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‘SPECIAL COMPONENT PLAN FOR DALITS¹’ IN TAMILNADU

- A NEW DALIT DISCOURSE IN THE MAKING?

MANU ALPHONSE

DALIT DISCOURSES & DALIT EMPOWERMENT

Over the centuries, the multipronged struggles of Dalits for self dignity and for their due share in public resources, have been influenced and given shaped to by various discourses on Dalit empowerment.

Discourses based on ‘categories that are historically constituted, sociologically arrived and politically articulated’², such as those of Jotirao Phule and Ambedkar, have played historically significant roles in the political, economic and social empowerment of Dalit masses in India.

In recent times, at the national level in India, there have been much discussion around the discourses of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the ruling party of U.P., the biggest State of Indian union, especially regarding its replacing of ‘Brahminism’ with ‘Manuwad’ and ‘Bahujan’ with ‘Sarvajan’ etc.³ While some have acclaimed the articulations and politics of BSP as ‘a significant advance in the politics of Dalit discourse’⁴, others have criticised it as “a ‘rushing’ rather than ‘reaching’ the universal’ and ‘a regressive shift in Dalit language’”⁵

The Dalit discourses during and after the Durban Conference Against Racism, leading to greater internationalisation of Dalit discourse, have also been much analysed in terms of a ‘Third Party’, ‘NGO-isation of Dalit Politics’, a ‘Pure Politics of Discourse’ etc.⁶ The Bhopal

¹ Special Component Plan (henceforth referred to as SCP) was changed by the Indian Government, in 2006, as Scheduled Castes Special Plan (SCSP) – an action that has been widely criticised as diluting the significance of the programme. This paper consistently uses SCP – both for sake of continuity and for the rigour of the original concept.

² Rf Gopal Guru (ed.), “Atrophy in Dalit Politics”, DIC Book Series: Intervention I, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2005. (“Categories” is the term used by Gopal Guru)

³ Rf D.L. Sheth, “Divergent Discourses in Dalit Politics”, Gopalguru (eds) “Atrophy in Dalit Politics”, 2005

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Rf Gopal Guru (ed.), 2005, Introduction

⁶ Ibid; also Prakash Louis, “political Sociology of Dalit Assertion (especially the two chapters on “Durban and Dalit Discourse” and “Post-Durban Dalit Discourse

Declaration⁷ and the Vancouver Declaration⁸ have also substantially contributed to the discourse and the debates.

With the introduction, in 1991, of a market-driven, neo-liberal policy framework by both the Central and State Governments of India, discourses around “Dalits and Globalisation” have gone on⁹. While some have looked at globalisation as an opportunity for Dalits and hence to be welcomed, others have asserted that both Brahminism and Capitalism are twin evils to be resisted by Dalits.

The inauguration of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) has also resulted in discourses and counter-discourses around concepts such as “Dalit Capitalism”, “False Dalit of Capital” etc¹⁰

Dalit Discourses in Tamilnadu

The dalit discourse within Tamilnadu itself has had a very rich history. The early discourses of Ayothidhasar (1845-1914), pre-dating Ambedkar and centering mostly around Buddhist categories, have been powerfully rediscovered in the recent past.¹¹ The discourses of Viduthalai Chiruthaigal¹², Pudhiya Tamilagam¹³ and the Aadhi Tamilar Peravai¹⁴, linking the Dalit discourse with that of Tamil Nationalism, for example, have had strong influences in the recent past in the State.

The discourses around “Dalits and Globalisation” have also been sustained and intense in the intellectual and political circles of Tamilnadu¹⁵. For example, based on a detailed analysis of the process of globalisation and its variant in India especially since 1991 and a detailed description of the poor, including dalits, during the period of globalisation, S.V. Rajadurai critiques both the Dalit movements and the Left parties for having forgotten that

⁷ The Declaration was the outcome of the Bhopal Conference (12-13 January 2002), with the theme, “Charting a New Course for Dalits for the 21st Century”, organised by the Government of Madhya Pradesh, India.

⁸ The International Dalit Conference was organised by the Association for International dalit Conference, Canada, at Vancouver during 15-16 May 2003

⁹ Refer, for example, Dhanajay Rai, “Dalits, Globalisation and Economism”; Anand Teltumbde, “Globalization and the Dalits”; S.V. Rajadurai, “Dalitism and Global Capitalism” (in Tamil), Vidiyal Publications, 2003; A Marx, “Globalisation, Oppositional Politics and Dalits” (in Tamil), Adaiyaalam publishers, 2002

¹⁰ Refer, for example, Chandra Bhan Prasad, “A community caught between Manu and Adam Smith”, December 2009; “Dalit Entrepreneurs spreading their wings”, Deccan Herald, 25 February 2011; Anand Teltumbde, “Dalit Capitalism and false Dalitism”, Counter Currents, 7 March 2011; Anand Teltumbde, “False Dalit of Capital”, Tehelka, 7 March 2011; The Tamil Translation of Anand Teltumbde’s “Anti-Imperialism and Annihilation of Caste”, Vidiyal Publications, 2006

¹¹ Refer especially, G. Aloysius, “Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement among Tamils under Colonialism”, New Age International Publishers, 1998 and Three Volumes of “Iyotidasar Thoughts”, published by Folklore Research and Resources Centre, Palayamkottai, 1999

¹² ‘Dalit Panthers of Tamilnadu’, founded by Thol-Thirumavalavan, originally as a mass movement, now turned into a dalit political party

¹³ Founded by Dr. Krishansamy and identified with Pallars, the sub-Dalit Caste, prevalent mostly in the Southern districts of the State.

¹⁴ “Indigenous Tamil Movement”, founded by Adhiyamaan, representing Arunthathiyars, the third most numerous sub-dalit caste and prevalent mostly in the Western districts of the State.

¹⁵ Refer among others, S.V. Rajadurai, “Dalitism and Global Capitalism”, Vidiyal Publications, Coimbatore, 2001; A. Marx, “Globalisation, Oppositional politics and Dalits”, Adaiyaalam publications, 2002

annihilation of caste and the fight against imperialism are intrinsically linked and that both Dalits and the Left are in a historical situation where they need simultaneously fight on both fronts¹⁶.

The recent floating of the Tamilnadu Untouchability Eradication Front by the State unit of the Communist Party of India (Marxists) and their vigorous struggles on certain untouchability issues in the State as well their various initiatives around SCP has again triggered the age old debates around the role of the Left parties in India in the struggle for Dalit emancipation and empowerment. While the floating of the Front has been dubbed as merely an electoral ploy to capture Dalit votes and the traditional suspicions of most Dalit parties and thinkers have remained, the Front has indeed added a Left dimension to the discourse around SCP.

It is also interesting that, in recent years, the call to Marxists, Ambedkarites and Periyarists to come together to fight for dalit liberation as a constitutive element of over-all struggles for social equity and social Justice, has grown in the State¹⁷.

But on the other hand, in the recent past, most of the dalit parties and movements in the State seem to have run out of stream and remain fragmented and politically powerless. Just as Gopal Guru speaks of the national scene, in Tamilnadu too 'one finds a disproportionate emphasis on electoral politics and not the politics of opposition and interrogation.'¹⁸ Processes such as the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal, Pudhiya Tamilagam and Aadhi Tamilar Peravai, who, in their early days, led to substantial resurgence among dalit masses and led to very intense intellectual and political debates and processes, have, in recent years, got caught up in electoral politics and have been greatly co-opted by the Dravidian parties.

It is in this context that the discourses and the struggles around the Special Component Plan for Dalits, especially in Tamilnadu, seem to throw up seminal categories of thought and praxis, which might prove to be elements that can go into the making of a new holistic Dalit discourse, even as Dalits struggle to find effective methods and processes of empowerment in an age of globalisation and neo-liberal policy framework.

SCP – A NEW PARADIGM FOR PUBLIC POLICY FOR DALIT WELFARE

The Special Component Plan for Dalits, potentially as revolutionary as the 1989 Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, was elaborated by the Planning Commission of India, in 1979, during the 6th Five Year Plan. Based on a strong conviction that all previous approaches towards welfare of Scheduled castes had not had any

¹⁶ Rf., S.V. Rajadurai, "Dalitism and Global Capitalism"

¹⁷ Refer "Marxists, Ambedkarists and Periyarists must unite together", (Kalagam publications, 2011), a publication released on the occasion of honouring S. Natarajan, a long-term Marxist-Leninist Trade Unionist and now running a Dalit organization, called "Rettaimalai Srinivasan Front"

¹⁸ Rf Gopal Guru, 2005, Introduction

substantial impact, SCP was visualised as a paradigm shift, in terms of the underlying philosophy, methodology and approaches, towards the empowerment of Dalits.

“For twenty five long years”, as Ms. Sivakami says, “economic experts and planners kept repeating that the benefits of general growth will trickle down to marginalised sections too. And it took 5 Five year plans before this perspective could be effectively questioned.”¹⁹

“The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) marked a shift in the approach to the development of the scheduled castes. The Special Component Plan (SCP), launched for the Scheduled Castes, was expected to facilitate easy convergence and pooling of resources from all the other development sectors in proportion to the population of SCs and monitoring of various development programmes for the benefit of SCs.”²⁰

Mr. P.S. Krishnan, who, as the then Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry in charge of SCs, was greatly instrumental in conceptualising and initiating the SCP in 1978 and has been a consistent proponent of the methodology and implementation of the programme ever since, explains the core of the SCP thinking as follows:

“The SCP (and the TSP) have a constitutional mandate that commands the State to create a regime of equality, including social equality, through comprehensive measures of social justice... The starting point of the SCP should be to set apart for the SCs the population-equivalent share of the total Five-Year and Annual Plan outlay of the Centre and each State before the Plan outlay is distributed among the sectors/Ministries/departments. Within this SCP corpus, plans should be formulated for the SCs in order to achieve the aforementioned goals...”²¹

Based on significant principles of Proportionality, Universality, Auto-Decision Making and Convergence²², the SCP has become, especially over the last decade, a focal point of Dalit discourses and struggles, at the Central and States level in India.

Although a very progressive programme, SCP still remains a promise not kept and a hope betrayed – due to many reasons such as lack of political will on the part of the Central

¹⁹ Rf., “Separate Plan for Dalits in 2007”, publication by Pudhiya Kodangi, a journal edited by Ms. Sivakami, who. When she was an IAS officer and Secretary, Department of Aadhi Dravida and Tribal Welfare, Government of Tamilnadu, had powerfully raised, within the official circles, the issue of non-implementation of Special Component Plan in the State. Later Ms. Sivakami resigned her IAS post and has started a political outfit.

²⁰ Report of the Steering Committee on Empowerment of the Scheduled Castes, Other backward Classes and Minorities, Tenth Five Year plan (2002-2007), Planning Commission of India, 2002

²¹ P.S.Krishnan, “For Social justice”, Frontline, 21 October 2011.

²² Rf (among others) NCDHR, “Dalit Budget Analysis and Special Component Plan – A Primer”; National Dalit Forum, “Understanding SCP and how to access it – Ready Reckoner for Activists”, 2009; Tamilnadu Peoples’ Forum for Social Development, “Social Development of Dalits and Tamilnadu Govt Budget – A Critique”, 1999

and State Governments, bureaucratic indifference and resistance, lack of sufficient attention paid to it by most Dalit parties and movements etc²³.

The Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Scheduled Castes during Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012), with Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat as Chairman, had the following critique about the implementation of SCP by the Centre and the States of India:

“The strategy of Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (earlier known as Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes) is one of the important interventions through the planning process to give focused attention to social, economic and education needs of Scheduled Castes... It has, however, been observed that this important initiative is not getting the priority and importance that it deserves. Many of the States are not formulating and implementing SCSP as per the guidelines issued in this regard. The allocation under SCSP has not been commensurate with percentage of SC population of the States...

... It has also been noticed that even if notional allocations are made, the level of expenditure under SCSP has been much lower than the allocated amount. As a result of allocations under SCSP being lower than the required levels, the objective of bridging the gap between Scheduled Caste and the general population, measured in terms of various indicators of social and economic development, is far from being achieved. There is therefore an urgent need to enforce strict implementation of this strategy if the Scheduled Castes are to be made equal partners in the progress of the nation.”²⁴

SCP Struggles & Discourse in Tamilnadu

Although a programme initiated by the Government of India, with a mandate for the Centre as well as for all the States of India, the experiences in Tamilnadu viz-a-viz SCP have been far more substantial than at the Centre or in other States of India. Actually, the Tamilnadu experiences as well as the relative success in the State regarding implementation of SCP have been taken up later as effective models of Dalit budget advocacy both at the Centre as well as in many other States.

In 2001, when Thol. Thirumavalavan, then a member of the State Assembly, raised, during the Assembly debates on budgeting for welfare of SCs & STs, the issue of a “Separate budget”²⁵, the then Chief Minister flatly denied the existence of any such programme as SCP. But the new State Government that came to power later in the year was quick to confirm, “The Government is aware that the allocation for the Special Component Plan for Adi-Dravidar and Tribal Welfare is not Commensurate with their total population”²⁶

²³ Refer especially Social Watch–Tamilnadu, “Special Component Plan – Dalit Hopes Betrayed?”, 2004

²⁴ Rf, Report of the Working Group on Empowerment of Scheduled Castes during Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012), Planning Commission, Government Of India, 2007, numbers 3.1 and 3.2

²⁵ Thirumavalavan based his demand on the publication, “Social Development of Dalits and Tamilnadu Govt. Budget – A Critique”, published in 1999 by the Tamilnadu People’s Forum for Social Development

²⁶ Budget Speech, 2001, Government of Tamilnadu

And, finally in 2010, the State Government proudly announced during the Budget Session of the State Assembly that the State, for the first time in the country, had fulfilled the mandate of SCP, by allocating Rs 3828 crores for dalit welfare, proportionate to their population share in the State.²⁷

Even though the 2010 Announcement by the State Government was only a quantitative acceptance, and was severely attacked by civil society and Dalit organisations for the dehumanising quality of the schemes proposed²⁸, the fact that it was the first instance in the country that even such a quantitative success had been achieved is significant. And credit is due to the sustained research-cum advocacy efforts by a vast alliance of social activists, researchers and committed Civil servants in the State.

It was actually Christudoss Gandhi²⁹ and Sivakami, both during their terms as secretaries of the Adi Dravidar and Tribal welfare Department, who had originally raised serious concerns about the non-implementation of SCP in the State. And over the whole decade of 2001-10, the Tamilnadu Peoples' Forum for Social Development and later, Social Watch–Tamilnadu³⁰, have truly provided the intellectual and advocacy leadership on SCP in the State.

And the effective coming together of various forums and political initiatives with convergent interests has truly contributed to the relative success in the sphere of implementation of SCP in the State.

The Tamilnadu Dalit Legislators Forum³¹, the Tamilnadu Dalit Panchayat Presidents Forum, especially in Kancheepuram District³², the Human Rights Federation for Dalit

²⁷ Budget Speech for 2010-11, Government of Tamilnadu

²⁸ The publication, "You can STILL praise Tamilnadu Government", released on the Occasion of the Parallel Peoples' Assembly, organized by the Tamilnadu State Campaign on SCP, truly reflects the mixed response

²⁹ Mr. Gandhi is at present the Development Commissioner, Government of Tamilnadu and has been, for many years, the prime mover of the debate on SCP in the State and in the country. Among his many articles on SCP, refer especially, "Special Component Plan – A Progressive Thought" (ONGC Endowment Lecture, Dr. Ambedkar Centre, University of Madras, 2002; "Public Policy, Budgets and Dalits" (Talk at the workshop organised by the Tamilnadu Peoples' Forum for Social development and NCDHR at the Asian Social Forum, Hyderabad, 2003) and "WTO Malevolence and the Marginalised" (Keynote Address in the National Seminar on "WTO Agreements – Prospects and Challenges", St. Joseph's College, Trichy, 2001; Refer also the Report of the Sub-Group on Scheduled Castes Sub Plan, XI Five Year Plan, Planning Commission of India, 2007 (with Mr. Gandhi as the Chairperson)

³⁰ Social Watch–Tamilnadu, originally launched in 1995 as "Tamilnadu People's Forum for Social Development" as a broad State-wide alliance, linking grassroots struggles with public policy in the State, has been a pioneer in the State in the effort to link Public policy in the State with, especially, the Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ESCR) of the marginalized in the State – the Dalits, tribals, women and Children. The publications and other information about Social Watch–Tamilnadu can be accessed from their website www.swtn.org

³¹ The Forum came into existence in 2003 and has regularly come up with Statements, relating to SCP and public policy for Dalits in the State. Refer, for example, "Policy Issues and Recommendations – SCs & STs Welfare in Tamilnadu: Background Note and Resolutions", 2003

³² With effective help from District Federation for Dalit Liberation (DFDL), a local NGO, the Forum has consistently made efforts, especially in Kancheepuram District, to link SCP with the budgetary processes at the village Panchayat level.

Liberation (HRFDL) - Tamilnadu³³, the Tamilnadu State campaign on SCP³⁴, ably supported by Social Watch-Tamilnadu and the Dalits Land Rights Federation³⁵ and the Untouchability Eradication Front of the Communists Party of India – Marxists (CPM), Tamilnadu³⁶ have all played their roles in pushing forward the struggles around SCP in the State. These State-level efforts have also received greater visibility at the national level through organisations such as the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)³⁷ and National Dalit Front (NDF)³⁸ and at the international level through the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)³⁹

More specifically, the political/intellectual discourse around the SCP in the State has been mainly developed by civil servants / intellectuals such as Christudoss Gandhi IAS and Sivakami and by civil society organisations such the Social Watch-Tamilnadu and the Tamilnadu State Campaign on SCP. The Tamilnadu Untouchability Eradication Front, a unit of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) too, has, in recent years, taken up the demands around SCP as an integral part of its grassroots and political struggles.

Progressive Dalit Journals in the State, such as the “Dalit Murasu”⁴⁰ and “Pudhiya Kodaangi”⁴¹, have consistently taken up the debates around SCP.

As mentioned earlier, the discourses around the Special Component Plan for dalits, especially in Tamilnadu, seem to throw up seminal categories of thought and praxis, which might prove to be elements that can go into the making of a new holistic dalit discourse. The following seem most significant:

³³ The Forum, started in the context of the Durban Conference, as a vast network of Dalit headed organisations, consistently collaborated with Social Watch-Tamilnadu and was greatly instrumental in taking the message of SCP to the grassroots.

³⁴ The Campaign, as a broad State-level alliance, was launched in 2010. The Campaign organised protests around SCP in most of the districts of the State as well as organised a Parallel peoples’ Assembly at Chennai, coinciding with the 2010 State Legislative Assembly Debates on SC/ST Welfare.

³⁵ The Federation, present mostly in the northern districts of the State, has used the platform of the State campaign on SCP to organise protests and rallies against the non-implementation of SCP in most of the districts.

³⁶ Refer mainly the Resolution Adopted at the All India Convention on Problems of Dalits, Communist party of India (Marxists), 2006 and “Give the share of Scheduled castes’, the Declaration released at the State Conference of the Tamilnadu Untouchability Eradication Front, August 2011

³⁷ For the varied initiatives of NCDHR regarding SCP, refer their website www.ncdhr.org.in and for their main publications on SCP, refer the References below

³⁸ Refer the references below for their major publications.

³⁹ IDSN has consistently used a section on dalit budgeting in its alternatives Reports on India to the Committee on Eradication of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Refer www.idsn.org

⁴⁰ The monthly Dalit journal, started in late 1990’s has continued to be an independent, but political platform for many debates on the dalit question and the thought of Ambedkar and Periyar. SCP and Public policy for dalits has been a constant concern of the Journal. Refer for example, “We Demand a White Paper on SCP”, April 2002; “Bhopal Declaration: Need for dalit Capital”, may 2002; “Dalit Economics needs to be developed”, February 2003; Christudoss Gandhi, Special Component Plan”, Novemeber 2004; Christudoss Gandhi, “Dalit Economics”, April 2007; “50 Questions to be answered by the Tamilnadu Assembly”, cover article, March 2010; P.S.Krishnan, “Budgetary Plans that refuse to touch Dalits”, April 2011; “Rupees 450,000 Crores Denied to Dalits”, August 2011

⁴¹ The Literary Journal, started by Sivakami has consistently provided a platform on questions of land and Dalits as well as SCP. Refer, for example, Christudoss Gandhi, “Budget Dynamics and its impact on Dalit Welfare”, Puthiya Kodaangi, July 2001; “Why a separate Budget for Dalits?”, Puthiya Kodaangi, Febryary, 2007

“WHERE IS MY MONEY”⁴² – A RIGHTS-BASED DISCOURSE

“Where is my Money?”, the central slogan of advocacy-cum-mobilisational efforts around SCP in Tamilnadu and in the country, truly reflects the new mood of assertion on the part of Dalits. Solidly based on the principle of Proportionality of SCP, the campaigns around SCP have harped on the legitimate share in public, including financial, resources, that needs to be allocated to dalits.

Ms. Sivakami says, “Dalits demanding their share from public resources, made up of their tax payments, is not a concession, but a right!”⁴³. Christudoss Gandhi says, “In SCP, it is no more a question of asking or begging the State. It is our right and we should grab it”⁴⁴. The Untouchability Eradication Front holds, “Caste discriminations in political, economic and social spheres have resulted in vast disparities between dalits and other sections of Indian society. It is the legitimate right of Dalits to demand that such disparities come to an end and that they are enabled to participate in the mainstream developmental processes. From this perspective, SCP is a programme that is Rights-based as well as Entitlements-based”⁴⁵

Organisations like Social Watch-Tamilnadu have always characterised demands related to SCP as not only a right of dalits to their legitimate share in public resources, but also a right that is closely related to ‘People’s Right to Information’ and “People’s Right to Good Governance”⁴⁶

The consistent effort to depict the non-implementation of SCP by the Centre and the States as a denial of Dalit’s legitimate share in public financial resources and to calculate concretely the amount of money that has been denied to dalits year after year has been characteristic of the discourse around SCP.⁴⁷

As can be seen, this rights-based assertive discourse is very different from what could be termed as the “Reservation Discourse” that has dominated over many years and still continues to hold sway in the domain of dalit empowerment. The sad realisation, that the history of Reservation has not benefited the majority of dalits and that both the State and the non-dalit castes have managed to vitiate the whole debate around Reservations for dalits, has resulted in a section of dalits to move away from a predominantly reservation-focussed discourse, though not undermining the importance of Reservations. Most of the individuals and organisations involved in the struggle for justice under SCP reflect such a move.

⁴² Refer, for example, National Campaign for dalit Human Rights, “Reclaiming Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan: Where’s Dalit’s Money?”, June 2007

⁴³ Refer Pudiya Kodaangi, “Separate Plan for Dalits in 2007” (in Tamil), p. 5.

⁴⁴ Speech at the State Conference of the Tamilnadu Untouchability Eradication Front. Refer “Dalit Murasu”, August 2011

⁴⁵ Refer “Give the Share of Scheduled Castes”, Declaration on SCP, released at the State Conference of the Front in August 2011

⁴⁶ Refer “Budget analysis as Social Audit”, p. 13

⁴⁷ Refer, among others, “Rupees 450,000 crores denied to Dalits”, Dalit Murasu, August 2011.

It is significant to note that one of the efforts of groups fighting around SCP is to make SCP not merely a policy guideline, but a legal entitlement and a justiciable right, by approaching courts in the country. In 2007, NCDHR and Social Watch-Tamilnadu, along with a few other organisations filed a Public Interest Writ Petition in the Delhi High Court, demanding the implementation of SCP in the Union Territory of Delhi⁴⁸. Again, when a sizeable amount of money was diverted from SCP funds for Commonwealth Games expenses, the Court ordered the Government to return the money to SCP account, based on a writ petition by NCDHR⁴⁹. It is heartening that the recent Report of the Working Group on Dalit Issues of the National Advisory Council, Government of India, has seriously recommended that efforts be taken to make SCP a justiciable right.⁵⁰

It is interesting to note that this rights-based discourse around SCP has historically coincided with similar developments in the field of Civil Society Budget Advocacy⁵¹, that have been critiquing budgetary processes of Governments based on human rights based demands as per international law and constitutional demands.

At the international level, Budget Advocacy groups such as the Washington-based International Budget Partnership (IBP) have taken up the discourse of rights-based budget advocacy in a systematic way in recent years. Linking budgetary processes with, especially, Social, Economic, and Cultural rights (ESCR) has gained much strength internationally among inter-Governments circles as well as among international civil society⁵². At the Indian national level, national organisations such as the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) and the national “Peoples’ Budget Initiative” (PBI) Alliance and State-level organisations such as Social Watch–Tamilnadu (SW-TN) have been greatly instrumental in critiquing Indian budgetary processes from a human rights perspective, especially from the focal point of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) of the marginalised, like Dalits, tribals, women and children.⁵³ These various organisations have, in a sustained manner, collaborated with rights-based dalit organisations such as the National

⁴⁸ Refer the Affidavit filed in the High Court of Delhi on the Public Interest Litigation, dated 26.09.2007

⁴⁹ Refer, “Refund Dalit Funds Diverted to Commonwealth Games”, New Indian Express, 16 October, 2000.

⁵⁰ Refer “Draft Recommendations on Reforming SCSP”, Working Group on Dalit Issues, National Advisory Council, (nac.nic.in/)

⁵¹ For latest trends in Civil Society Budget Advocacy at the Global level, refer, among others, Mark Robinson, “Budget Analysis and Policy Advocacy: The role of Non-Governmental Public Action”, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK, September 2006; “Budget Monitoring & Policy Influence: Lessons from civil society budget analysis and advocacy initiatives”, Overseas Development Institute, UK, March 2007; Warren Krafchik, “Can civil society add value to budget decision making? A Description of civil society budget work”, International Budget Project, Washington

⁵² Refer, for example, Jim Shultz, “Following The Money”, The Democracy Centre, Cochabamba, Bolivia, 2002; Jim Shultz, “Promises to Keep: Using Public Budgets as a tool to advance Economic, Social and Cultural Rights”, International Budget partnership, Washington, 2002; “Dignity Counts: A Guide to using Budget Analysis to advance Human Rights”, IBP, Washington, 2004; “Budget Analysis and Economic and Social Rights: A Review of Selected Case Studies and Guidance”, School of Law, Queen’s University, Belfast, 2010; Larry Cox, “Introduction to Human rights and Budget work”, Ford Foundation, USA.

⁵³ Refer, for example, Report of National Consultation on “Using Budget for Human rights Enforcement”, Shimla, May 2008, organized by Human Rights law Network, CBGA and a host of other budget advocacy organizations as well as the Rights and Development Group of the Network of European Protestant Development Organisations (APRODEV); at the State level, Tamilnadu Peoples’ Forum for Social Development, “Budget Analysis as Social Audit”, 2002

Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) in taking the debates around SCP and Dalit budgeting as integral parts of a holistic struggle for a rights-based regime of public policy and budgeting in the country.

At a time when public policy in the country is predominantly bereft of any rights-based perspectives, but more oriented towards a patronage-oriented governance, concentrating on freebies and cheap concessions and gifts, the rights-based discourse around SCP is indeed a powerful reminder that in an unequal society like India, human rights, and especially the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) of socially discriminated communities, must become the predominant focal point of all public policy formulations and budgetary allocations.

“DALITS AS SUBJECTS VS MERE BENEFICIARIES”

- AN ENABLING VS ‘VICTIMS’ DISCOURSE

Christudoss Gandhi, one of the chief developers of the thought around SCP for empowerment of Dalit communities, begins his analysis by criticising the warped perspectives and fault-lines of budgetary processes in the country, based on a lop-sided understanding of the reality of dalits:

“Budgets for Scheduled castes in independent India...are founded on certain negative (and quite wrong) assumptions, e.g., “All SCs are poor”, “All SCs are illiterates”, “All SCs are inefficient and not adequately competent”, “All SCs are weak”, and so on and so forth... They have not recognised the strengths, potentials, excellence and intellectual quality within the SC community...”

“In their strategic planning, it is anathema to provide scope for SCs to frog-leap others. Frog-leaping SCs, in the covert opinion of planners and bureaucrats, will lead to chaotic social upheavals...”⁵⁴

Summing up the various points, Christudoss Gandhi powerfully concludes. “A cursory look at successive budgets of the scheduled caste sector in the Centre as well as in any constituent State of the country will reveal that ‘change’ is an arena, planners and programme executives still fear to tread upon... ‘Change’ is a most dreaded word in SC budgeting process. At the same time ‘change’ is the only turn of leaf that SCs have been aspiring for centuries together.”⁵⁵

It is such an assertive positive tone of the discourse that has helped the groups to critique the quality of the various schemes that the State Government comes up with from a very positive vision of Dalit empowerment.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Tamilnadu Peoples’ Forum for Social Development, “Social Development of Dalits and Tamilnadu Govt. Budget: A Critique”, 1999, pgs 31-32

⁵⁵ Idid.

So, for example, in 2010, when the state Government was boasting that for the first time, in the country, the state Government had allocated Rs 3828 crores in its plan outlay, as proportionate to their population and as per the requirements of SCP, the Tamilnadu Parallel People’s Assembly, organised by the State Campaign on SCP, and the Booklet, “You can STILL Praise Tamilnadu” castigated the State Government for the poor and even demeaning quality of the schemes visualised for dalit welfare.

Making a detailed analysis of the various schemes brought under SCP in the State for the year 2009-2010 (refer table below), the publication showed how most of the money allocated within SCP went to schemes relating to “basic amenities” and “populist schemes”, which were beggarly and never reached the real beneficiaries or squandered away by corruption-ridden schemes of freebies and cheap concessions. While a minimal amount of Rs 22 crores had been allocated to higher education, schemes related to entrepreneurship and development received no allocation.

S. No	Departments	Number of Schemes	Total allocation (In Rs Crores)
1	Basic Amenities	15	1538
2	Populist Schemes	39	1267
3	School Education	26	484
4	Agriculture	25	267
5	Health & Social defence	2	250
6	Higher Education	10	22
7	Entrepreneurial Schemes	0	0
8	Developmental Schemes	0	0
	TOTAL	115	3828

Critiquing the patronage-oriented policy regime... Raising questions such as, “Why so little for higher and professional education for dalits?”... “Why no provisions for dalit entrepreneurial schemes and development-oriented projects?” etc truly reflect a new tone of assertion on the part of dalits.

It is also significant that the discourse around SCP has, over the years, has moved from a mere stress on non-allocation and injustice done to dalits to lobbying on alternative schemes and programmes and as presenting the non-implementation of SC as equally an opportunity lost to dalits. Social Watch-Tamilnadu has always depicted the history of SCP as ‘justice Denied and Opportunities Lost’

The discourse around SCP criticises the top down approach of looking at dalits merely as pitiable beneficiaries, and calls for a policy regime where dalits will be makers of their own history, not only catching up with others , but even leap-frogging over others, where dalits will become owners of assets and institutions.

‘SOCIAL ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY’ DISCOURSE

Vs CIVIL-POLITICAL DISCOURSE

One of the serious weaknesses of most Dalit movements and parties in Tamilnadu, as elsewhere in the country, is that they, in their concentration on “share in political power” have neglected crucial economic questions in their struggles and programmes. Today, especially in the context of globalisation and market-oriented public policy frame works, these economic questions are becoming crucial in the empowerment of Dalit communities.

The discourse around SCP bases itself on the insight of Dr. Ambedkar that mere political democracy without social/economic democracy is bound to lead to basic contradictions and that dalits getting their due share in political power will become possible only as they get greater share in the economic sphere.

While civil-political discriminations against dalits do continue and need to be addressed, the discourse around SCP calls dalit movements as well as the Governments to the equally, if not more important, factor that most of the civil-political disabilities and discriminations of dalits are rooted in cruel economic injustice and that ensuring the economic rights of dalits are vitally important in taking their civil-political struggles meaningfully forward!⁵⁶

Those who have been struggling for implementation of SCP have always linked their dalit budget advocacy as a part of reclaiming dalit economic rights.⁵⁷

In this context again, the debates around SCP, as dalits demanding their legitimate share in the material, including financial, resources of the country, are bringing economic rights of Dalits, such as right to land and a share in common property resources, to the centre stage. Such economic rights of Dalits have ranged from mere reduction of malnutrition and poverty and ensuring of basic need to improving access to land, making dalit businesses

⁵⁶ Refer, for example, Smita Narula & Martin Macwan, “Untouchability – The Economic Exclusion of the dalits in india”, International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2001

⁵⁷ Refer Social watch-Tamilnadu, “Reclaiming Dalit Economic Rights & Dalit Budget Advocacy”, Power-point Presentation at the training programme on Reclaiming Dalit Economic Rights by NCDHR, 4-11 February, 2009

viable and higher educational possibilities.⁵⁸ It is also significant that the two organisations that have consistently taken the message of SCP to the grassroots are Dalit Land Rights Struggle Committee, initiated by Ms. Sivakami and the Tamilnadu Dalit Land Rights Federation, headed by Mr. C. Nicholas, the Dalit leader from Villupuram.

Thus the discourse of SCP is a clarion call to dalit movements and others that true empowerment of dalits will need great concentration of struggles towards the ideal of Economic Democracy as, articulated by Ambedkar.

“PROACTIVE STATE IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION” DISCOURSE

Refusing to get into the ongoing debate as to whether dalits must support or oppose globalisation, the discourse of SCP strongly highlights the need for a proactive State in the age of globalisation. Those who have taken up the struggles around SCP are fairly aware that besides the negative impacts of globalisation on Indian economy and livelihoods, the dalits are the least equipped to handle meaningfully the challenges posed or opportunities offered by globalisation.

Describing the perils coming from agents of globalisation, such as the World Trade Organisation, Christudoss Gandhi says, “The still feudalistic and caste-powered ruling class (of India) would not opt out of ‘globalization’, since all the liberalized growth that might be engineered shall exclusively benefit this ruling class in position, who become conduits for the globalization thrust... The Dalits and marginalised are facing a double jeopardy, first, by deprivation of their feeble preoccupations and secondly by getting pre-empted from skill-acquisition process, that has been made totally ill affordable by privatization of education... The poor in India are looking for a change agent, which WTO is certainly not...”⁵⁹

While never neglecting the negative impact of neo-liberal processes on the lives and livelihoods of the marginalised, the discourse of SCP brings into focus, the need for the State to play a proactive role in the developmental process. This is indeed a urgent need, especially given the tendency of the State to get away from all its social responsibilities, leaving it all to market forces, as part of the neo-liberal public policy framework.

In this emphasis on the critical role of the State, especially in an age of globalisation, the discourse of SCP truly reflects the concerns of Ambedkar in a colonial context, wherein he ‘recognised the critical role of the State’ and ‘strongly defended a developmental and ameliorative and consequently an interventionist approach’ and asserted that ‘the pivotal role of the State is based on the premise of a regime of rights’⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Refer Thorat Report, 2007

⁵⁹ “WTO Agreements – Prospects & Challenges”, Keynote address in the National Seminar at St.Joseph’s College, Trichy, 24 February 2001.

⁶⁰ Refer Valerian Rodrigues (ed.), “The Essential Writings of B.R.Ambedkar”, Introduction, pp.21-22

“SOCIAL EQUITY BUDGETING” – TOWARDS A UNIVERSAL DISCOURSE

Long years of struggling around the concept of SCP as a tool for dalit empowerment has led to similar organisations and groups from all over the country to come together, discovering commonalities in their struggles around “Dalit Budet Advocacy. Similarly other sections of the marginalised in the country, such as women, children, tribals etc have been coming together, discovering greater synergies around themes like “Gender Budgeting”, “Child Budgeting”, “Tribal Budgeting” etc.

A salutary outcome of all these efforts has been united search for ‘inter-sectionality’ among themselves. The recent initiative by United Nations Women (South Asia), requesting NCDHr and Social Watch–Tamilnadu to take up research projects on “Reframing Gender and Dalit Budgeting: Using the Intersectionality Framework to track budgets for Dalit women”⁶¹

The issue of ‘Inclusive Development’ and ‘Social equity’ that have gained centre-stage in the context of the XIth Five Year Plan with its theme, “Towards Inclusive Growth” and have helped the above efforts towards intersectionalities even further. There have been efforts to move towards “Social Equity Budgeting” as an effort to turn budgeting processes as major tools to bring about greater social equity in the country. And it is significant that groups that have been pioneers in the struggles around SCP have also been the first to propose ‘Social Equity Budgeting’ as an effort to synergise the energies of various sectoral budget advocacy efforts into the more universal and unifying theme of ‘Social Equity’ and ‘Inclusive Development’⁶²

By linking itself with more universal and more integrating themes such as “Social Equity” and ‘Social equity Budgeting’, the discourse of SCP, again, is a timely call for dalit movements to align with other democratic and progressive forces towards common struggles towards the goal of Social / Economic democracy for all. It is also an invitation to all non-dalit progressive forces to view the struggle for greater empowerment of dalits as an integral part of their efforts for greater justice and equality in the developmental process.

CONCLUSION

It may be true, that at present, the discourses around SCP are limited to small sections of dalits and others. But, as the inevitable contradictions of a market-oriented, neo-liberal policy framework unfold in terms of social equity and inclusive development, the issues raised by the discourses around SCP will get greater prominence. Therein lies, the significance for both dalits and for India, the significance of the discourses and struggles around SCP.

⁶¹ Refer Services Contract between UN WOMEN and Social Watch-Tamilnadu, Oct. 2011

⁶² “Social Watch-Tamilnadu, Committed to Social Equity Budgeting in Tamilnadu and India (2011-2020)”, 2011

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