

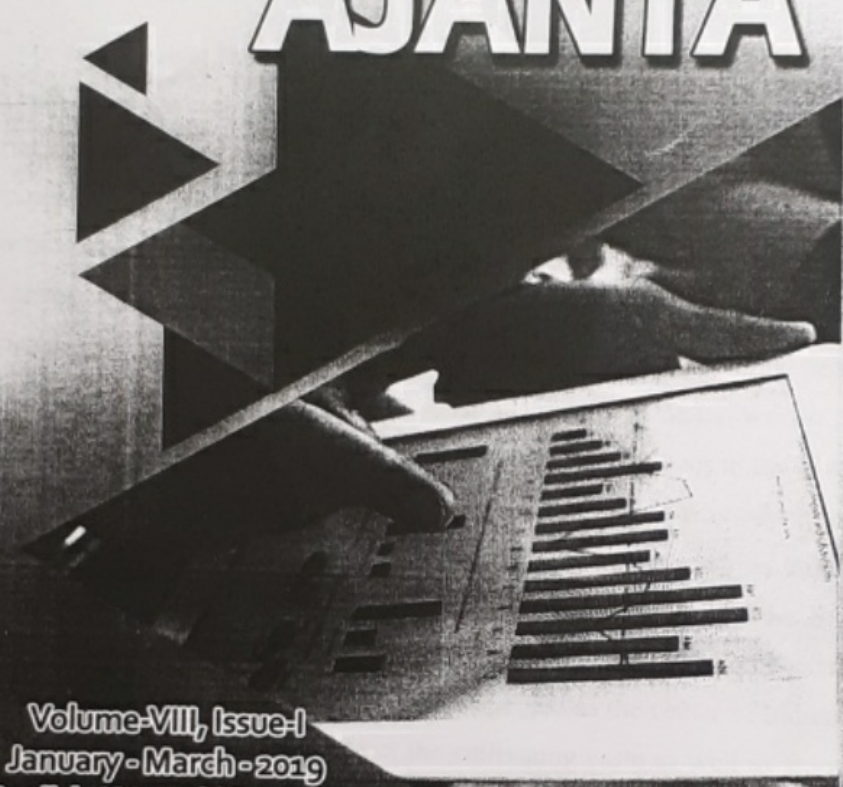


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## 10. Labour Movement and Caste Problem

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In the colonial India there was an industrial capitalism which was emerged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> c and the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> c. Bombay, Madras, and Bengal were the main areas of Industrial capitalism. In this era labors were needed by the industries for their stability and development. During the 19<sup>th</sup> c labors came from all over the India, mostly from rural areas, they came with their local identities such as caste, kinship, religion, language. When they mobilized for the struggle of their rights against the capitalist class they could not come together as a class. Generally labor movement was studied as a class struggle in colonial period, but in Indian Context they were scattered with their local identities. In India we do not study labour movement as a class base movement but we think about caste issues in the labour movement.

We know Indian society is the caste based society that's why whichever organization or movement emerges in India is the base of different identities such as caste, class, race and region. Colonial Labour movement is also influenced by all these identities. In this paper, I will discuss the issue of caste-class conflict in the labour movement with some examples.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bombay Presidency emerged as the center of Indian Industrialization. The industrial workers are recruited from the cultivating caste as well as from the laboring and artisans castes. In the other Provinces unlike Bengal the Hindus are very much in the majority in this province forming in 1911 no less than 77% of the whole population. They are scattered all over the province and in Sind alone are they outnumbered by the Muhammadans. Agriculture at that date supported 64% of the total population. In the Bombay Presidency among the cultivating castes the Marathas, Kolis, and Kunbis are most numerous. The artisans castes many of which also undertake cultivation are also numerous. They include such caste as Potters, blacksmith, oil pressers, tailors, and washer man. The weaving communities include many castes such as Koshti, Hatgar, Jed, Vinkar, etc. And numbered at the last census 2, 22,536 persons. In 1921 there were in Bombay 85 cotton spinning and weaving factories, employing a daily average of 1,46,000 persons.

### Labor Supply

Industrial workers are recruited from agriculture band to a lesser extent from the artisans classes in the village. In the chief centers of industry in India e. g Bombay, Calcutta, Cawnpore, employers are compelled to depend upon a fluctuating labor population ,consisting largely of semi -agriculturist, who migrate hundreds of miles and only reside in the towns for part of the year , returning to their villages when their labor is required for agricultural operation. There are nearly 20000 railway employees in Bombay, as two important railways(The great Indian Peninsular and the Bombay ,Baroda and central Indian Railway) have their termini in the city. Kathiawar and cutch are among the other main source of Bombay labour supply, but not so much in the matter of industrial labour. Both these regions provide large number of shopkeepers, domestic servants, and clerks, though a feature of recent times has been the growing number of artisans. Surat mostly supplies domestic servants while from other parts of Gujarat come artisans , shopkeepers, clerks and laborers. There are other aspects of migration to Bombay 1) The caste of the worker-immigrants 2) the extent to which they are accompanied by their wives and children 3) The relationship between the occupations which the migrants assume when they reach the city and the districts from which they come.

During the industrialization the untouchables were migrated to urban center for job purpose .The statistics compiled in 1921 showed that the Mahars, Holiyas, or Dheds, whose traditional occupation was that of village servants had largely gone into industry. The kolis, and Kunbis from among the cultivating castes have also done the same.. The Dheds, Mahars, Chambhars and Mochis all belong to the 'Untouchables' or depressed classes. They also come from the konkan and Deccan but they are persons of low caste who have filthy habits and live in squalor. The Dheds and Mahars work in Bombay as labourers and scavengers. Chambhars and Mochis work as mill operatives , in tanneries and other leather work. They are not of such a low caste as the Dheds and Mahars. The Principal castes which engage in industrial labor are (a) Marathas (b) Dheds and Mahars(c) Chambhars and Mochis and (d) Mohammedan sheikh. The Marathas are by far the most numerous. They are drawn chiefly from poona, Satara and other districts of the Deccan and from Ratnagiri. The Deccani Marathas, the Ghatias, have splendid physique and considerable power of endurance, the Konkani Marathas are slimmer and weaker. Both are drawn from the agricultural classes but the former worker the docks , in go-downs(ware houses),as bullock-cart drivers, etc. while the latter generally enter mills. Both will only eat food

cooked either by themselves or their caste fellows. The next important class are the Mohammedans from the Konkan and Deccan. Those from the Konkan generally become lascars (seaman), boatman, Policemen, and office servants. The decanis enter domestic services or work as artisans, Mill hands etc. It has been already pointed out that a fairly large number of schedules of the Gujarati speaking depressed classes belongs to the Meghawals and the Bhangis and of the Marathi speaking depressed classes to the Mahars. Though persons belonging to these castes can be employed for scavenging it would be noticed that a great majority of the Meghawals and the Bhangis is employed for this kind of work while only 14% of the Mahars are engaged in this work. It would be thus seen that out of 634 principal earners only 16 earners or 2.5% of the total do that sort of work in which there is fear of competition from other castes while 618 earners except a few earners who are employed as coolies either in the mills or in railways and who are chiefly Chamars, are scavengers in public or private bodies. It also shows that the occupation of the people is almost entirely their traditional one. After mid 19<sup>th</sup> century large number of Momin weavers began to migrate Malegaon and Bhiwandi. Malegaon and Bhiwandi offered especially attractive spot to settle because pre-existing Muslim communities circumstances for making cloth.

#### Employment of Untouchables

Classification of principal earners according to their employers

Employers	Cases	Percentage to the total
Municipality	517	81.5%
Mills	35	5.5%
Railways	26	4.1%
Private Bldgs	20	3.1%
Offices ,shopetc	15	2.3%
Police (Quarter)	06	negligible
Hospital	05	
Docks	05	
Jail	01	

81.5% of Municipality workers except 10 all are Scavengers. Almost all the principal earners employed in mills railways and private buildings, hospitals, Police quarter etc are Scavengers. People from Rural areas came to Urban centers which were the industrial centers of India, they maintained their relation ship with rural areas. Lack of residential places, Traditional

religious culture, Caste base marriages, maintained their caste base Superiority in the society. Caste and King ship tie were vital to the social organization of workers, but so were the affinities of region and religion , workplace and neighborhood, trade unions and political parties all of which cut across each other. Caste , regional and religious clusters formed within particular trades and occupations, similar clusters characterized residential patterns. Persons of the "depressed" and "backward" classes (i.e. Mahars, Chambhars, and Dheds) frequently find great difficulty in obtaining accommodation, as no other community will live near them. When they can not find room in the Chawls set apart for them ,they live in sheds or huts ,many of these sheds have roofs and walls made from flattened –out kerosene tins. There are no windows ,holes in the rusty tin walls and roof provide the interior with a sufficiency of light and air. A few chawls are inhabited by persons who are all following the same occupations, e.g policemen, sweepers etc the tenants of most of them are engaged in diverse callings. The Mahars chawls are so constructed that they can be easily converted at small cost into tenements consisting of two rooms and two verandas these shows the residential patterns of labour was based on caste , its similar like the village patterns of India i.e in the village of Bombay presidency there was caste based residents *maharwada, maangwada*, etc. It has been ,well accepted ,that in the India perhaps elsewhere also ,the working class tied to their primordial identities such as caste, religion, linguistic, regional etc. Caste, regional and religious clusters formed within particular trades and occupations, similar clusters characterized residential patterns. Some neighborhoods were inhabited predominantly by particular social group. Caste kinship and villages ties played a major role in the recruitment of labor . Workers of a particular caste (or religion) or migrants from particular districts came to be attributed with a special with a special aptitude for specific trades. Castisim was to become a major issue for the labour movement, give the proportion of Dalit in the textile workforce. For the first time it came up during the general strike of 1928 , which was dominated by the communist . The communist totally neglected the fact that a significant part of the work force comprised of the Dalit community , who were facing caste discrimination in the textile mills. The Capitalist exploited the primordial identities of the workers, such as caste, religion in order to dilute their unity. This started with the mode of recruitment, which prevailed in the textile mills, where by the jobbers was given the task to provide a 'disciplined' workforce. This jobbers normally recruited workers through his caste, kinship, village ties. Further it was on the workers were able to get a place to stay in the

neighborhood. Dalit were denied jobs in high paid departments of which the most evident was the weaving section in the mills where the Dalit were not allowed to enter due to the stigma of 'pollution' attached to them. In spite of this, the issue practically received no attention from the communist. In fact they themselves practiced caste discrimination in their Girni Kamgar Union office where they had kept two separate water pots one for the Dalit workers and another for the non-Dalit workers. The communists were not against the Dalit, but it was their commitment towards an ideological orientation that made them believe that untouchability would wither away once they achieve their goal. Theoretically speaking, for the communists it was the capitalist system that represented the source of all the evils in the society. For Ambedkar, on the other hand, he saw just enough to wage a struggle against the capitalist system, as he identified 'Brahmanism' along with capitalism to be equally perilous to the working class movement in India

#### **General strike of 1938**

In the month of sept 1938 Congress government produced the Industrial dispute bill in the Bombay Legislative Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar and Jamnadas Mehta opposed the industrial dispute bill, in this bill the right of strike was denied by the Government. This was perhaps the first occasion when the communists publicly co-operated with Dr. Ambedkar and his Independent Labour Party. When Dr. Ambedkar originated the idea of a "one day strike" against the bill, the Communist jumped over the idea and formed a united front with him. In this strike 70% of volunteers belong to ILP. On the other hand Congress government opposed this strike, the Home minister Mr. Munshi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel were trying to fail the strike. In this strike the police fired on the workers. The enquiry committee was appointed by Congress Government. It was a partial committee. They interviewed workers and the workers made caste based statements about this strike like, "The Untouchable workers attacked upper caste women and humiliated them". This type of caste based statements were mentioned in the committee report. Communist leaders opposed the report and asked for the impartial enquiry committee in this matter. This shows that how Mill owners and government took advantage of Caste consciousness among workers to break the strike

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