from Devakottai town, in Sivaganga district. The total population of Oonjanai was 1,982 during 1997, out of which 788 were scheduled caste Pallars who are numerically second to the Kallars. Pillais, Asaris, Nadars, Navidars (barber caste), Vannars, Chakkliyars, Chettiars and Paraiyars are the other castes found in this village. In Oonjanai, the Pallar's residential location is called Chinna-Oonjanai and the area where the Kallars and other castes live is called Periya-Oonjanai. Paraiyars and Chakkliyars live neither within the Pallar area nor within the upper caste area, but separately on the northern side of Periya-Oonjanai.

On 28 June 1979, five Pallars of Oonjanai were killed and 29 others were injured in the violence near Chinna-Oonjanai. Houses of Pallars were

3 It is written both based on the basis of information drawn from the Tamil Publication 'Oonjanaiyil Vanjanai', a booklet (1983) published by Nitharsana Veliyeedu, and on observations from my own field work.

burned, and cattle in their colony were killed. The loss of life and property was the price paid by the Pallars for their assertiveness in the matter of Ayyanar temple honours and claims of rights over the public dais, which was built both by the Kallars and Pallars.

During festivals, the people of Oonjanai worship Ayyanar by taking a painted clay horse (Puravi Eduppu) to the deity. Offering to the deity is usually done in two ways: in the form of individual offering and in the form of caste offering. As a part of the festival, the people of Oonjanai organised dramas and folk dances on the public dais. But in 1966, a dispute arose over the rights of using the public dais and subsequent tension between Kallars and Pallars led to the closure of the festival. After as many as 13 years, dalits had expressed their desire to participate in the festival when the Kallars were preparing for the festival. But the Kallars refused to accommodate them in the festival. The dispute then went to the district collector. With the help of the district administration, the disputants reached an agreement. They agreed to celebrate the Ayyanar festival on different dates. According to the agreement the Kallars were to celebrate the festival on 5 June 1979, and the Pallars were preparing to celebrate it on 9 June 1979. However, the Kallars breached the agreement and did not allow the Pallars to celebrate the festival claiming that taking out the clay horse was their exclusive right. The subsequent hostility between Pallars and Kallars led to the massacre of five Pallars and the closure of the Ayyanar festival once again. Till today the people of Oonjanai do not want to revive the festival for fear of a possible violent clash between the Pallars and Kallars.

Temples are not mere places of worship, but centres of power as well. Temple honours are not mere rituals, but symbols of power for the caste Hindus. Interpreting the dalit struggle for temple entry and the claim for the share in the temple honours as mere religious acts would not adequately explain dalit perception. They are struggles for their cultural rights and a struggle against the local power relations. Thus, the loss of life and property in the violence against dalits of Oonjanai was essentially the result of the 'politics of war of manoeuvre'.

The efforts of the subaltern dalits to broaden their political base and political composition by transcending their caste affiliations and aligning with other non-caste political forces like radical left movements, human rights and women's right movements also earns the wrath of the caste Hindus and the State, because in this 'politics of war of positions', the counter-hegemonic political formation of the oppressed is much more concrete and ideologically well equipped. It is a kind of hegemonic process in which class transcends its own class interest by establishing its relations with similar democratic forces in a civil society. However, the hegemonic class retains its class dimensions.

In our context, dalits realised their 'war of position' in two ways: first by accepting the support of other non-class and non-caste democratic political forces, and second by converting the dalit movement into political parties. After every incident of violence against them, the dalits receive support from various democratic political forces. Human and civil rights movements extend support by submitting fact-finding reports to the press and organising public meetings and demonstrations against caste violence.

The very act of dalit movements converting to political parties shows their effort to give their movement a non-caste political character. In another sense, the act of conversion indicates the ongoing ideological shift towards parliamentary politics. The near impossibility of winning a general election with a single caste support base forced the dalit political parties to join other mainstream or established political parties. For example, for the first time both the Pudhiya Tamizhagam (a political party with a large following among the Pallars of southern Tamil Nadu) and Dalit Panther of India (a movement which has a large following among the Paraiyars of northern Tamil Nadu) jointly fought the 1999 Lok Sabha elections under the Third Front Alliance led by Tamil Maanila Congress. In the process of participating in parliamentary politics, these dalit movements tend to lose their earlier caste affiliations (but not the caste identity). This new shift is a manifestation of the war of position because they have realised that it is no longer possible and easy to counter the State outside parliamentary politics. But both forms of war of position have earned the wrath of the caste Hindus. Given below are two incidents of violence in which dalits were attacked by caste Hindus and the police.

The Tirunelveli Massacre, 1999⁴

Police atrocities against dalits are not new either in Tamil Nadu or for the Tirunelveli region of south Tamil Nadu. In 1996, Kodyankulam, a village near Tirunelveli town, had experienced the worst form of State terrorism in the form of police violence. Police not only looted and destroyed the properties of dalits but also attacked the dalits, particularly dalit women, and left them with severe mental and physical injuries. Another notable episode of police violence occurred in Tirunelveli City, in front of the district collectorate. On 23 July 1999, about seventeen people lost their lives in the brutal police attack on a procession taken out in support of a labour struggle. Most of the participants were dalits. The victims included two women and a child. A procession was organised by the Pudhiya Tamizhagam to put pressure on the Government of Tamil Nadu to find an early solution to a long-pending wage-related dispute in

4 This is completely based on the Frontline report vol 16, No 16, July, 31-Aug 30, 1999.

a tea-estate at Manjolai in Tirunelveli district. The release of 652 plantation workers from jail was also one of the main-demands. They were lodged in jail following a demonstration before the same collectorate on 8 June, 1999. They also demanded that the state government take over the administration of the tea estate run by the Bombay-Burmah Trading Company, a demand that was turned down several times by the government of Tamil Nadu. This police action was condemned severely by various political parties and human and civil rights movements in Tamil Nadu. The government of Tamil Nadu appointed a commission of inquiry under the chairmanship of a retired Supreme Court judge to inquire into the incidents of violence.

This incident of police violence at Tirunelveli involves two important events in the history of the dalit struggle, i.e. for the first time in this struggle for the Manjolai Tea Plantation workers, Pudhiya Tamizhagam has taken up the class issue for its struggle, and its struggle for the plantation workers drew the participation of varied political forces like Tamil Maanila Congress, CPI and CPI (M). These two important events and the changes in the political characters of Pudhiya Tamizhagam provide evidence of the changing political identities of dalits towards 'war of position'.

Election Violence at Chidambaram, 1999⁵

The Lok Sabha elections of 1999 formed a watershed in the history of dalit politics in Tamil Nadu. For the first time, militant dalit movements like Dalit Panther of India (DPI) have joined the mainstream politics. And also for the first time the DPI and Pudhiya Tamizhagam jointly fought the general elections. On September 5, 1999, Chidambaram a reserved constituency had experienced large-scale poll-related violence in which dalits were prevented by the backward class caste Vanniyars from voting, and in many polling booths the DPI booth-agents were attacked and forced to leave. In a subsequent clash between Vanniyars, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party cadres and Paraiyar dalits, the Paraiyars' houses were burnt down and their property damaged. This poll-related violence against dalits should be seen in the context of the emergence or rise of DPI and its convenor R. Thirumavalavan in north Tamil Nadu, where DPI has a large following amongst the Paraiyars. The emergence of the DPI has eroded the mass base of Paataali Makkal Kattchi (PMK) in the form of moving the Paraiyars away from the vote bank of PMK. The growth of militant Vanniyar caste organisations like Vanniyar Kula Chingangal (Lions of Vanniyar caste) had started affecting the decade-long peaceful coexistence and political alliance between the Paraiyars and the Vanniyars, which was brought by Dr. S. Ramadoss of PMK after enormous effort and

5 Frontline, vol 16, No 20, Sep 25- Oct 8, 1999 and Vol 17, No 1, Jan 8-21, 2000.

political mobilisation. The consolidation of the Paraiyars under the leadership of DPI and other dalit political parties has provoked the Vanniyars and the political forces of Vanniyars to attack the dalits.

The analysis of the last two incidents of violence against dalits shows that the violence unleashed by the caste Hindus and the police was largely a response to the political identity formation at the level of war of position. Thus, Dalit politics both at the levels of 'war manoeuvre' and 'war of position' always ends with large-scale violence in which the dalits are always victims.

II. VIOLENCE AS DISCIPLINING

The years of caste oppression in the form of untouchability and caste violence against the dalits indicate the efforts taken by the caste Hindus to maintain the status quo as a hegemonic power in Indian society. Caste violence against dalits is not a spontaneous and unplanned action of caste Hindus, but a well-designed assault. From the caste Hindu or aggressor's point of view, violence is used basically to contain the violence of the dalits that is often expressed in the form of subversion of traditional caste rules and norms.

The process of containing the violence of the dalits is often realised in two forms of disciplining: (i) **destruction of material life** in the forms of looting and destroying the property and burning the houses of the dalits and (ii) **destruction of moral life** in the forms of rape of dalit women, decapitation of dalit leaders and forced subjection to degrading public punishments like undressing of dalit men and women in public and forcing dalits to march in 'donkey processions'⁶. It is an assault on the moral life because it is a punishment for the community. The individual is punished here to discipline the community because he or she is the bearer of the community and its morals.

The violence against dalits at Kodiyankulam in 1995⁷ is a classic example of police atrocities against dalits and the destruction of material life of the dalits. Kodiyankulam is an all-Pallars village in Tuticorin district in south Tamil Nadu. The village is economically better off compared to many of the Thevar or Maravar (a numerically dominant BC caste) villages around. The villagers of Kodiyankulam are wealthier, as at least one person in each family is employed in Dubai and other Gulf countries. Their homes are filled with foreign-made electronic and electric goods. The villagers of Kodiyankulam are not only

6 This is a kind of public torture in which the convicts are taken in procession on donkey with black and white marks on their bare bodies and shaven heads which they are forced to bear. This punishment is still in usage in many parts of rural Tamil Nadu.

7 Author's field observation immediately after the incidence and the Frontline (Oct 20, 1995, Dec 1, 1995 and Dec 24, 1999) reports were used here as the source to write about the incident.

well off but also educated IAS officer, doctors, engineers and lawyers amongst them.

On 31 August 1995, the police attacked Kodiyankulam in the name of a door-to-door search for weapons because a few days ago the local leaders of the Pallar community assembled in the village to decide upon the future course of defensive action against the possible attacks by the Thevar community. On the pretext of a search for weapons, the police broke doors and went on a rampage. They poisoned the drinking water by pouring diesel and kerosene and dumping insecticide in the well. They mixed foodgrains with pesticides and broke pots and pans, destroyed all electronic and electrical goods and looted ornaments and cash. The total damage is estimated at three crores of rupees. A national magazine, *Frontline*, reports the event thus:

"The purpose of a four-hour-long police operation was to destroy the economic base of the village" (December 24, 1999, p. 41).

The police violence against dalits at Kodiyankulam had brought out the casteist character of the law-and-order machinery of the State. The selective destruction of the economic base of the dalits reflects almost the kind of resentment caste Hindus have against the economic well-being of the dalits. The advancement in the material life of the dalits is seen as a sign of growing independence and also as 'things' grabbed from the caste Hindus. Thus violence is realised here as an act of 'levelling'.

"When a minority, or another community, is under attack by a crowd in the name of equalisation of entitlements, then the wanton destruction of the lives and property of the 'enemy' is inseparably accompanied by the personal appropriation and incorporation of that enemy's status, genius and wealth. This orientation is what has already been labelled 'levelling' - that is, eliminating the alleged advantages enjoyed by the opponent and redressing the inequality allegedly suffered by the aggressor, usually a majority" (Tambiah, 1997, p. 275).

Invariably in all the houses, the portrait of B R Ambedkar was broken by the police. It stands as yet another proof for the casteist mentality of the police. The destruction of a symbol of community pride in this case shows not only their anger but also the levelling of the victim's community pride.

The violence as levelling not only redresses the inequality allegedly suffered by the caste Hindu aggressors but also forces the dalits to return to their so-called inferior social status by defining the limits of material advancement for the dalits.

Why is the violence against dalits in the forms of rape, physical elimination of dalit leaders through decapitation and verbal abuse in public

places called destruction of moral life? Because it is an attack on the 'morality' of the community, which is often defined in terms of 'manhood' of the community. The manhood of the community lies in the chastity of its women. In their article on 'Caste and Gender', Vasanth and Kalpana Kannabiran (1991) made the following observations on the manhood of the caste.

"Gender within caste society is thus defined and structured in such a manner that the 'manhood' of the caste is defined both by the degree of control men exercise over women and degree of passivity of the women of the caste. By the same argument, demonstrating control by humiliating women of another caste is a certain way of reducing the 'manhood' of these castes" (Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 1991, p. 2131).

The act of raping of dalit women is seen as castration of the whole dalit community because it reduces its manhood. "...rape is the ultimate punishment - for the women certainly but more importantly and symbolically for the men." (Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 1991, p. 2132).

Thus, the manhood of the community is mediated through its effort to protect the chastity of its womenfolk. Both the act of rape and the following observations on decapitation should also be seen within the context of Tamil cultural notions like '*Maanam*' (honour), '*Karppu*' (chastity) and '*Veerum*' (valour). All these notions stand for community pride, and any attempt to dishonour the member of the community is taken as an assault on the morality and honour of the community. The observation of Rajadurai and Geetha (1996) on the notion of Tamil honour is very relevant here.

"The Tamil's honour, '*Maanam*', thus lies, by implication, in the defence of a woman's purity. A woman's sexual purity, her 'virginity', in turn become an ambiguous value marker, for it denies ideal Tamil society, uniqueness of the Tamil language, the superiority of Tamil institutions" (Rajadurai & Geetha, 1996, p. 566).

Another common form of violence in Tamil Nadu is decapitation. Most of the time dalit leaders are targeted in this form of violence. Decapitation can be interpreted as another form of castration. The interpretation of decapitation as castration should be seen within Tamil cultural notions of honour and valour. Decapitation is total defeat for the victims and valour for the aggressors. Losing of valour is interpreted in Tamil culture as losing of one's manhood. Even within psychoanalytic theory of symbolism, chopping the head off is a castration symbol (Freud, 1961, p. 366). Thus, Tamil society understood the cultural notions of '*manam*' (honour) and '*veerum*' (valour) not as values or consciousness of some individual but as community pride and purity. K Kailasapathy in his analysis of Tamil heroic poetry, observes the honour of a hero in the following way.

"For honour and dishonour were ultimately thought of in terms of the life and death of the hero. They were the criteria of his standing in society. Honour, although it was concerned with the individual's consciousness, and thereby its very basis, was in need of social response and recognition" (Kailasapathy, 1968, p. 246).

"Thus honour essentially means renown and glory. In them a person's honour finds its social expression. It is a common observation made of several societies where the concept of honour is highly developed and cherished that honour is associated with the existence of concrete social benefits such as rewards and ornaments, which elevates their bearer above the multitude of the community" (Kailasapathy, 1968, p. 231).

Invariably, in all the major incidents of violence against dalits, women were targeted and the leaders were decapitated by the caste Hindus. These individuals were targeted not only to punish them but also to discipline them. Both violence as punishment and violence as disciplining are deliberate acts of domination. The domination in terms of physical oppression thus makes the dalits understand dominance only in physical terms.

III. ELUSIVE DISTANT DOMINANCE AND SUBSTITUTED IMMEDIATE DOMINANCE

The history of caste clash and particularly the violence against dalits in post-independence Tamil Nadu has brought some complexities to understand the question of 'Dominance'. The violence against dalits is often understood here only in terms of physical repression not in terms of ideological oppression. Before we answer the question as to why it is understood that way, it is better to introduce the Gramscian concepts of 'coercion' and 'consent'. I have borrowed the concept of 'coercion' to explain the physical repression of the State and the caste Hindus and 'consent' to interpret the ideological dominance.

"Government with the consent of the governed - but with this consent organised, and not generic and vague as it is expressed in the instant of elections. The State does have and requests consent, but it also 'educates' this consent, by means of the political and syndical associations; these, however, are private organisms, left to the private initiative of the ruling class" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 259)

The above observation of Gramsci on the nature of consent shows clearly that consent operates as a medium of ideological dominance of the State and the ruling class. The ideological dominance is possible here only when there is consent of the dominated. The phrase "it also 'educates' this consent" shows how the State attains its ideological dominance through the

consent. But both at the time of the clash between the caste Hindus and the dalits and the one-sided violence against dalits, the dalits' understanding of dominance is very much influenced by the conception of immediacy.⁸ It is always the immediate coercive power that becomes the dominance for dalits, not the ideological dominance at the distance. In our context, it is the immediate dominant castes and the repressive State machinery like the police that become the dominance for dalits because it is they who always perpetrate and perpetuate violence against them. Even though the distant dominance or the ideological dominance of the State and the brahmanical Hindu social order behind these instruments of physical oppression are equally responsible, it always eludes the dalits in their understanding of violence and dominance by making dalits believe or by getting their consent that it is neutral and morally more responsible than the coercive immediate dominance.

In my recent fieldwork in various communally-sensitive villages in South Tamilnadu which have witnessed three decades of caste clashes and anti-dalit violence, I found that dalits were aggrieved by the destruction of their material advancements and community morality by the caste Hindus and the law - and - order machinery of the State. Since the late 50s they have been struggling to defend themselves from violent attacks and to get justice for violation of their civil and human rights.

In all these villages, I was told by the dalits that the caste Hindu Kallars and the local police were mainly responsible for this violence. It was not the other caste Hindus neither the State and Central Government nor the higher authorities in the police and revenue departments. There were many incidents of violence where dalits were attacked either by the caste Hindus or by the police. Several times dalits were attacked by the police with the support of the caste Hindus either in the form of taking sides with the caste Hindus or by becoming silent spectators of violence against the dalits. But there are many cases of atrocities in which dalits appealed to the state and central governments and petitioned to the higher authorities in the police and revenue departments like the Director General of Police, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Superintendent of Police and the District Collectors on the assumption that they are neutral. Dalits believe that the higher authorities and power at the distant place are always sensitive to their problems, whereas in fact these authorities and institutions belong to the same oppressive system that unleashes the violence against them. But the modus operandi is different, dominating as it does through consent and ideology. But as we mentioned earlier, the

8 Though I borrowed the concepts of 'immediacy' and 'distance' from Patnaik (1988), I understand it in a different theoretical context by equating immediacy with the Gramscian notion of coercion or domination and distance with his conception of consent or hegemony.

ideological dominance or the distant dominance always eludes the dalits in their understanding of violence and oppression. The following quotation is a translation of a petition written by Nagesh, a dalit leader of the village Narasingampatti (a revenue village, under Melur taluk of Madurai district) to the Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu, on 17 December 1992, about the local police nexus with the caste Hindu Kallars in handling the cases of violence against the Paraiyars of Narasingampatti. To understand the demands of the petition it is very necessary to understand the background of the event that led to this petition being written.

Violence at Narasingampatti, 1992

Narasingampatti is located about 21 kms from Madurai city and 9 kms from Melur. It consists of Kallars, Pillais, Konars, Paraiyars, Brahmins, Asaris, Nadars and Nayakkars. The total population of the village is 2,903, out of which 936 are scheduled caste Paraiyars.

On 14 April 1992, 46 huts of Paraiyars were burnt to the ground by the caste Hindu Kallars as a reaction to the entry of dalits in the public auctioning of palm and tamarind trees of the local panchayat unions. The Kallars denied this completely. According to the Kallars, 46 huts were deliberately set on fire by the dalits to get free financial assistance from the government to build pucca concrete houses. (But I found the Kallar's version untrue because all rebuilt houses were reconstructed from their (dalits) own resources, not with financial assistance from the government). The dalits sent petitions and made complaints to the higher police authorities for their intervention. Not a single petition was for financial assistance to rebuild their houses. Until the public auctioning in 1992, the other castes were discouraged, and the dalits were barred by the Kallars from taking action. This monopoly of Kallars was completely challenged by the dalit Paraiyars on 27 March 1992, by entering into public auctioning. With this short note on the background, I quote some statements from the petition of Nagesh (who took the auction on behalf of the Paraiyars of Narasingampatti) to show how dalits conceive immediate dominance as forces of oppression and distant dominance as forces of neutral power and authority.

"Our village Narasingampatti is in the Melur taluk of Madurai district. We scheduled caste Paraiyars live in a separate colony just outside the village. With the support of 'Thevar Peravai' (a powerful caste association of Kallars, Maravars and Agamudaiyars) the Kallars of our village forcibly collect taxes and take auction of village tanks, tamarind trees and palm trees. In the name of village welfare they spend all the money that comes from the auction on their own community.

As a scheduled caste Paraiya, I formed a Communist Party trade union. I have been functioning as a member of the Taluka committee of the trade union. One-and-a-half years back on behalf of our Paraiyar community, I took an auction of tanks and tamarind trees. The Kallars, who could not tolerate our entry into auction, along with office-bearers of Thevar Peravai, set fire to our huts. Even though there are many police cases against the Kallars aggressors, with the support of the local police station they have escaped legal action. Without filing a charge sheet, the Inspector of the local police station acts in favour of the aggressors.

Therefore, I pray you, your highness, Director General of Police, please give protection to our life and property by taking legal action against the aggressors and the police officers of Melur local police station who have some nexus with the aggressors".
- Petition of Nagesh -

The content and the statement of the above petition clearly show the dalits' conception of power and dominance. The dalits understand that the Director General of Police at the distance is always neutral and more responsible than the local police officials like inspectors and sub-inspectors of police.

The answer to the question, viz. how do some categories of power relation become immediate and the other is increasingly viewed as distant in the world view of dalits, can be derived from Arun K. Patnaik's theoretical proposition of Gramscian 'common sense'.

"As Gramsci (1971: 348) argues, the commonsensical views are directly received from the structure. It is meaningful in its immediate surroundings of space and time, even though it may have certain direct affiliations with the object of 'immediacy'. The distant objects in a totality, from a commonsensical view, seem to be the external ones. The internal character of the external objects are not intuitively grasped, at least not in the same way as the immediate objects are grasped" (Patnaik, 1988, PE. 5).

Thus, immediacy is largely determined by the intuitive grasp of the social system, which is physically nearer. Whatever comes into the intuitive grasp is immediate; everything else is distant. At the time of violence and after, the internal ideological character of hegemony of the State and the brahmanical social order is beyond the perception of the dalits. Since the psycho-physical violence of the caste Hindus and the police falls very much within the intuitive grasp, it becomes immediate for them. M. Chandra's letter from the women's wing of a dalit caste organisation called 'Devendra Kula Velalar Sangani', to the Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission, can explain the problem of dalit understanding of immediate dominance. The letter was written in the

context of a temple-related violence at Kovil Petti (a town in the Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu), in which dalits were attacked and their properties destroyed by the Kammavars and Thevars.

"There was a difference of opinion regarding the temple rituals during the festival on 13.4.97. But at the intervention of the DRO, Sub-collector, and other governmental officials, a compromise was reached whereby the Kammavar community would draw the chariot on the 9th day festival and once the deity returns to the sanctum, the poojas could be conducted by all communities. But some anti-social elements created trouble on this day. Our houses were damaged and looted. The people behind these atrocities were the Kammavars and Thevars who were against us. But the police officers, in order to harass us, foisted false cases against our people..

The Thevar community people, using their money and muscle power, have been terrorising our people for the past two weeks. They have imported mercenaries and were manufacturing sophisticated bombs, which they were hurling at our women and children and preventing people (from) getting out their homes even to go for employment. Even though we made repeated complaints to the police, acting partially, no action was taken by the people concerned. Our people were not given any kind of protection. The police failed to prevent attacks on us" (Soco Trust Report, p. 113)

Thus, the Thevar and the Kammavar and the police were perceived as 'immediate dominance' here because of their physical violence. The act of petitioning by the dalits to the higher authorities in the government about the ruthlessness of the immediate dominance itself reveals their understanding of distant dominance always as forces of neutrality and justice.

There are several incidents of violence against dalits and petitioning to national and state Human Rights Commissions. But no action has been taken so far by these institutions. Commissions of inquiry into the incidents of violence against dalits appointed by the state governments under the chairmanship of various retired judges do not differ much from the other human rights bodies of the government in their approach to violence against dalits. Findings of these commissions of inquiry are mostly pro-government. A case in point is the police firing at Thuraiyur on 5 May 1997. Police opened fire at the angry dalit protestors in which two dalits of Thuraiyur village were killed. The dalits of the Pallar community staged a protest to demand the immediate release of their leader, Dr K Krishnasamy, who was arrested for violating the police order. Immediately after the incident, the Government of Tamil Nadu ordered a one-man commission of inquiry to inquire into the facts and

circumstances that led to the police firing. The findings of the Commission were completely based on the statements of police and police reports. In the following quotation I have juxtaposed the final observation of the commission and the statement of a Deputy Superintendent of Police before the commission.

The Commission's finding is as follows:⁹

"The unlawful assembly which had caught hold of the above three constables attempted to beat them and Philips made an attempt to cut the Grade I PC 2029 with an aruval. On seeing this, the DSP directed the Constable 1578 to fire one round. PC 1578 fired one round at 10:00 A.M. The bullet did not hit anybody. On seeing this, Philips who was holding an aruval raised it and cut the Grade I PC 2029 by name Ramasamy by saying, 'sudugindra polikai vettungada' (You cut the police who is shooting). The said constable Ramasamy warded off the said cut with his left hand and the aruval fell on his left hand. He sustained bleeding injury in between his left thumb and index finger. When the said Philips raised the same aruval to cut and kill the Grade I PC Ramasamy again, the DSP directed PC 1578 to shoot at Philips and at 10:02 A.M. PC 1578 fired one round. This hit the left hip of the said Philips and he fell down with the aruval, which he was holding at that time. On seeing this, the unruly crowd scattered and ran in all four directions" (p. 4).

The statement of a DSP before the Commission:¹⁰

"The unlawful crowd which had kidnapped the three constables were attempting to beat them and Philips was attempting to cut Grade I PC 2029 by name Ramasamy with aruval and seeing this, P.W. 3 Deputy Superintendent of Police directed the Constable 1578 to shoot one round, and one round was made by PC 1578 at 10:00 A.M. Fortunately it did not hit anybody. At the time, Philips was holding an aruval raised it and cut the Grade I PC 2029 by name Ramasamy by saying 'Sudugindra polikai vettungada' (You cut the police who is shooting). The said constable Ramasamy warded off the said cut on his left hand and the cut fell on his left hand and caused bleeding injury in between left thumb and his index finger. The said Philips raised the same aruval to cut and murder the Grade I PC 2029 Ramasamy again. Immediately

9 This is quoted from the abstract of the final report submitted to the Government of Tamil Nadu (1997), by a one-man commission of inquiry, headed by Thiru M Kamatchi, into the facts and circumstances leading to the opening of fire by the police at Thurajur.

10 This is quoted from the final report submitted to the Government of Tamil Nadu (1997), by a one-man commission of inquiry, headed by Thiru M Kamatchi, into the facts and circumstances leading to the police firing at Thurajur.

P.W. 3 Deputy Superintendent of Police directed the constable 1578 to shoot at Philips and 10:02 A.M., the PC 1578 fired one round and it hit the left side hip of Philips and he fell down with the aruval, which he was holding at that time. Later the Tehsildar took care of the aruval. Thereafter the entire crowd scattered and ran in all four directions" (p. 5).

I do not see any difference between the observations of the Commission and the version of the police to the Commission. But dalits still demand these types of State interventions. It clearly points to contradictions in their understanding of dominance in the civil society: On the one hand, dalits do not have faith in the system of State policing, and on the other they have faith in the system of State judiciary. Similarly, dalits believe that the local dominant castes are responsible for their oppressed status, and not the other distant ideological dominance of the brahmanical Hindu social order. Dalits do not understand that the system of oppression has two sides - one dominates by coercion and the other through ideology or consent.

The following observations on Gramscian common sense by Patnaik can theoretically substantiate the analysis better.

"The commonsensical views are thus incapable of establishing on their own 'the laws of interconnections' among the objects in their totality. And this is why commonsense in the final analysis is fragmentary. As the above cases, show, however, it is meaningful perception of the immediate situation in a totality of space and time. It is capable of perceiving the immediate actors who are responsible for its 'fate'. While the questions of immediacy are central in the structure of common sense, the distant objects, unlike the immediate ones, do not usually form the internal and directly received elements in its structure. The inter-connections between the immediate and distant objects are not self-revealing to the sense-perception of the subaltern groups" (Patnaik, 1988, PE. 7)

The question of why the dalits cannot understand the nature of the oppressive system is related to Patnaik's sentence - 'the inter-connections between the immediate and distant objects are not self-revealing to the sense-perception of the subaltern groups'. But he does not explain the reason for the same. An attempt to answer the above questions can bring new insights into the understanding of power relations that operate both in the State and civil society. I have attempted in the following pages to understand this problem by mainly drawing from the Gramscian theory of contradictory 'common sense'.

The analysis on caste violence against dalits in the last section clearly shows on one hand how dalits organise themselves in their practical political

activities and how, on the other hand, these practical political activities meet with very serious resistance from caste Hindus and the law and order machinery of the State. Even though the politics of dalit identity at the level of 'war of position' is a process of ideological struggle, it does not make dalits fully understand the dominance in its ideological terms. The increasing participation of dalits in the parliamentary politics and the replication of hierarchical caste relations among themselves show the existence of some uncontested dominant ideologies and consent of dalits to the larger dominant social order, which are in a sense responsible for the continuance of the oppressive system. As long as politics of participating in parliamentary politics and replication of hierarchy exist, they exist completely in contradiction to the other practical political activities of dalit identity formation. On one hand, they organise themselves against the oppression of the State and the caste system, while on the other hand they accept the existing form of State in the form of participating in the parliamentary politics and accepting certain caste practices in the form of replication of caste hierarchy amongst themselves.

'The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding of the world in-so-far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousness (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences. It holds together a specific group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit any action of, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333).

The above observation of Gramsci on contradictory common sense is very relevant and significant in our analysis of contradictory dalit consciousness. Even though the politics at the level of war of position unites the dalits with other political forces of similar identity and consciousness in terms of ideology against the caste system and the State, it fails to enter the transformative politics, because it is partially absorbed into the fold of the State and the caste system in the forms of participation in the parliamentary politics and the replication of caste hierarchy. It clearly shows that his practical political activity is completely opposite to his political identity as a liberative

force. The main purpose of the paper is not to go into the details of how dalits organise themselves to overcome the contradiction in terms of 'good sense', but to understand how the dominant ideology eludes them through their uncritically absorbed political notions. The political notions and acts in terms of participation in the parliamentary politics and the replication of the caste hierarchy are not their own conception of the world but are borrowed from another group. In Gramsci's words,

"It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic: a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes - when, that is, the group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in 'normal-times' - that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 327).

As long as the act of borrowing from another group continues, it not only accepts the dominance of the other, but also fails to realise that its consent to the dominant social order is obtained through the acceptance of some dominant ideologies. How does it adopt a conception that is not its own? Or how does it accept the dominant ideologies of the State and the brahminical Hindu social order? The answers to the above questions will explain how the distant dominance eludes the dalits. I made an attempt to answer these questions first by using the Hegelian understanding of the State as an ethical community and second by subjecting Dumont's theory of caste to the Hegelian logic of 'identity' and 'difference' and the concept of ethical community.

Before we enter into the Hegelian interpretation of the State as an ethical community, and the State as the 'realisation of reason', it is necessary to discuss Hegel's understanding of civil society, because for him, civil society is also a kind of State, or rather an aspect of the State.

"Civil society - an association of members as self-subsistence individuals is an universality which, because of their self-subsistence, is only abstract. Their association is brought about by their needs, by the legal system - the means to security of person and property - and by an external organisation for attaining their particular and common interests' (Hegel, 1942, p. 157).

Civil society is also a State because the individuality or the individual will always realise its reason only in the universality or universal will. In civil society, the individual or private interests are always protected by some form of

public authorities. The universality of public authority is again an expression of particularity or individuality. For Hegel, civil society is more of universality for individual than universality for universal. As Avineri observes, 'civil society is the sphere of egoism, where I treat everybody as a means to my own ends. Its most acute and typical expression is economic life, where I sell and buy not in order to satisfy the needs of the other..but where I use the fact of need of the other as a means to satisfy my own ends' (Avineri, 1972, p. 134).

Thus, the universality in civil society is a mere instrument of individual interest. The rationality of the universal in the civil society is furthering of individuality.

"Individuals in their capacity as burghers in the State or private persons whose end is their own interest. This end is mediated through the universal which thus appears as a means to its realisation" (Hegel, 1949, p.).

For Hegel, the transcendence of civil society is the State where the realisation of reason or the realisation of man as a rational being is more of universalisation than individualisation. The Hegelian political idea of the State as an ethical community has its roots in his basic philosophical understanding of the State as 'realisation of reason'. The basic idealist philosophical tendency of viewing the material existence as an expression of realisation of some ideas takes concrete form in Hegel's philosophy of the State as realisation of reason. The reason is the objective totality through which the thought governs the reality, or in other words the real realises its essence or potential. The realisation of reason is the realisation of one's own self as a universal being or social being 'a mode of relating to a universe of human being not out of self interest but of solidarity, out of the will to live with other human beings' (Avineri, 1972, p. 132). The State is a kind of realisation of reason in which the individual self realises its universality or it brings the real into line with the essence.

The individual self realises its universality through the process of identity and difference of the subject in its self-development. The process of identity and difference must be seen as a process created by the subject's own movement towards the realisation of its essence. In its movement, the subject itself puts forth the necessary relation of itself to its opposite. It shows that the subject has power over its development by keeping itself in spite of its existence as a negation of itself, an otherness. Now the subject becomes object in its relation to its 'otherness'. This is realised through the process of identity and difference.

In the Hegelian understanding of the self-consciousness, 'I' as the 'identity' of the 'self' (I) and the 'other' (not-I) is also the difference of the self

and the other. In the process of identity and difference, the self identifies itself with the 'other' while at the same time differentiating them as non-identical in the form of understanding them as two different entities. The process of identity is itself a process of difference because by differentiating the self from the other, the self identifies with the other.

"Each is like the other in that wherein it has opposed itself to the other. By distinguishing itself from the other it thereby becomes identical (Gleichset Zen) with it; this is a cognitive process precisely in that ..for the being itself the opposition is transformed into sameness, or that the one, as it looks at itself in the other, knows itself" (Hegel, 1931: p.201)

The individual self realises its universality only when the opposition between the 'self' and the 'other' ceases to exist. It is possible only when the driving force of the process of opposites makes the 'other' a part of the self's own unity. Hegel sees the driving force in the mediating power of the self through sublating the 'otherness'.

"Self-consciousness has before it another self-consciousness; it has come outside itself. This has a double significance. First, it has lost its own self, since it finds itself as an 'other' being; secondly, it has thereby sublated that other. For it does not regard the other as essentially real, but sees its own self in the other" (Hegel, 1966: p.229).

According to Hegel, spirit is the driving force, which always unifies the opposites or the unity of opposites. Spirit is a moral totality because individuality realises its essence or potential as universal being through the mediation of spirit or the 'freedom'. For Hegel, 'freedom' is nothing but an act of obedience to the universal will or the State. The realisation of the reason as universal being is defined here in terms of one's duty and obedience to the State or universal will.

"The individual finds his liberation in duty (to the State) because 'in an ethical community, it is easy to say what man must do, what are the duties he has to fulfil in order to be virtuous: he has simply to follow the well-known and explicit rules of his own situation'. It is a truism that 'the State in and by itself is the ethical whole, the actualisation of freedom" (Pelczynski, 1971: p.26).

How does the realisation of the State as an ethical community through freedom make the ideological dominance of the State invisible to the dalits? It is through the creation of meta-communities like citizens of a nation. The meta-community of citizens is a kind of political consciousness where the identity of public and private ends is absolute.

The State is actual only when its members have a feeling of their own selfhood and it is stable only when the public and private ends are identical. It has often been said that the end of the State is the happiness of its citizens. This is perfectly true" (Hegel, 1947:265).

If the public and private ends are not identical, then there is a space for the realisation of the community identities like class and caste. If it is identical then all are citizens, no proletariat, no bourgeoisie, no dalits and no Brahmins. Such a meta-community of citizens is created through the individual's duty of political obedience or through the obligation as enforced submission to the State or the universal will.

The meta-communal identity of citizens makes the subalterns accept their oppressed condition by projecting it as a result of violation of duties and obligations to the ethical community. Thus, oppression is legitimised. Oppression is interpretatively understood here by the subaltern dalits that it is not done by some outside agency but by its own universality and ethical community of which they are a part. This inclusiveness of the ethical community through meta-community makes the subalterns finally divert their attack against the distant dominance or it eludes through the acceptance of the meta-community identity of the ethical community.

So far we have seen only how the distant dominance of the State eludes the dalit world view through its ethical content, but now we have to analyse how the brahmanical dominance eludes the dalit world view of dominance and hegemony.

Invariably, in all the villages where the dalits were victimised by the recent violence, a general belief prevails among them that the local dominant upper castes, and not the brahminical hegemony, are responsible for their victimhood. The reasons often cited for this belief are the physical non-existence of Brahmins in many villages and non-involvement in physical violence against the dalits. Why have the dalits understood violence and oppression only in terms of physical forces, and not in terms of ideological oppression?

I have attempted to answer this question mainly by using the Dumontian controversial interpretation of Hindu Social Order. I agree with Berreman's (1971) interpretation of Dumont's theory of caste as a brahmanical view of caste, but his theory of caste is used here not to interpret the caste system, but to interpret or understand the brahmanical hegemony. I hope Berreman will not object to my usage of Dumont's theory of caste to understand the brahmanical mind. Dumont's theory of caste is based on two basic theoretical propositions:

- (1) Caste system is a system of hierarchical arrangement of social classes based on the notions of opposition between the impure and pure: "Superiority

and superior purity are identical: it is in this sense that, ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status" (Dumont, 1980:56)

- (2) The binary opposition of pure and impure is sustained by the disjunction between ritual status and secular power, or in other words, purity is maintained by the encompassment of impure by the pure or ritual status.

Even though the above theoretical propositions of Dumont are about caste system, I read them more as brahmanical notions of social order than as a general theory of the caste system for reasons given below.

- (1) The very act of ranking the 'pure' superior to impure assures the brahmanical supremacy within the hierarchy of caste relations.
- (2) The impure temporal power is subordinated to or encompassed by the pure or the ritual status. It assures the advantageous position or dominance to the Brahmins by evolving an institutional ideology of Varna. By dividing society into hierarchical social classes based on the notions of purity and impurity, Brahmins occupied the top position leaving only the bottom place to the sudras. This cannot be treated as a mere division of labour, but should be viewed as a system of hierarchical division of labour.

While analysing the riddles of 'purusha sukta', Ambedkar locates the brahmanical mind behind this ideology.

"The equation of the different classes to different parts of the body is not a matter of accident. It is deliberate. The idea behind this plan seems to be to discover a formula, which will solve two problems, one of fixing the functions of four classes and the other of fixing the gradation of the four classes after a preconceived plan.

The principle underlying the 'purusha sukta' is, therefore, criminal in intent and anti-social in its results. For, it aims to perpetuate an illegal gain obtained by one class and an unjust wrong inflicted upon another" (Ambedkar, 1970, p. 15)

"...the purusha sukta is a forgery by the brahmins to bolster up their claim to superiority" (Ambedkar, 1970, p. 151)

Thus, *varna* was evolved by the brahmins as an ideological framework to maintain their supremacy. With this introductory observation on the brahmanical content of Dumont's theory of caste, we will move on to the observation, which we made in the beginning of our analysis. How can we use Dumont's interpretation of caste to explain the elusion of brahmanical hegemony from the dalits' in their understanding of dominance and oppression? The possible answer can be derived by reinterpreting Dumont's second basic proposition on caste that the pure or the ritual status encompasses the impure secular power. In another sense, it means that the Brahmins encompass the

kshatriyas, while the classes of other impure categories are also encompassed not directly by the Brahmins but through the Kshatriyas. The reinterpretation of the process of ritual purity encompassing the impure secular power as a process of making kshatriya as immediate dominance and the brahmins as distant dominance breaks the brahmanical myth that the brahmins are above the temporal world and power. The secular power represented in the Kshatriya is a mere instrument of power rather than the source of power. The real source of power is Brahmins, who represent the Brahman in terms of conforming the whole function of the society with 'Dharma'. In fact, both of them are two sides of same brahmanical Hindu social order.

"The function of the ksatriyas-'ksatra'-includes in its definition the religious duties of the prince, has functions as an 'offerer of sacrifice', which do not entitle him to perform the rites himself, but oblige him to have recourse to the brahmān. So the term 'temporal power' is only a very approximate translation of this function. On the other hand, the brahman's function, his 'power', so to speak is brahman. This is a new and final use of the term, which implies an extension of its meaning: the order which maintains the society thus structured and enables it to function is dharma" (Biardeau, 1994, p.24)

It should not be mistaken here that by reinterpreting the process of encompassment of impure by the pure, as a process of making Kshatriya as immediate dominance and Brahman as distant dominance. I understand them not as two different exclusive entities, as Dumont understands them, but as two oppressive functions of the same hegemonic principle. The distant dominance oppresses through ideology, whereas the immediate dominance rules through physical force. Smith takes almost a similar position but the logic is different.

"It may very well be too much to say, as Louis Dumont among others has, that 'the king has lost his religious prerogatives' as a result of this 'absolute' split between 'status and power, and consequently spiritual authority and temporal authority'. In the veda, at least, such dichotomies are probably misapplied- the kshatriya's royal and military power are infused with 'spirituality' and the brahmin's spirituality is represented as one kind, indeed the best kind, of coercive power" (Smith, 1994, p.27)

In the process of encompassment of the impure by the pure, the pure makes the impure an element of immediacy by distancing itself from the impure. The main purpose of making the impure an element of immediacy is basically to protect the purity by making one impure element responsible for all other impurities. In other words, secular power is given to the kshatriyas by

the brahmanical hegemonic social order mainly to avoid direct confrontation between the brahmins and the sudras. Thus, the process of encompassment can be interpreted here as a process of making some social class an immediate power centre out of their immediacy with the other social classes who are close in identity of impurity. This formulation can be meaningful only in one context where there is complete acceptance of their impurity by the so-called impure people. The continuance of the menial and the dishonourific traditional occupations by the untouchables in the villages shows some kind of acceptance of their impure status. In many of my own study area in the villages, the dalits started withdrawing from their traditional occupations. It clearly shows their resentment over the impurity, which is imposed on them. But this process of withdrawal is only a recent phenomenon. In many villages in Tamil Nadu, the untouchables are still in traditional occupations, forced by economic necessity. Then, the answer to the question as to how sudras and the untouchables accept immediate impure power just above them in the caste hierarchy as a dominance will also answer our basic question of this paper. How does the brahmanical hegemony elude the dalits in their understanding of dominance and oppression?

The Dumontian understanding of caste as a system based on the binary opposites of impure and pure with the Hegelian touch on the logic of 'identity' and 'difference' has the following explanations.

Dumont conceives the pure and the impure as opposite essence expressed in the hierarchical relations. The hierarchy is maintained through the process of 'identity' and 'difference'. To maintain the purity of a caste it should be kept separately, to prevent it from mixing with other castes of impurity. This 'difference' also brings the 'identity' of caste. The pure caste needs the service of the impure caste to maintain its purity. This process of identity and difference is mainly realised in the system of caste hierarchy by the mediation of the unity of the opposites through the ideology of 'dharma', which finally unifies the impure with the pure in the form of assigning duties to the various castes to maintain the system. The 'whole' or the moral totality absorbed the dalits in the name of dharma or duty to the whole community. This obedience to the brahmanical social order is realised not as voluntarism but as a forced obligation.

The dharma as a social obligation to the brahmanical Hindu social order creates a kind of moral collective in which the individual elements are forced to accept their positioning in the system as a part of the whole. It does not mean any equality in caste society, on the contrary it justifies the hierarchy. It justifies the hierarchical caste relations in the name of division of labour and contribution of each caste as part to the functioning of the whole caste system.

Even though the dalits are at the bottom of the hierarchy, they are in a sense forced to accept the system or to become part of it. This forced moral obligation to the system not only prevents the dalits from realising the inequalities in society, but it also makes the dalits believe that the caste system per se is not responsible for the oppression they are subjected to but only few dominant caste groups in that system are responsible for it. This is how the distant dominance of the brahmanical hegemony or caste as system eludes the dalits.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis of caste violence against dalits in Tamil Nadu, I have come to the following conclusions:

1. Caste violence against dalits by the caste Hindus and the law-and-order machinery of the State makes the dalits understand dominance only in physical terms, not in ideological terms or in terms of ideological dominance.
2. The ideological dominance of the brahmanical Hindu social order and the State are not taken note of by the dalits as it falls outside their intuitive grasp of social reality, or it is not immediate to their experience.
3. The ideological dominance is realised in the form of forced obligation to the ethical community, which is universal and exists beyond the individualities. It exists as moral totality.
4. The elusion of the distant dominance or ideological dominance of the State and the brahminical Hindu social order from the dalits through the forced obligation to the ethical community reproduces the violence against the subalterns. The elusion conceals the sources of oppression.
5. The caste violence against dalits cannot be reduced to the level of riot or law-and-order problem, because, violence against dalits is largely the reaction of the caste Hindus and the State to the emerging independent political identity of the dalits.
6. The caste violence against dalits shows the existence of triadic relations of violence. Contrary to the common perception that caste violence is a feud between the caste Hindus and the dalits, the incidents of violence at Kodiyankulam and the Tirunelveli massacre show a clear involvement of the law-and-order machinery of the State.

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