

**FROM BONDAGE TO CITIZENSHIP: AFRICAN AMERICAN AND DALIT MOBILIZATION  
IN TWO SOUTHERN DELTAS<sup>1</sup>**

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## **FROM BONDAGE TO CITIZENSHIP: AFRICAN AMERICAN AND DALIT MOBILIZATION IN TWO SOUTHERN DELTAS**

This paper examines political mobilization to reduce the deepest inequalities in the two largest democracies, those along racial lines in the United States and along caste lines in India. Most relevant in this regard was the mobilization of the groups at the bottom of these social hierarchies, African Americans and India's former untouchable castes (popularly called dalits, approximately meaning "broken people"), for full citizenship. Full citizenship includes not only the franchise but also various civil rights including freedom from bondage and freedom of movement, and social rights such as entitlements to higher incomes and social security. The paper focuses on the period between the 1940s and the 1970s, when the mobilization of the two groups helped them reach some crucial goals, and identifies the conditions under which mobilization was most effective. The patterns of subordinate group mobilization in the two cases are compared. More briefly, I suggest how these patterns and the responses of polity insiders influenced the political representation that the subordinate groups gained thereafter, and the extent to which democracy was consolidated and deepened in these regions. Further research is needed to fully assess the effects of mobilization on representation and policy benefits.

While outlining certain national and sub-national trends, the paper emphasizes experiences in two regions where inequalities were particularly high until the mid-20th century – the Yazoo-Mississippi delta (called the Mississippi delta) in the southern US and the Kaveri delta in the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India. The Mississippi delta and the state of Mississippi have been the loci of the greatest subordinate group disadvantage and concentration in the US since the mid-19th century. The Kaveri delta was one such region in India until the mid-20th century. A paired comparison is provided of two countries, two groups, and two regions whose experiences are comparable in important ways. The two countries and groups have rarely been compared, and the two regions have not been compared so far.<sup>2</sup> Such paired comparisons help explain key differences between two cases given various similarities, combine the depth of single-case research with the analytical advantages provided by comparison, and shed light on both cases.<sup>3</sup>

Race relations in the US and caste relations in India are similar and comparable in various ways. Group boundaries were sharper between the races in the US and castes in India than between races in former Portuguese, Spanish, and French colonies in the Americas. Moreover, there were many similarities in the circumstances of the groups at the bottom of the caste and racial orders, African Americans and dalits. Agrarian bondage was crucial to group formation and subordination. Popular discourses long presented these groups as culturally inferior and ancestrally distinct, and thereby provided justification in the eyes of many for their disadvantages and exclusion. These groups account for similar shares of their country's population - while dalits are 16.6% of the Indian population, African Americans account for between 12.6% (black only) and 13.6% (black in combination with another race) of the American population. The majority among these groups gained the franchise permanently around the same time – during the first universal franchise-based elections of 1952 in India and after the passage

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<sup>2</sup> Certain scholars drew analogies between caste relations in India and race relations in the US, but did not compare the phenomena in any detail. See for instance: W. Lloyd Warner, "American Caste and Class," *American Journal of Sociology* 42.2 (1936): 234-7;

John Dollard, *Class and Caste in a Southern Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937); M. Lloyd Warner and W. Allison Davis, "A Comparative Study of American Caste," in *Race Relations and the Race Problem*, ed. Edgar T. Thompson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1939), 219-45; Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom; a Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York: Viking, 1939); Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner and Mary R. Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); Oliver C. Cox, *Class, Caste and Race* (New York: Doubleday, 1948); Gerald D. Berreman, "Caste in India and the US," *American Journal of Sociology* 66.2 (1960): 120-7.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice," *Comparative Political Studies* 43.2 (2010): 230-259; Henry E. Brady and David Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010); John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) in 1965 in the US. The formal civil rights of these groups were increased around when they gained the franchise. The presence of these groups in the political and policy elite was more limited than their shares of the population and the electorate at least until the 1980s. The socio-economic advances of both groups were uneven and inconsistent after they gained political rights. Thus, these groups remain largely poor and racial and caste inequalities remain deep over a half a century after African Americans and dalits gained political rights in a somewhat sustained manner in largely stable democratic political systems.

Moreover, the experiences of the case study regions are worthy of comparison for various reasons. As the formation of the two key subordinate groups was closely tied to the coercive extraction of agricultural labor, both group inequalities and the concentration of the subordinate group were greatest in regions of large-scale agricultural production. This was particularly the case in the southeastern US, where plantation slavery was most extensive until the 1860s and where agrarian peonage was widespread for about a century thereafter, and even there especially in the fertile Black Belt around the lower Mississippi, extending from southern Virginia to east Texas, where cotton, paddy, sugar cane, and tobacco were the main crops from the 19th to the early 20th centuries. So was it in along the fertile deltas of India's major river systems, where paddy, wheat, and cotton were the main crops until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The Mississippi delta and its neighborhood were known as the areas where chattel slavery was most oppressive, and where African Americans enjoyed least access to economic independence, white social arenas, and formal political institutions, and experienced greatest violence through the Jim Crow years. Thus, observers of the Jim Crow years called Mississippi the "most race haunted of all American states," "the Deepest South", and "the darkest section of the South for a colored man".<sup>4</sup> The Kaveri delta was among the Indian regions where dalits experienced the most restrictive forms of bondage, the greatest violence and indignities, and the most elaborate social and ritual constraints through the colonial period. Contestation over group relations became particularly intense in these regions in the mid-20th century and closely tied to democratization processes.

Despite these similarities in the experiences in these regions until the 1950s, African American and dalit trajectories diverged there in important ways from about the 1970s onward. African American mobilization was extensive from the 1950s to the 1970s in much of the US, ended agrarian bondage, and gained blacks voting rights, representation, and greater civil rights in the South. Although these trends extended to Mississippi, the black 'representation gap' (the gap between group share in the population and in office) remained highest there until the late 1980s, black poverty remained so even later, and the wellbeing of blacks in comparison with whites remained lowest there according to various indices.<sup>5</sup> This was the case although the state witnessed some urbanization and occupational diversification and black representation increased from the 1990s. Thus, observers continued to deploy Mississippi as a metaphor to highlight racial iniquities in other parts of the country.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, mobilization from the 1930s to the 1970s consolidated dalit power in the Kaveri delta, and as a result dalit circumstances in the region went from being particularly backward to relatively advanced. For instance, bondage ended there quickly, agricultural wages and the duration of agrarian contracts became highest there (which enhanced the wellbeing of most local dalits), and dalit representation in local government increased there sooner than in other regions of high dalit concentration in Tamil Nadu. Moreover, the anti-dalit violence that erupted from the 1990s in response to dalit social mobility in different parts of Tamil Nadu did not extend to the delta. The middle caste organizations that mobilized violently against the perceived growth of marital links between dalits and other castes in the state in the early years of this decade did not raise this issue

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<sup>4</sup> Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 13; Rupert B. Vance, *The South's Place in the Nation* (New York: Public Affairs Committee, 1938)

<sup>5</sup> See Bruce Williams, Michael Timberlake, Bonnie Thornton Dill, and Darryl Tukufu, *Race and Economic Development in the Lower Mississippi Delta* (Memphis: Center for Research on Women, Memphis State University, 1992); Sarah Burd-Sharps, Kristen Lewis, and Eduardo Borges Martins, *A Portrait of Mississippi: Mississippi Human Development Report, 2009* (Brooklyn: American Human Development Project, 2009)

<sup>6</sup> For instance, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 212-36.

much or foment violence on this basis in the delta, deterred by the power that dalits had acquired there. Furthermore, migration patterns reflected how group circumstances compared across regions. The lower status of blacks in Mississippi compared to that in other states meant that the return migration of blacks to the state remained low, unlike in much of the South where the net black outflow since the onset of the 20th century was reversed from the 1970s. By contrast, dalit return migration was about as extensive as outmigration from the Kaveri delta, and the dalit share of the region's population did not change much over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The paper addresses the greater success of the subordinate group in consolidating its political power and socio-economic status in the Kaveri delta than in the Mississippi delta. Section I discusses important understandings of how class-state relations influence democratization prospects, the formation of citizenship rights, and durable forms of inequality, as they relate to African American and dalit citizenship projects. It introduces the paper's arguments about how discourses of community and the associated forms of social classification and identity formation shape responses to particular socio-economic contexts and political opportunities. We see how these factors help understand the key groups' mobilization, contexts and stability of enfranchisement, alliances, relationship to party systems, political representation, and social rights. Section II outlines and compares features of social relations in the two case study regions until the mid-20th century. Section III distinguishes particular socio-ecological zones within the two case study regions, and outlines their relevant characteristics. Section IV discusses and compares the patterns of mobilization of the subordinate groups in the two regions. Section V points to trends in subordinate group representation, and relates them to political mobilization and the responses of polity insiders. The Conclusion indicates the effects of mobilization and insider-mobilizer interactions on democracy.

## **I DISCOURSES OF COMMUNITY, DEMOCRATIZATION PROSPECTS, AND THE FORMATION OF CITIZENSHIP**

### **A. Prospects of Democratization**

Barrington Moore argued that the persistence of "labor-repressive" agriculture in the 19th and early 20th centuries deterred the emergence and consolidation of democracy in various countries. Large landowners dependent on extracting surplus labor from peasants needed to maintain constraints on peasant freedom and limit the taxation of land, he argued. They feared that enfranchisement would empower peasants to break free of bondage and press states to heavily tax or acquire their estates. In Germany and Japan, they crafted alliances that built centralized authoritarian states and maintained limits on peasant freedom. In Russia and China, millenarian peasant-based anti-capitalist movements formed authoritarian regimes upholding egalitarian goals. Moore considered the absence of a hereditary landed aristocracy a strong enabling condition for democracy in the US, by contrast.<sup>7</sup>

The consolidation of democracy in the US and India despite the maintenance of coercive agricultural labor extraction did not accord well with Moore's arguments. The American experience departed less clearly from Moore's arguments as the American South, where peasant bondage was most extensive, maintained authoritarian structures through the restriction of the franchise, other political rights, and the civil rights of blacks and some poor whites until after the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> Moore's efforts to explain away the Indian exception to his theory were far less convincing.<sup>9</sup> More relevant to my purpose is the attention he drew to the relationship between the class structures of predominantly agrarian societies and

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<sup>7</sup> Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966)

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, certain scholars applied Moore's theory to the defeat of the Reconstruction and the curtailment of democracy in the American South through the Jim Crow years. See: Jonathan M. Wiener, *Social Origins of the new South: Alabama, 1860-1885* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Dwight B. Billings, *Planters and the Making of a "New South": Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1979).

<sup>9</sup> For criticisms of Moore's arguments, see: Theda Skocpol, "A Critical Review of Barrington Moore's Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy," *Politics & Society* 4.1 (1973): 1-34; Stanley Rothman, "Barrington Moore and the Dialectics of Revolution: An Essay Review," *The American Political Science Review* 64.1 (1970): 61-82.

democratization, one that many later scholars examined with reference to the paths of a wider range of societies after the Second World War.<sup>10</sup>

Moore's focus on state-class relations did not take into account the effects of the distinctive character of agrarian inequality in India and the southern US especially until the mid-20th century. Property rights and labor obligations were closely connected to hierarchized ethnic identifications, linked in the former case to caste and in the latter to race. The classes at the poles of these agrarian societies were largely drawn from the groups occupying the poles of the racial and caste orders. The landed elite was entirely white in the southern US and largely from the upper and upper-middle castes in India, and the majority of bonded agricultural workers and sharecroppers was African American in the former society and from the lower castes in the latter. The close links of class to race and caste made group inequalities and authoritarian governance potentially more durable, but also provided space and set certain preconditions for subordinate group empowerment.

The considerable overlap between class and hierarchical ethnic identities went hand in hand with the pervasive influence of discourses of unequal group worth. This enabled the establishment and maintenance of stringent legal and customary restrictions on the subordinate groups, underpinned by frequent and extensive use of force and other attacks on dignity. This was particularly so in the regions where the agrarian structure was very unequal and class coincided most with race or caste. However, the subordinate groups were more cohesive because of their cultural affinities and the wide social gap between them and the dominant groups, and they had greater incentives to mobilize due to the serious limits to their upward mobility. Moreover, the subordinate groups had more demographic weight in the regions of high inequality, lending them more potential electoral influence. Along with their heavy reliance on the cheap labor of these groups, this made dominant elites more wary of subordinate group empowerment.

However, subordinate group mobilization was limited in the regions of high inequality until the early 20th century by considerable dependence on the dominant elites, for instance for employment and credit. Moreover, elites could use force more readily there to contain subaltern mobilization. The particularly pervasive nature of racial and caste discourses helped them rally some less privileged individuals - poorer whites and poorer upper and middle castes - behind shared antagonism toward the subordinate groups. The political marginalization of subordinate ethnic groups was cemented in some societies by forming representative democracies in which the franchise was denied mainly to these groups - e.g., through a strictly racial franchise in apartheid South Africa and the denial of voting rights to most blacks and many poor whites in the southern US. Giving dominant group members favorable access to better-paid and more stable employment consolidated support for such political exclusion. Such mechanisms seriously limited alliances along class and occupational lines that included the subordinate ethnic groups. This was especially a problem because, as minorities, these groups needed such alliances to gain the franchise and representation.

### **B. The Formation of Citizenship**

T.H. Marshall's classic understanding crucially helps understand the extension of citizenship rights to non-elites if understood in light of its later critical appropriation. Especially important are his disaggregation of the civil, political, and social components of citizenship, and his attention to their mutual interaction, particularly the effects of political rights on social rights. So is his consideration of the tensions between the "warring principles" of citizenship - equality of status as citizens and market-driven class inequalities. He considered the evolution of the three dimensions of citizenship sequential. Civil citizenship, involving the right to exchange property and enter contracts, emerged before the other components of citizenship, he claimed. It gave underprivileged groups the power to gain political rights, and subsequently the social rights provided by the welfare state. For Marshall, class-formation through capitalist development was the crucial motor of these processes. Specifically, working class-formation through trade unions ensured both franchise extension from the late 19th century and subsequent welfare

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<sup>10</sup> especially Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Elisabeth J. Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

state-formation. In a similar vein, Reinhard Bendix understood not just class-formation but also other modernization and state-building processes as important in turning historically subordinate groups into citizens. The somewhat widely shared prosperity right after the Second World War made both scholars optimistic about citizenship in industrial democracies.<sup>11</sup>

The gains of working men in industrialized societies were more uneven than Marshall acknowledged – they were more extensive in civic organization, political representation, and education than in property and wealth. Besides, the contraction of welfare states and decline of trade unions eroded this group's entitlements, especially from the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the citizenship projects of women and marginalized ethnic groups – e.g., formerly enslaved and indigenous groups of settler colonies, European Romany and Sinti, Japan's Burakumin, many mountain- and forest-dwelling groups in Asia and Africa, South Asian dalits and tribal groups - faced higher obstacles than did those of ethnically unmarked male workers belonging to dominant ethnic and racial groups.<sup>13</sup> Various scholars understood the genealogies of citizenship differently from Marshall and Bendix because they developed their analyses also with reference to the experiences of the latter groups that were later entrants to full citizenship. The experiences of these groups particularly highlighted how discourses of community using ascriptive categories shaped exclusionary social formations. Such narratives justified the limited entitlements of these groups by presenting them as ancestrally distinct and inferior in their norms, capacities, and desert. Even after these groups gained political rights, they retained influence in modified forms, due to which many members of other groups and the political elite remained reluctant to ally themselves with marginalized groups on terms that would offer them major advances.<sup>14</sup> This affected African American and dalit entitlements both before and since the majority among these groups gained political rights in the mid-20th century.<sup>15</sup>

Not only was class not the only basis on which African Americans and dalits were excluded from citizenship, it was also not the main axis along which these groups mobilized. At odds with Marshall's emphasis on industrial citizenship, these groups mobilized at first primarily along ethnic rather than cross-ethnic economic lines. This was primarily because associations claiming to represent the economic

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development: Essays by T.H. Marshall, with an Introduction by Seymour Martin Lipset* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Reinhard Bendix, *Nation-building and Citizenship: Studies of our Changing Social Order* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977)

<sup>12</sup> Joel F. Handler, *Social Citizenship and Workfare in the US and Western Europe: The Paradox of Inclusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001); Colin Crouch, Klaus Eder and Damian Tambini, ed. *Citizenship, Markets, and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the historical formation of these groups, initiatives for their advancement, and the consequences of these initiatives, see Jacob Meerman, *Socio-Economic Mobility and Low Status Minorities: Slow Roads to Progress* (New York: Routledge, 2009); William Darity, Jr. and Ashwini Deshpande, ed. *Boundaries of Clan and Color: Transnational Comparisons of Inter-group Disparity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> I draw on these compelling critical responses to Marshall: Margaret R. Somers, *Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness, and the Right to Have Rights* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, *Citizenship and Identity* (London: Sage, 1999); Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Jack M. Barbalet, *Citizenship: Rights, Struggle, and Class Inequality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*; Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith. *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

groups to which they primarily belonged – agricultural workers of various kinds (landless workers, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, smaller landholding peasants or farmers), and industrial and other urban workers - did not initially uphold their interests. For instance, many trade unions did not initially welcome them as members, and most of them resisted giving them equal pay and equal status in the workforce.<sup>16</sup> Many agricultural organizations did not help them shed forced labor obligations, gain higher wages, or access farm inputs.<sup>17</sup>

Privileged groups recruited African Americans and dalits from the interwar period onward into multi-ethnic movements and parties, but did not initially offer them significant influence in these organizations or advocate substantial benefits for them. For instance, African Americans outside the South were initially drawn to the Democratic Party without being offered representation commensurate to their numbers, as were dalits to the Indian nationalist movement and the Congress Party.<sup>18</sup> The relatively small population shares of these groups and the poor terms on which cross-ethnic alliances were available to them limited their policy influence. As a result, the social rights that workers initially gained through the New Deal in the US and to a lesser extent through state-led development in early postcolonial India reached African Americans and dalits only to a limited extent. This happened significantly by design in the US due to the influence of southern segregationists, and partly through the neglect of unsympathetic politicians and bureaucrats in India.<sup>19</sup>

The majority of both African Americans and dalits were denied full civil rights to movement and property until the Second World War, and this hampered their mobilization for political and social rights. These groups mobilized simultaneously for all three sets of rights, and indeed resisted the efforts of certain dominant group leaders to urge them solely in the one or the other of these directions. Thus, African American civil rights campaigners such as Martin Luther King, Jr. resisted the suggestion of federal officials to focus on voter registration in the 1960s and postpone attention to accessing public spaces and white educational institutions; and soon after the passage of the Civil Rights Acts and the VRA, some of them pressed the federal government to prioritize poverty alleviation and the implementation of judicial desegregation mandates. Similarly, dalit leaders such as Bhimrao Ambedkar resisted the compromises on access to temples and common property resources advocated by Mohandas

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<sup>16</sup> Regarding trade unions and African Americans, see: Paul Frymer, *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Eric Arnesen, ed. *The Black Worker: Race, Labor, and Civil Rights Since Emancipation* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1999); Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973* (New York: Praeger, 1974); about trade unions and dalits and tribal groups, see: Barbara Harriss-White, *India Working: Essays on Society and Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 176-99; Patrick Heller, *The Labor of Eevelopment: Workers and the Transformation of Capitalism in Kerala, India* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Rupa Viswanath, "Rethinking Caste and Class: "Labour", the "Depressed Classes", and the Politics of Distinctions, Madras 1918–1924," *International Review of Social History* 59.1 (2014): 1-37.

<sup>17</sup> Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, *Still a House Divided: Race and Politics in Obama's America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); D.N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India, c. 1920-50* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983)

<sup>18</sup> Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of Low Castes in North Indian Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)

<sup>19</sup> Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Linda F. Williams, *Constraint Of Race: Legacies Of White Skin Privilege In America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Atul Kohli, *Poverty amid Plenty in the New India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty, and the State in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012)

Gandhi and other elite nationalists; and pressed without success for greater political representation through separate dalit electorates. Despite facing the obstacles mentioned earlier, African Americans and dalits gained various civil, political, and social rights around the same time – soon after independence in India and in the 1960s in the US. This was importantly because the Indian nationalist movement needed to mobilize a broad coalition against colonial rule, and aroused expectations through the egalitarian rhetoric it employed to achieve this end; and the civil rights movement and the attention in Soviet propaganda to racial iniquities in the US pressed the US government.<sup>20</sup> Soon after Indian independence, dalits gained voting rights, preferences in education, government employment and political representation, and laws and constitutional provisions banning untouchability, forced labor, and caste discrimination, and benefitted from wage goods subsidies and anti-poverty measures. In the 1960s and the 1970s, the majority of African Americans gained voting rights that were strengthened through the containment of vote dilution mechanisms over a decade thereafter, civil rights legislation underwritten by conditions placed for government funding, affirmative action and desegregation measures, and benefits through the Great Society programs. Thus, these groups mobilized for and at least partly attained civil, political, and social rights simultaneously.

Even after this, the formal rights of African Americans and dalits were not matched by their influence in civil society and the party system. Moreover, the continued power of exclusionary civic visions meant that privileged groups remained reluctant to share formerly exclusive institutions and spaces with them.<sup>21</sup> These circumstances rendered African American and dalit entitlements less secure thereafter. These groups counteracted the adverse conditions better where they were concentrated, built strong civil society institutions, or formed advantageous partisan alliances. But the entitlements of most group members declined once public provision, preferences in education and employment, and efforts to desegregate educational institutions declined in the US from the 1980s; and after economic liberalization reduced wage goods subsidies and the public sector's economic role, and thus the significance of government job preferences in India. Even the political rights of African Americans eroded due to racialized incarceration and felon disfranchisement, and the recent passage of stringent voter identification laws.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the gains of these groups proved partly reversible.

### ***C. Durable Inequalities and their Legacies***

Charles Tilly revitalized scholarly attention to the formation, reproduction, and change of durable inequalities.<sup>23</sup> Two processes to which Tilly attached central importance were crucial to the formation of racial and caste inequalities in our two cases: exploitation, involving elite use of resource control to extract surplus labor; and the emulation of exterior categories – the incorporation of the racial and caste inequalities in society into the hierarchies of organizations such as firms, state bureaucracies, and political parties. Surplus labor extraction through serious restraints on African American and dalit freedoms was made possible by elite control over land and the means of violence, including those at the

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<sup>20</sup> Richard M. Valelly, *The Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Myron Weiner, "The Struggle for Equality: Caste in Indian Politics," in *The Success of India's Democracy*, ed. Atul Kohli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 193-225; Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1989)

<sup>21</sup> Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances*; Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *Untouchables*; Navsarjan Trust and Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights, *Understanding Untouchability: A Comprehensive Study of Practices and Conditions in 1589 Villages* (Ahmedabad: Navsarjan Trust)

<sup>22</sup> Becky Pettit, *Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012); Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza, "Democratic Contraction? Political Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement in the US," *American Sociological Review* 67.6 (December 2002): 777-803; J.D. Mycoff, M.W. Wagner and D.C. Wilson, "The Empirical Effects of Voter-ID Laws: Present or Absent?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42.1 (2009): 121-6

<sup>23</sup> Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998)

disposal of state authorities. Moreover, the alteration of forms of exploitation, for instance by recruiting members of our key groups into the lower rungs of new kinds of economic and state enterprises, reproduced group subordination in modified forms as these societies underwent major changes over the past two centuries. The correspondence of organizational hierarchies with prior ethnic inequalities helped generate the consent of many less privileged white Americans and upper and middle caste Indians in patterns of economic and political organization that disadvantaged them. Furthermore, the incorporation of subordinate group members mainly in lesser roles in many movements and parties limited these groups' voice and representation.

However, contrary to Tilly's suggestion, imperatives of exploitation did not primarily determine organizational recruitment strategies or how far elites maintained subordinate groups in disadvantageous positions. Popular discourses about group identities, group character, and the political community exercised significant influence over the social roles of groups, perceptions of the requirements of surplus extraction, approaches to institution-building, mobilization to maintain or transform resource control, and the outcomes of contending initiatives. For instance, they made entrepreneurs skeptical that firms could benefit from workforce desegregation in the American south until the 1960s and led many Indian administrators to consider dalit presence in the upper bureaucracy inimical to institutional efficacy. Moreover, the content and power of their communitarian discourses influenced the membership, goals, and strategies of political organizations that pressed for dalit and African American empowerment, as well as the broader public ethos, and thus the policy agenda after dalit and southern black enfranchisement. Similarly, they shaped the initiatives that grew especially from the 1970s onward to press for better implementation of preferential, anti-poverty, and civil rights policies, to limit police and dominant group violence toward the two groups, to improve social infrastructure in predominantly dalit and African American neighborhoods, and to enhance subordinate group representation and dignity. They exercised independent influence over where, when, and how far such movements built broad coalitions that changed representation and reshaped policy agendas.<sup>24</sup>

#### **D. Discourses of Community and Forms of Classification**

While drawing from some of Marshall's and Tilly's insights, I highlight the independent influence of discourses of community over interests, coalitions, and projects. Discourses of political community using ascriptive categories such as ethnicity, race, caste, nationality, religion, gender, and sexuality, as well as other referents such as citizenship, class, and territorial belonging shape social classification, group identities, group boundaries, and visions of group relations. They influence how individuals construct their interests, how institutions take shape and function, and how social forces respond to socio-economic change and political opportunity. Salient narratives specifically affect how social forces view legacies of deep inequality, conceive and react to projects to maintain or change these legacies, and form coalitions and agendas to promote these projects. Influential narratives characterize formerly bonded groups – their norms, capacities, and relationships to the nation and polity – in ways that limit their coalitions with other groups and policy elites' prioritization of their interests. Alternative discourses frame these groups' initiatives, sometimes help them form new coalitions, and shape agendas to enhance their entitlements. They interact with economic change and political opportunities to determine the typically uneven access of these groups to contractual freedom, voting rights, political representation, education, desirable jobs, and property.

There were crucial differences in the predominant discourses in the US and India about the nation and the political community, and in patterns of social classification and identification. Although African Americans and dalits occupied comparably marginal spaces in both societies through their colonial experiences, the nation was imagined to clearly include dalits earlier than African Americans, and especially earlier in relation to sovereign state-formation. Rogers Smith elaborated on various ways in which inegalitarian ascriptive discourses referring to race, gender, religion, and sect interacted, competed, and intertwined through American history with republican and liberal visions focused on citizenship,

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<sup>24</sup> For a similar critique of Tilly, see: David Mosse, "A Relational Approach to Durable Poverty, Inequality and Power," *The Journal of Development Studies* 46.7 (2010): 1156-78.

class, and territorial belonging that were sometimes more egalitarian.<sup>25</sup> Federal authorities supported the complete exclusion of African Americans from citizenship during the times of slavery and various limits on their rights through the Jim Crow years. Especially in the southern US, political elites accepted the full inclusion of African Americans in the nation only at the end of the civil rights era. Even then, visions that marginalized African Americans remained salient, although fewer political elites voiced them explicitly. By contrast, when Indian nationalism became the dominant political force after the First World War, Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the most influential leaders, clearly signaled dalit inclusion in the community, although Gandhi was wary of autonomous dalit mobilization, opposed separate dalit electorates, resisted ascribing dalits a non-Hindu identity, and advocated paternalist approaches to dalit uplift.<sup>26</sup> Thus, dalits were included in predominant visions of the Indian nation two decades before sovereignty, while African American membership in the American nation remained precarious even two centuries after sovereignty.

Race was the primary axis of classification and identity in the US from at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, often assuming priority over ethnicity, religion, and sect, though sometimes not over citizenship and country of birth. In India, religion was as salient as caste since the onset of colonial rule and language became equally so by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and religious and linguistic allegiances cut across caste status. Moreover, India has a large number of *jatis* (mostly endogamous castes of which there are tens of thousands), the relative status of proximate castes was disputed, and there was some room for group mobility over the centuries. This contrasts with the primarily bipolar nature of racial classification and the more restricted mobility avenues in the American racial order until the Second World War, particularly where Britain was the initial European power.<sup>27</sup> The complex nature of caste stratification, the cultural differences between similarly ranked castes across language group and region, the cultural similarities across caste within particular regions, and certain similarities in the socio-economic circumstances of some dalit castes and certain lower middle castes made the distinctiveness and cohesion of both dalits and dominant castes less than that of both African Americans and whites in the US.

The above two features of the political and cultural contexts influenced important differences in African American and dalit experiences regarding mobilization, enfranchisement, interethnic alliances, relationship to the party system, political representation, and social rights. We discuss their effects across the two countries in this section, and in the case study regions in Sections IV and V.

**(i) Mobilization:** As African Americans were more distinctive, cohesive, and politically marginalized, autonomous mobilization grew earlier among them and became more extensive by the 1960s in much of the US, while dalit mobilization was high only in some parts of India at any point. Moreover, stronger networks connected African American initiatives in different regions than dalit initiatives that were mostly restricted to the regions where specific dalit *jatis* were concentrated. An extensive literature documents African American mobilization from slavery through the Jim Crow decades, which used the space that segregation provided to develop autonomous black churches, schools, and organizations for self-government and rights litigation. These institutions connected rural and urban areas, and the South with other regions, and provided the infrastructure for later movements that were

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<sup>25</sup> See especially: Smith, *Civic Ideals*, but also King and Smith, *Still a House Divided* and Shklar, *American Citizenship*.

<sup>26</sup> Narendra Subramanian, *Nation and Family: Personal Law, Cultural Pluralism, and Gendered Citizenship in India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Niraja G. Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents: An Indian History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution*; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Removal of Untouchability* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, 1954)

<sup>27</sup> Contrast the discussion of caste mobility presented in M.N. Srinivas, *Collected Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics* and Dirks, *Castes of Mind* with the discussion of race relations in the US in Smith, *Civic Ideals*, Klinker and Smith, *Unsteady March* and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the US: from the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2015).

nearly national in scope - initially Garveyism and later the civil rights movement of the 1950s to the 1970s.<sup>28</sup>

Dalits mobilized from the late 19th century onward in many parts of India for goals similar to those of African Americans - freedom from landed elites, ability to migrate, higher returns to agricultural labor (through higher wages and crop shares or lower land rents), and access to land, education, non-agrarian jobs, and public space. However, these initiatives became strong only in regions in which many dalits had already experienced upward mobility, such as Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, and Bengal. They were constrained by intra-dalit differences in *jati* (over a thousand of which the government classifies as “scheduled castes” eligible for preferences), language, dialect, ritual, religious and kinship practices, and socio-economic status.<sup>29</sup> These differences limited dalit-focused organizations even after dalit electoral participation increased considerably from the 1980s. For instance, the most successfully dalit-led electoral party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), built significant support only in the zone of concentration of the Chamar *jati*, from which its main leaders are drawn.<sup>30</sup> Reflecting this pattern, much of the literature on dalit mobilization focuses on particular regions;<sup>31</sup> such of it that has a broader geographical scope reflects on why dalit politics has been weak in many regions.<sup>32</sup> However, dalit mobilization increased from the 1980s onward, precisely when African American mobilization declined.

**(ii) Enfranchisement Context:** Access to the franchise was a central goal of African American mobilization, the strength of which was a major reason for the VRA’s passage in the 1960s. Dalit mobilization was not strong enough to have ensured enfranchisement when India became independent. However, the need to rally less privileged groups against colonial rule, the visions of Hindu/ Indian modernity developed through engagement with colonial discourses about Indian backwardness and the hierarchical nature of Hindu society, and the precedents of universal franchise in Western Europe led the major Indian nationalist leaders to support universal franchise from the 1920s. The commitment of these leaders to the dalit franchise encouraged militant dalit leaders to focus on the arrangements for dalit representation rather than on gaining the vote. Their prior commitment to this goal and mobilized mass expectations ensured that the early postcolonial leaders would introduce universal franchise. Thus, the path of African Americans to sustained voting rights conformed to Adam Przeworski’s suggestion that new groups need to conquer the vote, but that of the dalits did not (and neither did initial African American enfranchisement during the Reconstruction).<sup>33</sup> Higher autonomous mobilization prior to enfranchisement gave African Americans greater potential policy influence after the VRA’s adoption than dalits had soon after Indian independence. But the decline in African American mobilization and increase in dalit mobilization from the 1980s had the opposite effect.

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<sup>28</sup> On mobilization until the interwar period, see: Steven Hahn, *A Nation under our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003); and about how the civil rights movement built on earlier initiatives, see Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 listed 1,108 castes eligible for government preferences, but more recent studies of the Anthropological Survey of India mentioned many more “scheduled castes.” See Singh 1993.

<sup>30</sup> The states where it polled over 10% of the vote at any point in state assembly elections – Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, and Delhi – are all part of this zone, and Chamars provide the party its most consistent support.

<sup>31</sup> e.g., studies of late colonial dalit mobilization, in Maharashtra: Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009); Punjab: Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Social Vision of Untouchables* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988); and Bengal: Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya, *Caste, Politics, and the Raj: Bengal, 1872-1937* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co, 1990)

<sup>32</sup> Jaffrelot, *India’s Silent Revolution*; Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

<sup>33</sup> Adam Przeworski, "Conquered or Granted? A History of Suffrage Extensions," *British Journal of Political Science* 39.2 (2009): 291-321

**(iii) Interethnic Alliances:** The primacy and bipolarity of the racial unlike the caste order, the greater cohesion of American races, and the greater exclusionary tendencies in American civic discourse made it easier for dalits than for African Americans to build favorable alliances with other groups. Dalit-focused movements allied themselves at different points with groups such as the lower middle castes, Muslims (among whom the majority belonged to the middle and the lower castes and even the upper castes sometimes allied with dalits to build alternatives to upper caste Hindu hegemony), and language groups mobilized mainly by the middle castes, as well as with upper caste reformists. Comparable alliances forged by African Americans were either more transitory (e.g., alliances with Hispanics and Jews) or more likely to subordinate black interests (as was the case for long periods in parties that drew most of the black vote and in trade unions with black members).<sup>34</sup> This encouraged some to claim that a black/non-black divide exists in American politics and society.<sup>35</sup>

**(iv) Relationship to Party System:** The nature of civic discourse and social classification limited empathy among other groups with African American concerns far more than with dalit concerns. Paul Frymer demonstrated that the opposition of many white voters to crucial African American demands meant that party leaders believed it would not be electorally viable to accommodate black interests extensively. As a result, a party captured the African American vote for long – the Republican Party from the Reconstruction until the New Deal, and the Democratic Party since the 1980s. Not only did this party monopolize the black vote, the other major party made no effort to compete for this vote because it felt this would yield net electoral losses, reducing the first party's incentive to address black interests much.<sup>36</sup> India did not witness dalit electoral capture. Even when the Congress party polled most dalit votes until the 1980s, other parties competed for this vote effectively in various regions – e.g., the dalit-focused Republican Party of India in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, the communists in Bengal and Kerala, the Dravidian parties (focused on language and the middle castes) in Tamil Nadu, the socialists especially in Bihar. The dalit vote dispersed further as the Congress party's dominance declined from the 1980s. The much higher levels of party competition for dalit support pressed political elites to address dalit interests far more than African American interests. The BSP polled much of the dalit vote since 2000 in two states, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and a significant share of this vote in some others (Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, and Bihar). This only increased attention to dalit interests in these states because this party focused on dalit demands even while it built support among other groups – e.g., it pressed for dalit quotas to be filled in the elite bureaucratic layers, for dalit bureaucrats to be promoted, for social infrastructure to be improved in dalit neighborhoods, and for the police to better address violations of dalit civil rights; and other parties continued to vie for dalit support there.<sup>37</sup>

**(v) Representation and the Franchise:** The resistance of other groups was greater to African American than to dalit demands regarding the franchise and representation as well. As a result, the franchise of most African Americans was revoked after the Reconstruction, and greater mass mobilization was necessary for blacks to regain the vote in the South; while in contrast, dalits were given reserved electoral districts along with the vote and retained the vote thereafter. Moreover, after both groups got the vote in the 1950s and 1960s, more vote dilution mechanisms were introduced in the US, such as multi-member districting, at-large voting, and gerrymandering, to limit the number of districts in which African American voters were likely to be decisive, and new devices of this kind were designed in the face of restrictions placed by courts and, more recently, with the support of courts.<sup>38</sup> Besides, political elites, the police, and the courts disfranchised a range of African Americans through racialized

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<sup>34</sup> See Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances*; Frymer, *Black and Blue*.

<sup>35</sup> George A. Yancey, *Who is white? Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003)

<sup>36</sup> Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances*

<sup>37</sup> Regarding the BSP, see: Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*; Sohini Guha, *Ethnic Parties, Material Politics and the Ethnic Poor: the Bahujan Samaj Party in North India* (Montreal: McGill University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2008); Sudha Pai, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002). In Bihar, the Lok Janshakti Party, based largely among the Pasi caste, had more dalit support than the BSP.

<sup>38</sup> Chandler Davidson, ed. *Minority Vote Dilution* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1984); King and Smith, *Still a House Divided*, 168-91

incarceration and felon disfranchisement. Greater prior support among political elites for the dalit franchise was reinforced by increased dalit mobilization and participation since the 1980s. As a result, no significant efforts were made to disfranchise dalits and arrangements for dalit representation were strengthened in some respects. The dalit quota in the lower house of parliament was increased from 7.6% to 15.5%, brought close to the group's population share in state assemblies as well, and extended to local assemblies in 1993.<sup>39</sup>

**(vi) Social Rights:** For the earlier mentioned reasons, the most influential political elites also committed themselves earlier and in a more sustained manner in India to providing social rights for the poor, including poor dalits. They did so by the 1920s in India, and devised certain policies from the 1950s to realize this commitment – e.g., food subsidies and land reforms in the 1950s, and easy credit provision, employment generation, and other anti-poverty measures from the 1970s. Even after the neo-liberal turn of the 1990s, state elites introduced new measures to promote social rights, such as the rural employment scheme introduced in the 2000s. Moreover, anti-poverty legislation gave dalits, tribal groups, and other “weaker sections” preferential access.<sup>40</sup>

Similar commitments to social rights drove American policy only starting with the New Deal. However, the New Deal excluded most potential black beneficiaries, by making agricultural and domestic workers ineligible for Workers' Compensation and Medicare and devolving implementation to state and local governments that were then dominated by white supremacists in the South. The state gave poor blacks significant benefits only beginning with the Great Society programs of the 1960s. These programs were scaled back from the 1980s and especially from the 1990s, when the resources devoted to public assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid were reduced, and eligibility for welfare was made more selective and temporary, and contingent on work performance, even while taxation became more regressive. The decline in benefits since the 1980s disproportionately hurt African Americans, other underprivileged minorities, and women.<sup>41</sup>

Some caveats are in order to the above comparison of social rights. While policy rhetoric promised these rights earlier and more consistently to dalits than to African Americans, the Indian state had far fewer resources as it drew from a much lower economic base and collected taxes less effectively. This was a reason why the Indian state offered the majority of citizens fewer social rights. While dalits were given preferential access to these rights, they as a result acquired a narrower array of entitlements than African Americans did from the Great Society programs. Moreover, the links between political elites, bureaucrats, and social elites limited the implementation of ameliorative and redistributive policies far more in India after the Great Society measures centralized American policy implementation. Besides, various Indian policy changes since the 1990s, such as the reduction of wage goods subsidies and industrial labor rights, and enablement of state takeover of small farms for corporate use, diminished the life chances of the poor. The devolution of many economic policies to local governments through this period also increased dominant group influence. Further research is required to assess how far these trends counteracted the more sustained legislative commitment to dalit than to African American social rights.

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<sup>39</sup> However, certain changes of the 1950s reduced the efficacy of the dalit vote – e.g., the provision for only dalits to vote in the first round of elections in reserved constituencies was abandoned, and these constituencies ceased to have two representatives, both of whom could be dalits. See: Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution*; Thad Dunning and Jahnvi Nilekani, "Ethnic Quotas and Political Mobilization: Caste, Parties, and Distribution in Indian Village Councils," *American Political Science Review* 107.1 (2013): 35-56.

<sup>40</sup> See, regarding policy commitments of the late colonial period: Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents*; about postcolonial policy: Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy: The Gradual Revolution (1947-2004)*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); land reform: Ronald J. Herring, *Land to the Tiller: The Political Economy of Agrarian reform in South Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); anti-poverty policy: Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *Untouchables*, 147-175; and recent policy changes: Kohli, *Poverty amid Plenty*.

<sup>41</sup> Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*; Handler, *Social Citizenship*; Williams, *Constraint Of Race*

## **II SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CASE STUDY REGIONS**

Since whites established control over the region in the early 19th century, Mississippi (particularly the Mississippi delta) was associated with large-scale plantations, initially cultivated mainly by slaves and later by peons. The import of large numbers of slaves to cultivate cotton made this the region with the greatest concentration of African Americans from the mid-19th century. African Americans accounted for 58.5% of the state's population in 1900 and remained in the majority until 1930, after which net emigration reduced their population concentration. In the Mississippi delta, they were 74.0% of the population in 1930 and remained 65.1% of the population in 2006.<sup>42</sup> Mississippi saw the most stringent race-based restrictions through the Jim Crow years, when black poverty and the repression of blacks (e.g. lynching) were particularly high, and black land ownership and the presence of blacks in the professions were lowest here.<sup>43</sup>

The Kaveri delta was among the regions with the greatest dalit concentration, agrarian bondage, and most elaborate and rigid caste distinctions and inequalities.<sup>44</sup> Dalits are 30.8% of this region's population and 20.0% of Tamil Nadu's, compared with being 16.6% of the Indian population. Unlike with Mississippi's African Americans, the dalit share of the population did not change much since the 19th century. The population share of dalits in the Kaveri delta is less than half that of African Americans in the Mississippi delta, and this partly reflects the extent of territorial concentration of the two groups. Over 90% of the African American population lived in the South until the first World War, 55% still did so in 2010, and African Americans are the majority of the population in 105 of the 3,143 American counties. By contrast, dalits were never territorially concentrated, and account today for the majority only in one of the 626 Indian districts. The middle castes, which are numerous in this region and even more so elsewhere in Tamil Nadu and southern and western India, experienced many restrictions as well in the Kaveri delta. The shared restrictions, as well as shared occupations as agrarian labor, sharecroppers, and tenants enabled dalits and middle castes to build alliances, especially through the mid-20th century.

The collective control that landed elites drawn mostly from the upper and upper-middle castes exercised over much of the agricultural land and the slave castes prior to colonial rule was converted into individual property over the course of the 19th century. Neither the increase in land revenue demands through the 19<sup>th</sup> century nor the official abolition of slavery in India in 1843 reduced the control of landlords over dalits because the colonial state allied itself closely with landlords to enable revenue extraction and initially did little to reduce peasant dependence on the landed elite. For instance, colonial officials did not help bonded peasants access homestead land or common property resources; rather, they collaborated with landed elites to build a myth that Indian slavery was gentle and based on mutual interest and consent.<sup>45</sup> The conversion of many dalit families from *adimaiyaal* (slave) to *pannaiyaal* (permanent farm hand, often hereditary) and the conversion of some sharecropping arrangements into fixed rent did not improve the group's economic condition or increase their freedom much until the late 19th century.

Agrarian and ethnic relations changed from the late 19th to the mid-20th century in both regions, though without a major transformation in the terms of power. A decline in demand for the rice produced in the Kaveri delta in South and Southeast Asia lowered the production of the region's main crop. The colonial state's tax demands did not decline in keeping with landlord revenues, and this weakened the

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<sup>42</sup> Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 155; US Bureau of the Census, figures for 1930 and 2006

<sup>43</sup> George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); McMillen, *Dark Journey*

<sup>44</sup> See especially: Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Willem van Schendel, *Three Deltas: Accumulation and Poverty in Rural Burma, Bengal and South India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991), 45-51, 81-5, 92-6, 116-30, 143-55.

<sup>45</sup> van Schendel, *Three Deltas*; Kathleen Gough, *Rural Change in Southeast India: 1950s to 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Indeed, Christopher C. Baker, *An Indian Rural Economy, 1880-1955: the Tamilnad Countryside* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), 78 called the 19th century a golden age for the landed elite of the region.

state's alliance with landlords. Increased land transfers saw the emergence of new landed groups, including from the middle castes, the duration of labor arrangements became shorter, and clientelist landlord-peasant links weakened. These changes accelerated during the Great Depression. Moreover, significant numbers of peasants and tenants, about half of them dalits, migrated to plantations in other British colonies in Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia, Mauritius, South Africa, the Caribbean, and Fiji. Some of these émigrés returned to the Kaveri delta, especially when plantation labor demand declined during the Great Depression, and became minor property holders. The remittances of others improved the circumstances of their families. Living in regions where caste had a less pervasive presence induced some return migrants to contest caste dominance. Moreover, a significant minority of the middle castes and a smaller proportion of dalits gained education, aided by Christian missionary involvement in schooling. The exclusion of dalit children from schools, practiced in much of India through the 19th century, declined, but these children remained segregated in schools, and most had to sit outside the classrooms or be schooled in separate rooms. Old mechanisms of social control weakened, landlords attempted to reinstate their dominance through debt bondage, regaining control over homestead land, and increased repression, and these changes led to increased class and caste conflict from the 1910s. These conflicts were concentrated in the more socially polarized eastern regions of the delta.<sup>46</sup>

Some changes in agrarian and race relations in the Mississippi delta were similar to those in the Kaveri delta from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries. A decline in the major crop, cotton, hastened by the boll weevil pest and the Great Depression, sharpened the drop in labor demand due to the belated but extensive mechanization of cotton production from the 1940s. The state urbanized at the same time, but more slowly than the Upper South and parts of the Deep South. Blacks migrated from the delta to towns in Mississippi, elsewhere in the South, and industrial centers in the Midwest and Northeast, aided by a decline in plantation elites' demand for labor. As a result, blacks ceased to be the majority of the state's population from 1940, and their share declined to 37.6% by 2010. While emigrant remittances aided some black families, the intensity of segregation and repression deterred return migration until the 1970s. Black education also increased gradually, although its quality was much lower than that of white education, and a quarter of the black school-age population attended secondary schools by 1950. But black college education was very limited, and the levels of black education remained lower absolutely and relative to whites in Mississippi than in any other state. Moreover, only 13% of black Mississippians lived in urban areas by 1930, and only 16.7% of the black workforce was employed in sectors other than agriculture, and domestic and personal services in 1940, and these were also the lowest figures. The share of blacks in occupations most under white planter control was particularly high in Mississippi; for instance, sharecroppers accounted for as much as 58% of all black farm operators in 1945 and blacks were 65% of the state's landless agricultural workers in 1930.<sup>47</sup> Thus, black dependence on white landholders was in slower decline in Mississippi than in other southern states toward the end of the Jim Crow years. Nevertheless, white resistance became sharper to even minor African American autonomy, and was organized not only by the landed elites of the delta, but also poorer whites of the less polarized hill regions of western Mississippi. White repression became more organized by the 1950s.<sup>48</sup>

### **III SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL ZONES AND CASE LOCALITIES**

The patterns of mobilization and representation varied within each of the two deltas, depending on local ecological and social features. Scholars have distinguished various socio-ecological zones in

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<sup>46</sup> Van Schendel, *Three Deltas*; Saraswathi Menon, *Social Characteristics of Land Control in Thanjavur District during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: A Sociological Study* (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, Ph.D. thesis, 1983); Baker, *An Indian Rural Economy*; Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children: the Paraiyans' Tryst with destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956* (New Delhi: Sage, 2011), 111-164; Interview, Sithamalli N.

Somasundaram, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Nidamangalam, July 15, 1989

<sup>47</sup> Robert Mickey, *Paths out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 90, 411; Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005)

<sup>48</sup> McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 72-110, 154-94; Albert D. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1951)

Mississippi. V.O. Key considered the distinction between the delta (in northwest and central Mississippi) and the hill (in the eastern and southern regions of the state) politically significant due to racial demography. Blacks have a much higher share of the delta's population, which he believed triggered a sense of "racial threat", leading to particularly strong white landowner resistance to black citizenship.<sup>49</sup> Based on a simplification of Neil McMillen's more recent and elaborate typology, I distinguish three regions – a) the delta in the northwest, which had the most fertile soil and extensive irrigation, was dominated by big plantations, and saw extensive bondage, and the highest black population; b) the river lowlands and the Brown Loam and Loess Hills, parts of which had fertile soil, extensive irrigation, and big plantations, but other parts of which did not, and in much of which the black population share and bondage were lower than in the delta; and c) the hill, a more ecologically diverse region, including the Northeastern Hills, the Black Prairie, the Flatwoods, the Sand Clay Hills, the Central Prairie, Piney Woods, and the Gulf Coast, which had less land concentration, a higher share of smaller white farmers, and more African Americans with small property by the mid-20th century. Despite the socio-economic similarities between the hill and other regions of the South outside the Black Belt, the very unequal racial relations elsewhere in Mississippi influenced politics here too. Moreover, African Americans had less political influence in the hill than in the other two segments of Mississippi after they gained voting rights because of their smaller numbers.

Scholars have similarly distinguished segments of the Kaveri delta according to the regularity and sources of irrigation, soil fertility, land distribution, occupational profile, caste composition, and the relationship between caste and occupation. Simplifying the typology that André Béteille and Marshall Bouton offered, I divide the Kaveri delta into three segments – a) the coastal old delta that had canal irrigation for centuries but not very reliable water supply because it was at the tail end of the canal, greater land concentration, more big landowners from the middle castes, and a larger proportion of bonded dalit landless workers than segment (b); b) the central old delta that also had canal irrigation for centuries, had particularly fertile land, a very stratified agrarian structure in which upper castes, temples, and other religious institutions were the largest landowners, but other castes also had smaller parcels of land, and bonded dalits, lower in number than in (a), occupied the lowest rungs; and c) the new delta, which has had canal irrigation only since the 1930s, less polarized land ownership, a higher middle caste population, a lower dalit population, and lower bondage than the first two segments.<sup>50</sup> The influence of Brahmanical high Hinduism was greatest in the central delta, less in the coastal delta, and least in the new delta, and elite power has been challenged least in the central old delta. Dalits account for 44.3% of the population in the coastal delta, 24.1% in the central delta, and 16.3% in the new delta; the caste composition of the new delta comes closest to that in Tamil Nadu, where dalits are 20.0% of the population. Much of Tamil Nadu is composed of plains and uplands where agriculture depends on less secure canal irrigation, well irrigation, or the vagaries of rainfall, and the caste and class structure are less polarized than in the old Kaveri delta.<sup>51</sup> The segments of Mississippi labeled (a), (b), and (c) are comparable with the similarly labeled segments of the Kaveri delta.

The following discussion of mobilization and representation is based on changes in the two deltas and the adjoining areas, and especially in three pairs of localities drawn from the three socio-ecological zones in each region – particular revenue blocks in India, and adjacent counties in the US. The case localities are: (a) Kilvelur block (coastal old Kaveri delta, where the dalit population concentration is the highest in Tamil Nadu, 52.1%), and Leflore and Holmes counties (Mississippi delta, where blacks are 72.2% and 83.4% respectively of the population); (b) Papanasam block (central old Kaveri delta, where dalits are 21.6% of the population), and Pike and Amite counties (Brown Loam and Loess Hills/Mississippi lowlands, where blacks are 51.5% and 41.6% respectively of the population); and (c)

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<sup>49</sup> V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1949)

<sup>50</sup> André Béteille, *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974), 142-70; Marshall M. Bouton, *Agrarian Radicalism in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 102-35; Also see: Gough, *Rural Change*, van Schendel, *Three Deltas*.

<sup>51</sup> The only other areas with regular canal irrigation are parts of the Vaigai and Tamiraparani valleys, in the central and southern regions of the state. The caste structure is polarized as in the old Kaveri delta only in the Tamiraparani valley. See Baker, *Indian Rural Economy*, 22-34.

Madukkur block (new Kaveri delta, where dalits are 12.8% of the population), and Lee and Pontotoc counties (Mississippi's hill, where blacks are 27.3% and 13.8% respectively of the population).

#### **IV MOBILIZATION**

Tilly proposed that underprivileged groups can press states to redistribute resources significantly to them only if they build movements based on broad categorical identities.<sup>52</sup> However, he did not fully specify the conditions under which this was likely to occur. Crucial for our purpose is his failure to indicate when subordinate ethnic groups build advantageous alliances with other groups that share aspects of their deprivation. Doug McAdam said that, in the Jim Crow South, the civil rights movement had to build strong organizations based on the infrastructure provided by preexisting indigenous African American organizations for which segregation had created space, specifically churches, educational institutions, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Moreover, the movement needed to adopt innovative strategies to use the opportunities provided by endogenous changes such as a reduction in peonage, agricultural mechanization, urbanization, and the formation of links with blacks outside the South, as well as exogenous developments such as a growth of the black vote outside the South, the increased importance of American race relations in Cold War ideological battles, and growth in support for racial integration among non-southern whites. McAdam argued that the civil rights movement was most successful where such opportunities were best available and where the movement found and built on prior community organizations.<sup>53</sup> The civil rights movement grew in Mississippi despite the absence of some of these conditions, but these circumstances delayed its growth and limited subsequent black representation and entitlements.

No comparable analysis has been developed of the conditions under which dalits mobilized effectively. Scholars have focused, rather, on explaining when dalits were incorporated into parties. Kanchan Chandra and Christophe Jaffrelot claimed that dalits and other "low castes" were incorporated into the Congress party and other multi-caste parties earlier and on more favorable terms in south India. They attributed this to dalits getting mobilized earlier (Chandra), to the gap between these groups and the upper castes in power, land control, and ritual status being lower, and to colonial rulers resorting less often to indirect rule through rulers closely linked to landed elites in southern than in northern India (Jaffrelot).<sup>54</sup> These analyses did not accurately identify the regions of early dalit mobilization, which included parts of northern (Punjab), western (Maharashtra), and southern (Kerala) India;<sup>55</sup> the gap in ritual status between upper and lower castes, which was greater in southern India;<sup>56</sup> and the effects of colonial land revenue settlements, which did not empower landed castes much more in *zamindari* regions, where the colonial state arranged to gather taxes through these groups, than in *raiyatwari* regions, where colonial officials were supposed to gather taxes directly from peasants.<sup>57</sup> *Zamindari* settlements were more widespread in northern and eastern India, and *raiyatwari* arrangements were adopted in much of southern India. But colonial officials used landlords to gather taxes everywhere, and dalits were in fact more easily able to reduce revenue demands in *zamindari* than in *raiyatwari* areas.<sup>58</sup> The upper castes were indeed more numerous and dominated landholding more in North India. But it was the middle and lower-middle castes rather than dalits that had more power and property in southern and parts of western India, and it was these groups that mobilized and entered the middle rungs, and to a lesser extent the upper rungs, of state Congress parties in the late colonial and early postcolonial decades. In understanding dalit mobility in politics and society much as she did middle caste mobility, Chandra underestimated the barriers dalits faced.

The Congress party incorporated dalits extensively only in the parts of south and west India where dalits had already experienced significant upward mobility through government employment and education – i.e., in Maharashtra and Kerala, but not in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. Even

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<sup>52</sup> Tilly, *Durable Inequality*, 193-228

<sup>53</sup> McAdam, *Political Process*

<sup>54</sup> See Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution*, 144-213, Chandra 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Rao, *Caste Question*, Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels*

<sup>56</sup> See for instance, Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *Untouchables*.

<sup>57</sup> Viswanath, *Pariah Problem*

<sup>58</sup> van Schendel, *Three Deltas*, 81-3

in Maharashtra and Kerala, party leaders were reluctant to incorporate into the leadership those dalits who prioritized the group's autonomous mobilization and rapid entitlement. Chandra did not consider how the social visions of party leaders led them to respond thus to dalits, and focused on descriptive representation, which she assumed would direct patronage to emergent groups, rather than on the goals of subordinate group representatives and how they influenced party agendas. It was not only the upper-caste-led Congress party, but also movements led by the middle and lower-middle castes, such as the non-Brahmanist movements of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, that limited their accommodation of dalit demands. In Tamil Nadu, elite non-Brahmanist organizations such as the Justice Party opposed various dalit demands, such as access to public temples, village pathways, and homestead land. Even mass non-Brahmanist organizations, such as the Self Respect Association and the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK), had ambivalent relationships with dalit empowerment. They curtailed untouchability practices in temples and villages, but placed dalits on the margins of their visions of the political community and resisted dalit preferences in education and government employment when they felt these preferences constrained middle caste prospects.<sup>59</sup> The non-Brahmanist organizations of Maharashtra such as the Satya Shodhak Samaj associated themselves more with dalit aspirations because dalit mobilization was stronger there and the most influential non-Brahmanist leaders were from lower-middle castes that shared more of the disadvantages of dalits, rather than from powerful middle castes, that led non-Brahmanism in Tamil Nadu. For instance, Jyotirao Phule, the Satya Shodhak Samaj's founding leader, belonged to the *mali* (gardener) caste and a lower-middle class family that owned some farmland and a flower shop, while E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, the founding leader of the Self Respect Association and the DK, belonged to the mercantile Kavarai Balija Naidu caste and a prosperous merchant family.<sup>60</sup> The limited accommodation of dalit demands by many multi-caste organizations directed more ambitious dalit initiatives into other channels.

Emancipatory visions crucially enabled and directed mobilization over high obstacles in both of our deltas. The outlooks and strategies of four early mobilizers, discussed below, illustrate the formation and nature of these visions and how they shaped mobilization. Two of these leaders were outsiders who moved to these regions in their adulthood to address the sharp inequalities of these deltas – Robert Moses who was an important Mississippi civil rights organizer in the 1960s and B.Srinivasa Rao, who was the leader of Kaveri delta communist mobilization from the 1940s to the early 1960s. The two others were locals whose leadership roles motivated their assassination by opponents – the NAACP leader Medgar Evers and the dalit communist S.G.Murugaiyan.

#### A. Mississippi

Prior conditions did not favor the growth of movements of the excluded in Mississippi. The Reconstruction was particularly short-lived and black disfranchisement and disenfranchisement subsequently proceeded furthest here. We saw that few African Americans had attained autonomy from whites in Mississippi. Black colleges had meager resources and drew low attendance and the largest of them depended on state funds, many churches depended on contributions from white elites or were run by part-time clergy whose other occupations made them dependent on whites, and the NAACP barely existed in the state until the Second World War.<sup>61</sup> Black voter registration was lowest in the state - a mere 0.4% of

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<sup>59</sup> Narendra Subramanian, *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization: Political Parties, Citizens and Democracy in South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 110-113; E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, *Ina Izhivu Ozhiya Islame Nanmarunthu* (Islam Alone is the Right Remedy for Communal Degradation) (Chennai: Pakutharivu Pathippakam, 1947); *Kudi Arasu*, 18 Oct, 6 Dec 1925, 25 April 1926, 9 Dec 1928, 16 June 1929, 12 April 1931, 8 May 1932, 28 July, 29 Sept 1935

<sup>60</sup> Contrast the portrait of the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra in Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Rao, *Caste Question* with that of the non-Brahman movement in Tamil Nadu in Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India; the Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), Subramanian *Ethnicity and Populist*, 82-129, and Basu, *Nandanar's Children*, 165-377.

<sup>61</sup> McMillen, *Dark Journey*; Kenneth Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and its Legacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 42

voting age blacks were registered in 1940 and this figure had risen to only 6.7% as late as 1964, when it had reached 41.9% in the former Confederate states.<sup>62</sup> The dominance of the segregationist Democratic Party remained undisputed in this state until the 1940s. Although support for the state party fractured from the 1940s to the 1970s, all factions resisted the national party's moves toward racial integration. Initiatives to build alliances between blacks and poor whites such as the Populist Movement of the late-19th and early-20th centuries did not proceed far in Mississippi. The poor hill whites that challenged the control of delta planter elites through the interwar "revolt of the rednecks" proposed to further tighten segregation to limit competition with blacks, contrary to Key's claim that planters were most committed to segregation. Minor civil society initiatives such as the Committee of One Hundred sought amelioration only within a segregationist framework.<sup>63</sup>

Mississippi's delta elite led massive white resistance to the minor federal integration directives of the 1940s and 1950s. A delta landowner, Fielding Wright, was the Vice-Presidential candidate of the Dixiecrat revolt of 1948, which gained substantial support in the state and near-unanimous (95%) white support in the delta. Another, James Eastland, was a leader of the southern Congressional resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education*. The white Citizen's Council formed to oppose *Brown* began in the delta, and was particularly effective in the state in building private academies to evade court-ordered desegregation and in hampering black voter registration. Moreover, the State Sovereignty Commission reinforced race boundaries and organized surveillance of black protest, complementing high Ku Klux Klan violence.<sup>64</sup>

The civil rights movement grew much further in the state than prior political opportunities suggested. This was crucially because emancipatory discourses developed elsewhere in the US, but altered through engagement with a sense of community that had developed among local blacks since the times of slavery, led movement leaders to see broader avenues for empowerment opening if they adopted strategies conducive to circumvent the unfavorable conditions and addressed the pressing needs of their target groups. Three strategic choices were crucial to movement success. First, to compensate for the prior weakness of movement infrastructure, mobilizers such as Evers built the state NAACP from the 1950s mainly among somewhat economically independent blacks, which responded better than the litigation-focused national organization to the tempo of mobilization in the state. Second, they emphasized building community organizations rather than launching massive protests aimed at national attention, considering the latter approach (closely associated with King) too risky in Mississippi because many blacks were vulnerable to white pressure and segregationists used much repression. Third, while adopting non-violent methods, they resorted to armed self-defense to counter the repression.<sup>65</sup>

Different ideological currents influenced Evers early on – visions of racial integration through non-violent cross-racial mobilization that inspired the NAACP since its founding and anti-colonial black African nationalism, especially the Kenyan Mau Mau insurgency. Evers quickly abandoned plans he briefly considered to bring national attention to Mississippi's racial injustices through guerilla warfare, and directed his energies toward building the state's NAACP as a social movement organization. His earlier openness to armed warfare and black nationalism meant that he was comfortable with the need of civil rights mobilizers to arm themselves to confront segregationist violence, and worked closely with the organizations formed in the 1960s to direct the movement, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Congress of Federated

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<sup>62</sup> David Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 7

<sup>63</sup> Kirwan, *Revolt*, Neil R. McMillen, "The Migration and Black Protest in Jim Crow Mississippi," in *Black Exodus the Great Migration from the American South*, ed. Alferdteen Harrison (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 83-99

<sup>64</sup> Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jenny Irons, *Reconstituting Whiteness: The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002); Christopher M. Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011)

<sup>65</sup> Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 41-63; Payne, *Light of Freedom*, John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994)

Organizations (COFO), some of whose activists embraced black power. Robert Moses moved from Harlem in the early 1960s to aid the Mississippi civil rights movement. He crucially influenced the focus on community organization and the adoption of tactics appropriate to bridge class and generational divides. Moses tempered his preference for non-violence in view of the requirements of confronting repression, and tried to discourage militant protest in regions of limited organized strength (e.g., Pike and Amite counties), while promoting it in areas where local blacks were more prepared for it (e.g., Holmes and Leflore counties). Leaders such as Evers and Moses saw that mass black mobilization was possible if community organizations were strengthened and risks were taken judiciously. They directed mobilization in ways that led the national Democratic Party and the federal government to enable black enfranchisement, the desegregation of public spaces, the state Democratic Party, and representative institutions, and the extension of welfare benefits to poor blacks from the mid-1960s to the 1970s.<sup>66</sup>

The movement initially grew in the 1950s and the early 1960s in parts of the delta and the Brown Loam and Loess Hills, in counties such as Holmes, Leflore, Pike, and Amite, and was associated with both the primarily middle class activists of the NAACP and the younger and in some cases poorer activists of SNCC and CORE. COFO coordinated the activities of these organizations, and of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) that worked to desegregate the Democratic Party. The organizations complemented each other's activities by emphasizing different methods, especially community organization and protest demonstrations, and different goals, including voter registration, desegregating white facilities, entering the Democratic Party, poverty amelioration, and entering representative institutions. They initially focused more on community organization, voter registration, and entry into the Democratic Party in some delta counties (especially Holmes, Leflore, Coahoma, and Sunflower), but launched direct action to desegregate cafés and restaurants and organized sit-in and walk-out campaigns involving high school students in parts of the Brown Loam and Loess Hills (particularly Pike and Amite counties). Moreover, the movement was built around a core of owner farmers, army veterans, and minor shop owners such as Howard Taft Bailey, Hartman Turnbow, Reverend J.J. Russell, Robert Clark, Richard West, Louie Redd, W.J. Bishop, Ed Cochran, Charles Golden, and David Jordan in Holmes and Leflore counties, while it relied more on young students and others with less economic independence and status such as Herbert Lee, Hollis Watkins, Curtis Hayes, Emma Bell, and Brenda Travis in Pike and Amite counties.<sup>67</sup> Besides, Klan activity was much higher in the lowlands and Brown Loam and Loess Hills where poor whites, feeling the pinch of competition with blacks, directed considerable violence against activists and other blacks particularly in McComb town. As a result, local blacks were unable to withstand the repression and the movement was seriously weakened in Pike, Amite and neighboring counties, many blacks became averse to discussing the movement experience for decades, and a discussion of local civil rights activities was initiated only in the 2010s in Burgland High School in McComb where protest had been centered in 1960-1. Indeed, black political representation also remained limited as a result there, and McComb elected its first black mayor only in 2006 although blacks accounted for 66% of the town's population.<sup>68</sup>

By contrast, the movement overcame repression better in the delta counties of Holmes and Leflore because it focused on community organization and relied on more economically independent activists. Indeed, repression reinforced the determination of locals to engage in voter registration and desegregation

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<sup>66</sup> Dittmer *Local People*, 49, 73-89, 101-19, 146-55, 158-69; Payne, *Light of Freedom*, 4, 43-68, 93-140, 158-64, 185-6, 240-50, 286-7, 317-8, 372-3; Myrlie Evers-Williams and Manning Marable, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: A Hero's Life and Legacy Revealed Through His Writings, Letters, and Speeches* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Eric Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Robert Moses and Charles E. Cobb, *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002)

<sup>67</sup> There were some exceptions to this pattern, such as the landowner E.W. Steptoe in Amite county and the railroad worker-turned-barbershop owner C.C. Bryant in Pike County.

<sup>68</sup> McComb was however predominantly white until the 1970s. Certain blacks that had not entered politics through the civil rights movement gained representation in other lowland counties from the late 1960s by allying with emergent white moderates. Charles Evers especially did so, and his independent campaigns for the U.S. Congress drew considerable support in the 1970s.

campaigns at crucial points in the 1960s here, unlike in Pike and Amite counties. This was so although the leading segregationist planter elites were based in the delta, and the Citizens Councils and Sovereignty Commission were particularly active there. Thus, the movement was more sustained in Holmes and Leflore counties, and spread from there to other delta counties such as Sunflower, Washington, Bolivar, and Coahoma, as well as to the adjacent Brown Loam and Loess Hill counties of Warren, Madison, and Hinds. The above delta counties became the loci of greatest black political representation.<sup>69</sup> The movement's success where it focused on community organization, voter registration, and representation, and its failure where it emphasized direct action without federal support reinforced a focus on the former methods and goals.

Civil rights mobilization was limited from the 1950s to the early 1970s in much of the hill, where blacks were less poor but also less numerous and faced much repression. The minor exceptions to this pattern were some counties in the Piney Woods and along the Gulf Coast in southeast Mississippi, specifically Jones, Forest, Harrison, and Jackson. Civil rights organizations grew in certain hill counties in northeast Mississippi (Marshall, Lee, Pontotoc, Chickasaw, and Tippah) only from the late 1970s onward, after national narratives as well as accounts of the Mississippi experience take the civil rights movement to have declined.<sup>70</sup> The United League, based in Tupelo and led by a building contractor, Alfred 'Skip' Robinson, was active in the region in the late 1970s and early 1980s, opposing Klan and police violence, the theft of black land, employment discrimination and discrimination against customers in private stores, and demanding greater black representation in local government and increased anti-poverty programs. It complemented the NAACP's efforts by using other methods (protest marches, store boycotts, and armed self-defense), much as the SNCC and CORE had in the delta, lowlands, and Brown Loam and Loess Hills. Although it ceased to function by the late 1980s, the United League initiated black entry into local government in northeast Mississippi, much as the better known civil rights organizations did elsewhere.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, African American mobilization proved feasible in Mississippi if organizers adopted methods suited to circumvent the formidable obstacles. While raising redistributive demands, mobilizers did not frame them in the kind of millenarian visions that Moore believed would lead unfree peasants to support authoritarian rule, but based on aims to effect inclusion in a fully democratized polity largely through

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<sup>69</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 99-157; Payne, *Light of Freedom*, 112-79; Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 6-8, 41-107; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Interviews, Hollis Watkins, Founder, Southern Echo, former SNCC, Freedom Summer, and MFDP organizer: Jackson, June 18, 2012; Dr. Leslie McLemore, MFDP Organizer and former acting Mayor of Jackson: June 19, 2012; Robert Clark, first black state Congressman since Reconstruction (1967-2003), head of House Education Committee, 1977-87, House Speaker pro-tempore, 1992-3: Canton, July 9, 2012; Henry (Chuck) Espy III, state Representative: Clarksdale, July 9, 2012; David Jordan, State Senator, 24<sup>th</sup> District, 1993-now, Founder, Greenwood Voters League: Jackson, July 10 & 16, 2012; Robert L. Jackson, State Senator, 11<sup>th</sup> District, 2004-now: Jackson, July 10, 2012; George Flaggs, Jr., State Representative, 55<sup>th</sup> District, 1988-2013, Chair, Juvenile Justice Committee: Jackson, July 11, 2012; Calvin Head, farmer organizer: Lexington, July 12, 2012; David Myers, State Representative, 98<sup>th</sup> District, 1996-now: Lexington, July 12, 2012; Anthony Witherspoon, NAACP Field Coordinator, Pike County: Jackson, July 12 & 16, 2012; Therese Palmertree, Superintendent, Gloria Stubbs, Facilitator, Civil Rights Curriculum, McComb Public School District, and Vicky Malone, Teacher, Civil Rights Curriculum, Burgland High School: McComb, July 18, 2012; Lisa Deer, Executive Director, Young People's Project, McComb: McComb, July 19, 2012

<sup>70</sup> Thus, studies of the Mississippi civil rights movement – Dittmer, *Local People*, Payne, *Light of Freedom*, and Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* – do not discuss the United League's activities.

<sup>71</sup> *Time*, March 10, 1975: 33; *Clarion Ledger*, March 12, 25, 1978; Dec 11, 1978: 9; *South Mississippi Sun*, March 27, 1978; *Vicksburg Evening Star*, August 28, 1978; *Meridian Star*, July 9, 1978; *Picayune Daily*, Oct 5, 1978; *Unity* Nov 17-30, 1978; *New York Times*, Jan 30, 1979; *Jackson Advocate*, Dec 11, 1980; Andrew Marx and Tom Tuthill, "Resisting the Klan: Mississippi Organizes," *Southern Exposure* 3.2 (Summer 1980): 73-84; Interviews, Dr. Roy DeBerry, Executive Director, Hill Country Project: Ashland, June 28, 2012; Andre DeBerry, Mayor, Holly Springs: Holly Springs, July 3, 2012

non-violent means. Success however depended on the responses of polity insiders both within the state and nationally.

### ***B. Kaveri Delta***

As indicated earlier, dalit mobilization was weaker in Tamil Nadu and the Kaveri delta in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century than in Maharashtra and Punjab, where more dalits had benefited from education, government employment, urbanization, and agricultural enterprise. Nevertheless, many Tamil Nadu dalits had advanced through migration to plantations elsewhere in the British empire and to cities and mining centers in other parts of India, and through education in government and Christian mission schools. Some had become middling tenant farmers or owner farmers or gained homestead land through government initiatives, and fewer had acquired significant commercial wealth. Some of these new elites became leaders of dalit political initiatives of the early 20th century, such as the neo-Buddhist organizations led by Pandithar Iyothee Thoss, the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha, the Dravida Mahajana Sabha, and the Madras Scheduled Castes Federation, with which certain Kaveri delta dalits engaged.<sup>72</sup> More importantly, the emergence of some landowning dalit farmers, the erosion of landlord paternalism, and the return of many emigrant workers enabled dalit mobilization in the Kaveri delta. The ascent to power of Indian nationalists, who had committed themselves to universal franchise and to end untouchability, widened these opportunities. These changes aided considerable agrarian mobilization based primarily among dalits in the Kaveri delta from the 1930s to the 1970s.

While these circumstances created opportunities, prior community institutions were weaker than in Mississippi or were not used as effectively by mobilizers. Social movements did not broadcast their appeals through dalit temples and churches. Certain dalit elites and Hindu reform organizations started dalit schools in various regions of India in response to caste discrimination in common schools, but these initiatives were not as extensive as among African Americans. While dalit schools were formed in the Kaveri delta too, more dalits seem to have been educated in the common government and Christian mission schools. The main preexisting dalit social arena utilized by political mobilizers was the monthly new moon day meeting to address collective action problems and resolve disputes within dalit hamlets, and sometimes among peasants of different castes.

However, party competition and the relationship between state and national politics were more favorable to subordinate group mobilization in the Kaveri than in the Mississippi delta. While the segregationist Democratic Party and its offshoots dominated Mississippi politics until the 1980s, the Kaveri delta was the most mobilized and politically competitive part of Tamil Nadu from the 1940s onward. The Congress party and the Indian nationalists established a presence in parts of the Kaveri delta from the 1930s, and the communists and the Dravidianists did so from the 1940s. As a result, this region consistently witnessed the highest voter participation in Tamil Nadu until the 1990s.<sup>73</sup> There were tensions between the call of the Congress party's national leaders such as Gandhi to promote dalit inclusion and mobility (albeit under paternalist upper caste leadership) and the delta party leadership being drawn primarily from dominant caste landlords such as Kunniyur Sambasiva Iyer and A.Krishnasami Vandayar, who were inclined to maintain authority patterns. Certain Congress party leaders of the region initiated minor agitations to gain dalits greater access to temples and upper caste streets. While not opposing these efforts overtly, the landlords that led the region's party resisted changes in agrarian relations.<sup>74</sup> The DK and its offshoot, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), had a middle caste and lower middle caste leadership in the state and the delta, and gained significant dalit support only in parts of Nagaipattinam, Kilvelur, and Thiruvavur revenue blocks of the coastal old delta by opposing caste discrimination in public access and pressing to promote peasant welfare. But they did not

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<sup>72</sup> On early dalit mobilization in Tamil Nadu and neighboring areas, see: Basu, *Nandanar's Children*, 224-342; Viswanath, *Pariah Problem*, 190-216.

<sup>73</sup> Subramanian, *Ethnicity and Populist*, 19

<sup>74</sup> Interviews, Amirtharaja, Congress Party Sirkazhi Constituency Secretary, Kilvelur, Dec 29, 2012; G. Karuppiiah Mooppanar, former Congress Party President, Chennai, Sept 10, 1989; Ramamirtha Thondaman, Thattuvancheri, June 18, 1989

attack agrarian bondage importantly because of their association with big landlords such as Nedumbalam Samiappa Mudaliar and V.S. Thyagaraja Mudaliar.<sup>75</sup>

The communists engaged much more closely from the early 1940s with dalit mobilization, which they closely connected to the demands of lower agrarian strata - *pannaiyaatkal*, casual agricultural workers, sharecroppers, and smaller tenants. While all *pannaiyaatkal* were dalits, the other lower agrarian strata were drawn from dalit, lower middle, and middle castes. As in other Asian countries, the communists realized that a focus on industrial workers would limit their relevance in a predominantly agrarian society, and moved from the industrial centers to various rural areas from the late 1930s. They focused their mobilization in rural Tamil Nadu on the Kaveri delta because they felt that their egalitarian vision required them to prioritize changing the region's deep class inequalities and caste exclusions. The Communist Party of India (CPI) sent Srinivasa Rao, a Brahman from neighboring Karnataka, to lead agrarian mobilization in the region, which he did until his death in 1961. Although he was initially politicized through Gandhian agitations, Rao sensed that local power relations could be changed only if dalits and agricultural workers responded in kind to the physical and verbal violence of landlords. The communists did not acquire the support necessary to launch insurgencies in the Kaveri delta, as they did in Telengana and parts of Bengal around the same time. However, Rao encouraged activists to use armed self-defense to counter landlord and state violence, much as Mississippi's civil rights mobilizers did. Thus, communists came armed with sticks to public meetings, demonstrations, and marches into town centers and upper caste streets. They were able to retaliate against repression from the mid-1940s more frequently in the Kaveri delta than Mississippian civil rights activists could because they had built broader support.

Although Marxist ideology suggested the prioritization of class demands, Rao found it necessary to also address the partly caste-based abuses that local peasant initiatives had opposed from the 1930s. Thus, under his leadership, communists initially demanded an end to landlord violence (especially whipping) and indignities (such as being made to consume excreta) directed mainly against dalits, and enforced dalit entry into certain upper caste streets. Thereafter, they agitated to end bondage (a dalit concern) and to raise agricultural wages, increase the crop shares of sharecroppers, reduce rent for tenants, and increase the duration of sharecropping and rental arrangements (demands of many dalits and middle caste members). The communists did not demand land redistribution here (other than briefly in pockets of the central old delta in the 1970s) or seek to overthrow the state, as they did in Telengana and parts of Bengal, for want of adequate support. Unlike in Mississippi, the franchise and representation were not foci as the Indian nationalist leaders introduced universal franchise and separate dalit representation throughout India, independent of levels of local dalit or lower class mobilization.<sup>76</sup> Dalits predominated the cadre of the region's communist party organizations, but did not get commensurate representation in the leadership. Nevertheless, engagement in mobilization to reduce caste exclusions made these central orientations of many upper and middle caste communist leaders in the region, and certain dalits became important local leaders early on, notably Kalappal Kuppaswami in the 1940s and Murugaiyan from the 1950s. However, it was only when they faced competition from dalit parties from the 1990s that the communists foregrounded opposition to untouchability.

The communists retained two features of Rao's approach - using muscle power in local conflict and addressing intertwined caste and class demands. This was for instance the style of Murugaiyan, who

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<sup>75</sup> Interviews, G. Veeraiyan, CPI (M), former President, Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association and Tamil Nadu Agricultural Workers Association, Sithadi, Dec 23, 2012; Thangarasu, DK, Rajagiri, Dec 28, 2013; S.S. Batcha, DK, Peasant Union Secretary, Nagaipattinam, July 18, 1989; Marimuthu, Kavalakkudi, July 15, 1989; T.M. Soundararajan, Viduthalai Chiruthaikal Katchi (formerly with DK), Kohur, Feb 12, 2016; Kader Hussain, CPI-M (formerly with DK), Pandaravadai, Dec 28, 2013 & March 14, 2016

<sup>76</sup> B. Srinivasa Rao, *Kamyunist Iyakkamum Vivasaya Porattangalum* (The Communist Movement and Peasant Struggles) (Chennai: New Century Book House, 1995); Ko. Veeraiyan, *Sengodiyin Paadhayil Neenda Payanam* (Long Journey on the Path of the Red Flag) (Chennai: Chennai Book House, 2010); G. Ramakrishnan, "Birth Centenary of Comrade BSR: Tribute to a Valiant Fighter," *People's Democracy* XXXI.16 (2007), [http://archives.peoplesdemocracy.in/2007/0422/04152007\\_com%20bsr.htm](http://archives.peoplesdemocracy.in/2007/0422/04152007_com%20bsr.htm) (accessed: June 20, 2016); Saraswathi Menon, "Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District: 1940-52" *Social Scientist* 7.6 (1979): 14-31, 7.7 (1979): 57-68, 7.10 (1979): 52-64

became the first dalit elected as Chairman of a revenue block in Tamil Nadu in 1962 in Kottur, the locus of the earliest communist agrarian agitations in the state. He habitually carried knives and guns, and used them to overcome resistance to his efforts through the 1960s and 1970s to improve the social infrastructure of dalit hamlets, and to gain dalits access to village temples, streets, and wells.<sup>77</sup>

The social vision that framed communist mobilization, when modified in view of local social relations and dalit concerns, made supporters confident that they could significantly change power relations. The polarized social structure of the coastal delta was conducive to the success of agitations of the lower agrarian strata inspired by this vision. Mobilization was extensive in the southern and central coastal delta where effective alliances were built between agricultural labor, sharecroppers, and tenants, and between dalits and middle castes belonging to these class categories, in the revenue blocks of Kottur, Thiruthurai, Thiruvavur, Kilvelur, Thalagnayiru, Kizhayur, Nagaipattinam, and Thirumarugal. It only drew moderate support, mainly among agricultural workers or dalits, in the northern coastal delta, in the revenue blocks of Mayiladuthurai, Sembanar Koil, Sirkazhi, and Kollidam, and in parts of the less polarized central old delta - the revenue blocks of Nannilam, Nidamangalam, and Valangiman. The communists also led agitations in the early 1940s against *zamindari* revenue settlements in the new delta taluks of Pattukottai, Orathanad, Peravurani, Aranthangi, and Gandarvakottai. But mobilization and communist support declined there once *zamindari* arrangements were abolished after independence, and most middle castes began to support the Congress party and later the Dravidian parties (the DMK and its offshoot, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam). In empathy with the pervasive agrarian discontent, certain minor Congress party, DK, and civil society leaders led agrarian agitations in parts of the coastal and central old delta (in Sirkazhi, Thiruppanandal, and Nagaipattinam revenue blocks), but they did not shape agrarian militancy.<sup>78</sup> Thus, patterns of mobilization in the three zones of the Kaveri delta paralleled those in the corresponding Mississippi zones to a significant degree due to similarities in social structure – being highest and most sustained in the most polarized zones where the subordinate group was most numerous (coastal old Kaveri and Mississippi deltas), less extensive in the moderately polarized zones (central old Kaveri delta and Mississippi lowlands and Brown Loam and Loess Hills), and more limited and short-lived in the least polarized zones where the subordinate groups were least numerous (new Kaveri delta and the Mississippi hill).

As in Mississippi, the polarized agro-ethnic structure that had seriously limited subordinate group autonomy, proved conducive to group mobilization when changes in the regional economy and the larger political system created significant opportunities. Locals recognized these opportunities, however, only when political forces with new political visions engaged local concerns and sentiments. While discourses of racial revitalization enabled people to perceive and act on such opportunities in Mississippi, Marxist discourses played this role in the Kaveri delta. The mobilizing discourses influenced the strategies adopted and the groups mobilized. The communist vision induced militant mobilization behind agrarian

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<sup>77</sup> G. Maniarasan, *Thozhar SGM* (Comrade SGM) (Thanjavur: Pakutharivu Pathippakam, 1998); Interviews, G. Neelamegam, CPI-M, Thanjavur District Secretary, Thanjavur, Dec 17, 2012; Maniarasan, Tamil Desiya Podhu Udamai Katchi, President, Thanjavur, Dec 18, 2012; C. Mahendran, CPI, Tamil Nadu Assistant State Secretary, Chennai, Jan 31, 2016

<sup>78</sup> Bouton, *Agrarian Radicalism*, 136-296; Subramanian, *Ethnicity and Populist*, 17-29, 185-8; V.K. Ramachandran, *Wage labour and Unfreedom in Agriculture: An Indian Case Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 7-13; Gough, *Rural Change*, 50-1; Menon, "Responses to Class and Caste"; Srinivasa Rao, *Kamyunistu Iyakkamum*; Ko. Veeraiyan, *Tamizh Naattil Vivasayigal Porattam* (Peasant Struggles in Tamil Nadu) (Madurai: Theekkathir Press, 1980); Veeraiyan, *Sengodiyin*; Interviews, G. Veeraiyan, CPI-M, Dec 23, 2012; K. Balakrishnan, CPI-M, Secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, Chennai, Dec 8, 2012; Umar Farooq, early dalit mobilizer in Tiruppanandal area, Tiruppanandal, Dec 29 & 30, 2012; R.C. Palanivel, CPI-M, former Thanjavur District Secretary, Madukkur, Dec 30, 2012, Dec 29, 2013, March 7, 2016; A.V. Murugayyan, CPI(M), Nagaipattinam District Secretary, Kizhayur, December 24, 2012; R. Nallakannu, CPI, former Tamil Nadu State Secretary, Chennai, Dec 13, 2013; V. Thambusamy, former CPI (M) District Secretary, Ettukudi, Dec 18, 2013; Ambalavanan, DMK, Nagaipattinam District Secretary, Sikkal, Nagaipattinam block, Dec 19, 2013; A.V. Subramaniam, DMK, former Thanjavur District Secretary, Alathur, Dec 29, 2013; Krishnammal Jagannathan, founding President, Land for Tillers' Freedom, Gandhigramam, Dec 30, 2013 & Feb 20, 2016; S.S. Batcha, DK, July 18, 1989

demands in the Kaveri region. However, such mobilization was most effective where it also addressed caste-based exclusions, yet built alliances among lower agrarian strata across caste boundaries. Such cross-ethnic alliances were very weak in Mississippi when blacks initially mobilized from the 1940s to the mid-1960s, although they were forged at times after African Americans gained the vote. The unavailability of white support reinforced the reliance of civil rights mobilizers on black community institutions and visions of black dignity. Dalits were more able than African Americans to forge and sustain cross-ethnic alliances while prioritizing their interests in our regions and elsewhere. This was because race was the primary axis of classification and identity in the US, unlike caste in India, and because racial classification was bipolar in the US unlike the Indian caste order.

Subordinate group mobilization faced considerable repression from dominant elites and state authorities in both regions until the 1960s. But polity insiders accommodated group mobilizers sooner in the Kaveri delta, from the 1950s to the 1970s, than in Mississippi, where such accommodation began only in the late 1960s and remained incomplete. Moreover, mobilizers faced less repression in the former region after the burning of forty-four dalit women and children in Venmani village by a landlord and his toughs in 1968 brought the local landed gentry disrepute and curtailed their violence.<sup>79</sup> Accommodation channeled communist mobilization further toward participation in representative institutions.

## **V INSIDER RESPONSES AND REPRESENTATION**

The effects of subordinate group mobilization depend importantly on the responses of dominant elites and polity insiders. The dominant agrarian strata initially resisted pressures for inclusion and redistribution in both countries and regions. In Mississippi, they had considerable influence over the state Democratic Party that was rather autonomous of the national party, and through it on the state government that remained authoritarian until the 1970s. The state Democratic Party and the state government thus resisted the integrative pressures that emerged not only from local black civil society, but also by the mid-1960s from the federal government and the national Democratic Party, more fiercely in Mississippi than in any other southern state. This created a deep schism between the state and national Democratic parties from the late 1940s to the late 1970s, delayed racial integration, kept black voter registration and participation levels lower in Mississippi than anywhere else through the 1960s, and postponed a significant increase in black representation to the 1980s. Thus, insider resistance set Mississippi on a path of particularly protracted democratization and black inclusion, as ably detailed by Robert Mickey.<sup>80</sup>

Civil rights mobilizers were able to ensure greater voter registration by the late 1960s, and black turnout rates were particularly high for over a decade thereafter in counties in which the movement had been strong, primarily in the delta.<sup>81</sup> Once black voter registration and participation increased, authorities undertook more extensive black vote dilution in Mississippi than in any other state, through mechanisms such as gerrymandering and the creation of multi-member districts for the state legislature, and at-large elections for local bodies. It took black activists over a decade of litigation to overcome these measures. In this context, black political representation increased initially at the local level where the black population share was high, in the delta and lowland counties and in towns elsewhere. As with voter registration and participation, black local government representation rose faster in the regions of high civil rights mobilization.<sup>82</sup> The black representation gap in the state House of Representatives remained highest in Mississippi until the late 1980s. This gap was closed thereafter, but African American

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<sup>79</sup> Interviews, G. Veeraiyan, CPI-M; Mathiazhagan, DMK, Kilvelur, December 19, 2013; G. Palanivelu, CPI-M, Venmani, December 20, 2013 & Feb 13, 2016; Muniyan, CPI-M, Venmani, February 14, 2016; *Ramayyavin Kudisai* (Ramayya's hut; documentary film)

<sup>80</sup> Mickey, *Paths out of Dixie*

<sup>81</sup> Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 124-34

<sup>82</sup> Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 174-90

legislators still had limited access to the committees with the greatest budgetary powers. Mississippi remains the state with the highest representation gap in the state senate.<sup>83</sup>

Polity insiders responded differently to subordinate group challenges in the Kaveri delta. The leaders of the postcolonial Indian state introduced universal franchise, consolidated democracy, and made a constitutional commitment to abolish untouchability. Social elites throughout India tried to secure their interests in the face of the enfranchisement of their dependents by consolidating their links with the postcolonial state and the Congress party and limiting the substantive representation of subordinate groups. This was the approach taken by Kaveri landholding elites too. The Kaveri delta Congress party leaders of the 1940s and the 1950s, such as Sambasiva Iyer and Krishnasamy Vandayar, did not resist universal franchise, unlike their Mississippi counterparts such as Wright and Eastland, and tolerated the initiatives of their reformist party colleagues to gain dalits entry into public spaces. The state government initially heeded their call and repressed the mobilization of the delta's lower agrarian strata especially because the communists who led the mobilization had launched insurgencies elsewhere. Nevertheless, the CPI defeated the Congress party in the first postcolonial elections of 1952 in many parts of the delta, especially along the coast, based on the support generated by mobilization. Communist electoral success in the region, sustained agrarian mobilization, and the abandonment of insurgency by the communists in other regions by 1953 led the state government to accommodate some of the mobilizers' central demands. The state government passed legislation from the late 1940s to the early 1970s that ended bondage, raised wages and sharecroppers' crop shares, reduced rents, extended the duration of agrarian contracts, and made sharecropping arrangements more durable. Some of this legislation applied to the entire state, but was implemented best in the Kaveri delta because the lower agrarian strata were best organized there. Legislation that set wages and the duration of agrarian contracts applied only to the coastal old delta and parts of the central old delta because it was meant to contain communist growth that was centered there.<sup>84</sup>

The Indian state retained the quotas in dalit representation at the national- and state-levels that had been introduced in 1935, but the quotas were set below the group's population share of 16.6%, at 4.4% in the upper house of parliament, 7.6% in the lower house, and 9.5% in the state assemblies. Moreover, upper and middle caste leaders tried to limit dalit substantive representation by nominating docile dalits as the candidates of multi-ethnic parties in the constituencies reserved for dalit candidates, and sought to ensure their election based primarily on the support of the non-dalit voters that predominate these electorates.<sup>85</sup> They also attempted to restrict the number of dalits and candidates favorable to dalits elected to local bodies, in which dalit quotas did not apply until 1993. Moreover, they tried to limit local government powers in regions of considerable lower caste and lower class power, and influence policy independent of representative channels. These efforts were successful in many parts of India, but were less so in regions such as the Kaveri delta where the lower strata were significantly mobilized.<sup>86</sup>

The concentration of dalits and lower agrarian strata in the Kaveri delta, the alliances built in the 1950s between dalits and middle castes, and the support that communists had gained in the region brought both dalits and communists considerable representation in local government and the state legislature. Dalit representation in local representative bodies was highest in the southern and central coastal delta where mobilization had been highest, in Kottur, Thiruthurai, Thiruvarur, Kilvelur, Kizhayur, Nagaipattinam, Thalaigayiru, and Thirumarugal blocks, but was also significant in the pockets of moderate agrarian mobilization in the northern coastal and central old delta (Mayiladuthurai, Sembanar Koil, Sirkazhi, Kollidam, Nannilam, Valangiman, and Nidamangalam blocks). Dalit representation rose earlier here than in the rest of Tamil Nadu, including in other regions of high dalit concentration in the state's northern and western plains, in the current districts of Perambalur, Cuddalore,

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<sup>83</sup> Charles Menifield and Stephen Daryl Shaffer, ed. *Politics in the New South: Representation of African Americans in Southern State Legislatures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 107-27, 195-197

<sup>84</sup> Bouton, *Agrarian Radicalism*, 67, 192-3, 202-6, 274, 284-6; K.S. Sonachalam, *Land Reforms in Tamil Nadu: Evaluation of Implementation* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1970), 56-62, 126-7

<sup>85</sup> Dalits account for between 20% and 40% of the electorate in the majority of reserved dalit state and national constituencies.

<sup>86</sup> Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998)

Villupuram, Kancheepuram, and Nilgiris. Moreover, the communist parties (either the CPI and, after this party split in 1964, the Communist Part of India-Marxist (CPI-M)) drew significant support in the above coastal and central old delta regions from the 1940s to the 1970s primarily among dalits and secondarily among lower-middle and middle caste agricultural workers, sharecroppers, and smaller tenants. Reflecting their close local identification with dalits, they were called parties of the Pallar and the Parayar, the two major dalit castes of the region. They retained substantial support longer among agricultural workers than among sharecroppers and tenants because they focused mobilization from the 1960s on agrarian wage increases, limiting the hire of migrant labor, and, in the case of the CPI-M, restricting agrarian mechanization, rather than on the rights of sharecroppers and tenants or on land distribution.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, the regions of prior subordinate group mobilization corresponded closely with the loci of greatest group political representation in both deltas. But, alliances crossed ethnic lines much more and the subordinate group's vote got dispersed more in the Kaveri delta. Blacks entered both major parties as voters and middle-level leaders from the late 1960s until the late 1970s, and thus built significant cross-racial alliances for the first time in Mississippi. But race did not thereby become irrelevant to partisanship. The national Democratic Party accommodated blacks and their demands far more than the Republican Party, and the state party reconciled itself with the national party and its acceptance of blacks by the early 1980s. In response, the state Republican Party, and to a lesser extent its national counterpart, became primarily aligned with whites and attempted to limit black representation and policy benefits. As party strategies changed along these lines, the majority of white voters shifted to the Republican Party by the 1990s despite the ancestral association that southern whites felt with the Democratic Party. The reconciliation of the state Democratic Party with black inclusion and the resulting voter realignment happened later in Mississippi than in much of the South. Once such realignment happened however, it was more complete than in more urbanized and industrialized Deep South regions, and only a small minority of whites supported the Democratic Party thereafter. This meant that the Democratic Party won in national, state, and local elections from the 1990s onward only in predominantly black areas in the Mississippi delta and the lowlands.<sup>88</sup>

In the Kaveri delta, the communists monopolized dalit support from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s in the regions of high mobilization. Although they gained poorer agrarian groups favorable legislation and local power, their electoral performance declined from the 1970s onward. These gains promoted differentiation between agricultural workers on the one hand and owner-farmers, tenant farmers with security of tenure, and non-agricultural workers, on the other hand, as well as between dalits and middle castes. This reduced the incentives of upwardly mobile former supporters, both dalit and non-dalit, to engage in communist agitations, and weakened the force of the sanctions the communists used to deter defectors. Moreover, the Dravidian parties attracted most of the middle caste vote and a minority of dalit support in the region by offering a combination of policy and patronage benefits while they alternated in power in the state from the mid-1960s onward. The marginalization of the communists in the state and the country from about the same time also discouraged former supporters. These changes contributed to a decline in communist support in the Kaveri delta from the 1970s, and the dispersion of dalit support among various parties. As a result, the share of the delta vote gained by the communist parties declined from 24.2% (which yielded 7 seats) in 1952 to 15.2% (2 seats) in 1962, 13.4% (3 seats) in 1977, 9.4% (4

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<sup>87</sup> There were exceptions to this pattern. The CPI mobilized sharecroppers to take over plots they tilled if their owners were well over the land ceiling limit, especially in Valangiman and Nannilam blocks. Agitations on the lands of the national Congress party leader, G. Karupppiah Mooppanar, drew particularly wide attention. Interviews, V. Rangarajan, CPI, Papanasam, December 30, 2013; Selvaraj, CPI Nagaipattinam District Secretary, Nagaipattinam, December 18, 2013; V. Mutharasan, CPI, Vivasayigal Sangam President, Thiruthuraipundi, December 17, 2013.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Jere Nash and Andy Taggart, *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976-2008* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007); Sharon D. Wright Austin, *The Transformation of Plantation Politics: Black Politics, Concentrated Poverty, and Social Capital in the Mississippi Delta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006)

seats) in 1989, and 4.4% (3 seats) in 2011. Thus, caste became less relevant to partisanship in the region after subordinate group mobilization declined, unlike with race in Mississippi.<sup>89</sup>

As a result, after initial subordinate group mobilization, parties competed much more for dalit support in the Kaveri delta and Tamil Nadu than they did for black support in Mississippi. This placed Kaveri delta dalits in a better position than black Mississippians to press parties for benefits from the 1980s. The position of black voters in the party system weakened their influence over the state government despite Mississippi's high black population concentration. As a result, after peonage ended and employment diversified, Mississippi's African Americans mainly got the lowest-paying and least secure jobs in new enterprises such as catfish farms, casinos, and supermarkets. The terms of such employment were poorer because trade unions remained very weak in the state.<sup>90</sup> However, black representation became higher and black voters acquired greater influence over local governments where blacks were numerous and the community institutions built during the civil rights movement endured. In these regions, local governments built social infrastructure in black neighborhoods and employed more blacks, and black poverty declined more.<sup>91</sup> Preliminary research suggests that Kaveri delta dalits made more economic gains than black Mississippians after enfranchisement. Kaveri delta dalits advanced by getting higher agricultural wages, more secure land tenure, and land titles, as well as non-agrarian employment since the 1970s. They were more successful than black Mississippians because they had built stronger interethnic ties and parties competed more for their vote in the region and elsewhere in the state.

### **CONSEQUENCES FOR DEMOCRACY**

The mobilization of the subordinate group increased its representation sooner, gave its members greater room to bargain with parties for benefits, and thus enhanced democracy more in the Kaveri than in the Mississippi delta. Two developments crucially influenced this outcome. First, the subordinate ethnic groups were better able to build interethnic alliances that addressed their interests in the Kaveri delta than the Mississippi delta. Kaveri delta dalits did so by becoming central to an alliance of lower and middle caste groups from the lower agrarian strata. The primacy of racial identities and the depth of racial discourses seriously limited such alliances in Mississippi, at least until the 1970s. The nature of identities and classification made interethnic alliances easier for dalits than for African Americans throughout the two countries. But this was particularly the case in the Kaveri delta in comparison with Mississippi and the Deep South.

Second, polity insiders, including dominant agrarian elites, became far more accommodative of subordinate group challenges in the Kaveri delta. This was connected to national trends. The national Congress party and the postcolonial Indian state moved toward dalit inclusion much sooner than the national Democratic Party and the federal US government did to include southern African Americans. Moreover, the locally dominant party (the Congress Party in the Kaveri delta and the state Democratic Party in Mississippi) was less autonomous of its national counterpart, and the state government of the federal government in India than in the US, and these entities did not seek to build greater autonomy as a means to seriously contain subordinate group advancement and democratization in India.

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<sup>89</sup> Four independent candidates supported by the CPI were also elected in 1952. The communist vote overstates party support in elections since the 1970s because it was predominantly drawn from other parties with which the communists were allied. Bouton, *Agrarian Radicalism*, 136-81, 251-96; Subramanian, *Ethnicity and Populist*, 17-29, 154-7, 185-8;

[http://eci.nic.in/eci\\_main/StatisticalReports/AE2011/stat\\_TN\\_May2011.pdf](http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/AE2011/stat_TN_May2011.pdf) (accessed: June 20, 2016)

<sup>90</sup> Regarding trends in the state, see Clyde A. Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (London: Verso, 1998); Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013); and in specific regions of the state, see Wright Austin, *Transformation*; Françoise N. Hamlin, *Crossroads at Clarksdale: The Black freedom struggle in the Mississippi Delta after World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Frederick M. Wirt, *"We Aint' What We Was": Civil Rights in the New South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Williams et. al., *Race and Economic Development*.

<sup>91</sup> Andrews, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 185-190; Wright Austin, *Transformation of Plantation Politics*, 133-168