Emergence of the DSS in Karnataka:
Contesting society, state, and bureaucracy from below

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1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Dalit movement in Karnataka in 1973 had a far-reaching impact not only among the untouchable communities across the state, but also in challenging the dictates of caste. The movement ushered in a new vision of civil rights across India. In order to understand the dynamics of caste and state bureaucracy, this paper specifically tries to capture the social evolution of a Dalit movement, the Dalit Sangarsha Samithi (DSS) in Kolar District of Karnataka. The impact of the DSS among the Dalit communities in the district is analysed by focusing specifically on the ethnographic details of Valagalaburre village. Finally the paper considers how the state machinery responded to the DSS.

By taking the fact sheets of the atrocities recorded by the social welfare department of Kolar District the paper contends that the DSS did alter the ethnographic map of social relations, drastically reducing the number of atrocities perpetrated upon Dalit communities. This in turn inspired the committed workers of the DSS to organize villagers to come together to shackle the age-old oppressive caste structures that defined the relations to resources in the villages.

This study is well aware that unfortunately the DSS has currently fallen into a sad state of affairs with innumerable factions. However the present situation does not invalidate the very real achievements of the DSS, which are aptly captured in the words of one of those involved:

"The Dalit movement in Karnataka in the past three decades was a vigorous march towards self-dignity. But today it sadly gives an impression of being at a tangent turn of events. Indeed, as it emerged from a long historical slumber, it gave rise to a stormy wave of protest against all sorts of oppressive tendencies inherent in the very social fabric of the society in Karnataka. It played a decisive role in awakening the Dalits in Karnataka. But it also shook the rigid, irresponsible Hindu conscience. The movement spread like a wild fire burning every sluggish mind to transform itself into a zealous flame… It really hailed a new era of hope for Dalits in Karnataka”

It is this saga that will never allow the spirit of the DSS to die in spite of carnages like the Kambalapalli episode. The Kambalapalli carnage took place in 2000, and the following account of it illustrates precisely what the DSS struggles against:

"a flock of sheep belonging to both Vokkaligas and Dalits was stolen from Kambala Palli Village. In this connection a ‘Panchayath’ was held in the village and it was unilaterally decided that Venkataramanappa, Anjanappa and Ravanappa - all Dalits - had stolen the…"
sheep inspite of their denial and it was also decided to file a police complaint of theft against them. Fearing police action the above named Dalits left their village along with their families. A police complaint was filed in this connection and during investigation it came to light that the sheep were stolen and taken to Andhra Pradesh and sold for Rs. 9,000/- by K.M. Maddireddy, Anjaneyareddy, Reddappa, Narayanaswamy, Kittanna alias Krishnareddy and their followers all belonging to Vokkaliga community of the same village. The sheep belonging to the Dalits were recovered and brought back and handed over to the owners. Dalit Venkataramanappa and his two brothers who had left the village took leading part in the detection of the stolen sheep which resulted in the exposure of Vokkaligas’ conspiracy. Further it also brought contempt and ridicule to Vokkaligas as a whole in the village. They wanted to do away with Venkataramanappa and were waiting for a chance for him to come back to the village. According to Section 3(1) (VIII) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act., 1989 whoever not being a member of a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe institutes a false criminal or other legal proceedings against a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to five years and with a fine. The police should have booked a criminal case against the Vokkaligas who had filed false complaints against Dalits in the matter under the above provision of law. That would have checked them from advancing further with their criminal activities. On hearing the delivery of his wife Venkataramanappa came to the village on 5-6-1998 at about 10.30 p.m. On getting information about his arrival Maddireddy, Anjaneyareddy and another 39 persons including Kittanna alias Krishnareddy formed an unlawful assembly and chased him to his house and stoned him to death in the presence of his wife and other family members. He was buried under the stones numbering about 50. All the above 41 culprits were released on bail and were roaming in the locality.”

This study highlights the value of the DSS in its continued challenges to local caste relations and to LPG policies (liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation) in Karnataka. More particularly, the present study challenges the normative theoretical underpinnings of ‘caste’ to show that Dalit activism did unravel the much-ignored fact of caste as experienced distance from powerful castes that hinders the self-determination of Dalit communities.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study situates itself in ‘the politics of cultural meanings’ that are articulated by the Dalit communities in their everyday ‘survival’ mechanisms. This politics underlies their ‘autonomous spheres’ of existence from which emerge Dalit protest, resistance, and self-will.

This is echoed in the words of Mr. K. Ramaiah:

“Any activism that doesn’t understand the survival strategies of the people is doomed to reinforce the dominant social philosophies of Brahmins.”

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4 Mr. K. Ramaiah was one of the pioneers of Dalit Movement in Karnataka. After finishing his plus two he joined Canara bank in KGF seeking a lucrative career. But he soon left that and became a full-fledged leader of the DSS in the district. As a playwright, a poet and cultural critique, he is well known in Karnataka today. At present he has started ADIMA a cultural centre on the hills of Kolar town. In one of his interviews, on 19/12/2010, he narrated the above.
It is from this perspective that the study tries to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach drawing information from various sources through a variety of methods. These include collecting information through interviews, questionnaires, personal write ups by the DSS leaders who were part of the struggles in the district, focus-group discussions, active participation in informal interactions, close observation of the attitudes of the speakers during the discussions, and finally through participatory rural appraisal (PRA) at Valagalaburre village. Moreover the research team participated in various seminars on DSS activism and its contribution to civil rights movements across Karnataka. The study also uses secondary data such as Dalit literature, other media documents/reports, academic studies and experiential accounts and reviews of the struggles of DSS. All these have enabled us to theorise the enormous quantity of information in the field.

This study moreover focuses on the effects of the struggles throughout the district, verified by listening to the memories of both organisers and ordinary participants in these struggles. Thereby, the study seeks to unravel the social history of major struggles in the district. Specifically this study examines:

i) the magnitude, nature, extent of the impact of the DSS;
ii) how that impact in turn mobilized the cadre base; and
iii) how the govt. machinery in the district responded to the demands of the DSS.

Based on these methodological clarifications the study divided the interviews into three parts:

i) interviews with the DSS leaders;5
ii) interviews with the cadres of the DSS;6
iii) interviews with lay people – there were two groups among them: Dalits and non-Dalits.7

For a close PRA exercise Valagalaburre village was taken up. This was to understand and unravel the kind of impact DSS had in the village, including upon the multiple communities who live in the village.

3 THE EMERGENCE OF THE DSS IN KOLAR DISTRICT

3.1 Kolar District

Kolar District in Karnataka has a unique place in India’s trajectory into colonial modernity. In 1880 the Kolar Gold Mines were taken up for systematic exploitation by John Taylor & Sons under the East India Company. In order to enhance mining activity, from 1902 onward, the mines were supplied with electricity from the Shivanasamudra Hydro Electric Powerplant, the first of its kind in Asia at the time. These colonial developments heralded

5 DSS leaders interviewed: Mr. K. Ramaiah, Mr. C. Muniappa, Mr. Specks Narayananswamy, Mr. T. Vijayakumar, Mr. Ramappa, Dalit Narayananswamy, Suggandalli Muniraju, B. Muniappa, Mr. Timmarayappa, and N. Venkatesh. All these individuals had excelled in their own fields of expertise regarding Dalit movement in the state.

6 DSS cadres interviewed: Mr. B. Muniappa, Mr. Sriramappa and Mrs. Lakshamma

7 Among the Dalits the following were important interviewees: Mr. Chikka Muniappa, Mr. Shetty Gunth Narayanappa, Mrs. Muniamma, Mr. Narayananswamy, Mr. V. M. Mohanababu, Mrs. Pillamma, Mrs. Thippamma, Mrs. MunUanumakka, Mrs. Thotigara Kempamma, Mrs. Lakshamma, Mr. Venkateshappa (Rtd. Block Development Officer). There were also the Village representative in Gramapanchayath like Mrs. Chowdamma, Mr. Shashidhar – Govt. Officer in agriculture dept., Mrs., and Mr. Mulavagalappa. Among the non-Dalits the following were important interviewees: Mr. Munesh, Mr. P. Nanjudappa, Mr. P. Prasanna and Mr. Husen Sabi – another Village representative.
new, complex configurations of power relations and poverty in the princely state of Mysore. There is no surprise then at the outcome in the present day: according to the Prof. Nanjunadappa Report\(^8\), the district is one of the most backward in the state.

Till recently, the district had 11 Taluks (inclusive of Chikkaballapur which was declared as a district two years ago) and 12 Assembly Constituencies out of which 3 are reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs). There are 2 Parliament seats – one is Kolar Constituency and the other is the Chickaballapur Constituency.

Out of the districts of Karnataka, Kolar has the highest Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe population bordering about 30% of the total population of the district. They are mostly agricultural labourers working in the fields of upper-caste, feudal landlords. A large number of them continue to work as bonded labourers in the houses of Vokkaliga landlords. The entire economy of the district and the industrial establishments are under the control of the dominant castes. Out of the 12 MLAs (Member of Legislative Assembly), 7 are Vokkaligas, 2 Balijigas (also upper-caste) and only 3 are SCs. Clearly, the Vokkaligas not only possess lands in the district but also wield political power. It looks as though the entire district administration including the police force is at their beck and call.

### 3.2 Dalita Sagharsha Samithi (DSS)

Though there are different versions of the history of the emergence of the Dalita Sagharsha Samithi, or DSS, the specificity that captures our attention is the upsurge of the ‘first generation’ of Dalit youth into the field of higher education\(^9\). This was possible because of the affirmative action policies that were followed both by the central and the state governments,\(^10\) particularly during the tenure of Chief Minister Mr. Devaraj Urs in the 1970s, whose pro-people oriented policies did trigger several positive developments in the state. According to C. Muniappa,\(^11\) during this time there were three Dalit Cabinet Ministers - Mr. Basavalingappa, Mr. Rachaiah, and Mr. K. H. Ranganath who had the courage to give voice to the Dalit communities and they ably used the government machinery to tackle the rising atrocities in the villages against the Dalits. It was this support that made progressive intellectuals come together and dream of a platform like the DSS. This happened during 1973-74 when there was a definite stir in the socio-political milieu of the people in Karnataka. The Emergency Period of 1973 also had a certain impact, with different repercussions to lower caste communities, and particularly the Dalit communities, across the country. It was during this time also that the Prevention of Atrocities Act was implemented.

There were already, at the grassroots, various initiatives by individuals and Dalit communities who were trying to address their continuous painful stories due to practice of caste in the

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\(^8\) Prof. Nanjunadappa was the chairman of Karnataka Planning Commission in 2002. The report he submitted to the then Karnataka Government is known as the ‘Prof. Nanjunadappa Report’. It brought out the regional imbalances with regard to development programmes initiated by the government.

\(^9\) The introduction of the colonial education system in the old Princely state of Mysore had varied impacts on the caste communities. Those who first grabbed the opportunity were the Brahmans. Hence they are considered as the first generation. In contrast, the Dalit communities made their efforts into the field of education only during the late 70s.

\(^10\) These affirmative action policies can be traced to colonial times in the then princely state of Mysore. Due to this, in Kolar there was a hostel for the education of Dalit boys. The Hostel was called the Nachiketana Nilaya. Many youngsters who were there felt an urge to respond to their hopeless state of affairs in the villages as well as in the urban centres.

\(^11\) Currently Mr. C. Muniappa heads a daily called ‘Sanchile’. He is also one of the important leaders of DSS in the state. His interview was taken in November 2009.
villages. All these decided to combine themselves in the making up of Dalita Sagharsa Samithi in the state. The Boosa (Cattle Fodder) Event crowned the above efforts into the real formation of the DSS. Mr. Basavalingappa, the Law Minister in the then Congress government of Karnataka and himself a Dalit, was invited to address the members of an association called the Dalitha Pragathipara Barahagarara Vedike (Progressive Writers Forum) at Mysore. During his speech there, he was moved to describe the literature of Kannada “boosa”, meaning cattle fodder, that held nothing for Dalits. This created an immediate stir all over the state and due to the pressure, he had to resign from his cabinet rank later. This triggered all the progressive thinkers to come together and rethink their strategies to address casteism and untouchability.

According to Mr. K. Ramaiah the unique issue that became the driving force of the Dalit movement in the state was the issue of Untouchability. Against this practice, ‘lower caste’ communities in unison raised their anger both against the state as well as against society. The first expression of this came in Kolar in 1974-75.

The event that is significantly remembered is as follows. Two students from Mulabagal Taluk were studying in the Government College at Kolar during the academic year 1974-75 of whom one was from Vokkaliga caste and the other, named Munivenkatappa, belonged to Scheduled Caste. Both of them appeared for SSLC examination and the Vokkaliga boy failed in the exam whereas Munivenkatappa secured a FIRST class. The Vokkaligas could not tolerate a Dalit boy passing the exam with distinction. Moreover, in the same village, this boy was honoured with a respectable role in a marriage ceremony of an upper caste family – the role being to record the names of those who gave wedding gifts to the newlywed couple. This further insulted the men of the Vokkaliga community who were present there. Without any hesitation the Vokkaligas murdered Munivenkatappa, packed his body in a gunny bag, and threw it in a well.

When the matter came out to the public

“persons like K. Ramaiah, Gaddam Venchatesh, Mr. G. M. Muniappa, Mr. N. Muniswamy, Mr. M. Venkataswamy and others who were studying at Nchiketa Nilaya – a government sponsored hostel for SC/ST students – came together and took up the murder case. There was an instantaneous dharna (protest) in front of the District Collector’s office and later a FIR was lodged, to demand immediate action against the culprits. Thus, the incident marked the turning point in the awakening of Dalit consciousness among the Dalit students in Kolar and later this spread to the Dalit masses in the villages.”

Due to this stir among the Dalit youth, a district unit of the DSS was started in Kolar. As usual the murder case did not end up in a conviction of the culprits. Instead, all the accused were acquitted for want of evidence. This was due to the interference in the investigation by the political forces in the district.

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12 Here a number of studies by Scarlett Epstein and others show that due to the constitutional provisions in the Independent India individuals were questioning the caste practices. Further, Epstein also notes similar churning in sixties. See, Scarlett Epstein T’, 1999, Village Voices: Forty Years of Rural Transformations in South India, Sage Publications, New Delhi, p. 188. Our studies at Kolar reveal the same at Valagalaburre village.

13 Interview with K. Ramaiah dated November 2009.

14 This was narrated by K. Ramaiah during the interview dated November 2009.

15 Narration by S. Narayanaswamy narrated this during an interview with him.

This did not, however, discourage the enthusiasm of the DSS cadre. The public visibility that the incident drew gained the Dalit leadership a certain respectability among the public and they started responding to any atrocity immediately. Thus, the DSS took up the challenge of mobilizing Dalit communities against the atrocities of the upper castes.

The next notable struggle that was taken up by the DSS was the gang rape and murder of one Chinnamma, belonging to a Scheduled Caste, by Vokkaligas in Doddi Halli village about 5 kms away from Chinthamani Town. The dead body was thrown into a well and later buried after a fake postmortem. The DSS took up the case, got the body exhumed and another postmortem conducted by a panel of three doctors. But again the accused could not be convicted for want of evidence. However, these incidents led to the awakening of dormant Dalit forces not only in the district but also in other parts of the state. The DSS took active role in organising the Dalits and agitating against these barbaric acts of the upper castes. The agitation was led by N. Shivanna, Gaddam N. Venkatesh, and others.

During the 1978 Assembly Elections N. Shivanna contested from Chinthamani Assembly general constituency. The opposing candidates belonged to the Vokkaliga community, and in that election a Vokkaliga candidate, Chowdareddy, won. The upper castes were not happy that a Scheduled Caste person had contested in a general seat against Vokkaligas. A few weeks later they organised the Vokkaligas and later in the evening a large group of them forcibly entered Vinoba Colony where the Madiga (Scheduled Caste) resided. The group consisted of more than 200 persons armed with deadly weapons. They entered into the houses of Dalits breaking the doors open and dragging the inhabitants out. Thereafter they set their houses on fire. One Dalit, Pedda Patelappa, was stabbed to death and about 30-35 Dalits sustained bleeding injuries. Though a few police personnel came they could not control the situation. The unruly mob attacked the police and the Circle Inspector of Police sustained grievous injuries. This incident led to the unification of various factions of Dalits in the village. A complaint was lodged by N. Shivanna and under his leadership the DSS started agitations which led to the arrest of four persons. The Vokkaligas influenced the witnesses and the case ended in acquittal of the accused.

The above incidents are only a glimpse into the kind of reactions that the dominant caste groups showed to the emergence of the DSS and its marshalling of a band of committed leaders who took up the task of training the cadre as well as monitoring the government machinery to address violence against Dalits. This also leads one to think about the modern liberal parliamentary democracy in India that with all its partisan politics did contribute to the rise of ‘rights discourse’ to challenge this partisan politics. Hence, the normative discourse of caste had to face the challenge of the DSS in Karnataka and specifically in Kolar District.

Further, the DSS in Kolar district took up land issues, addressing landless among all castes. It was during 1978 that one Mr. Sambaiah, a Dalit, lost his fertile land. Another person, a landlord in Chinnapagana Halli, Malur Taluk became a defaulter in payment of land revenue and his land was ordered to be sold in auction. The auction notification was issued and in the auction notification the land of Mr. Sambaiah was falsely inserted. Thus, the land of Sambaiah was auctioned and purchased by the Vokkaliga landlords of the same village with full knowledge of the forgery and fraud. This only highlights how the dominant groups manoeuvred the government machinery. Mr. Sambaiah had no other means of livelihood and he filed an appeal against the auction. The case went up to the High Court of Karnataka and after about 20 years of litigation, the land was restored. But in the meantime, during the

17 Ibid, p5
18 Ibid. P.5
agonizing delay in the delivery of justice, Sambaiah and his son Mr. Munivenkatappa died. The Lawyer, O. Sreedharan, one of the founder leaders of DSS, took the certified copy of the final order of the High Court to the village and handed it over to the wife of late Sambaiah. Then he visited the graveyard of Sambaiah and his son. The villagers who had assembled there observed two minutes silence to pay homage to the dead souls. The Dalits of the village had organised a small function in the evening and the leaders like Muniyappa of Bahujan Samaj Party, State Vice President, Mr. Mavalil Shankar, State Organising Convenor of DSS, and Mr. R. Muniyappa, State Executive Committee Member of DSS were to address the gathering. Suddenly the electricity failed because somebody had cut the wires. Yet the spirits of DSS and the people were never to be put down and the event led to further strengthening of the cadre base of the DSS.

In the same event the DSS in Kolar demanded the following from the state govt.:  
1) Implement the Land Reform Act of 1978 immediately.
2) Dalits cultivating Bagar-hukkum land should get their title deeds immediately.
3) The C and D land of the government, through the Revenue Dept., had been handed over to the forest dept. The DSS demanded that the order should be taken back and such land should be given to the landless of all castes.
4) All the Dalit cases that were pending in the taluk courts should be immediately settled by the District collector.
5) The Dalits in the rural areas should get basic amenities like drinking water, roads to their habitat, and houses for the poor.
6) All landless Dalits in Kolar Dsitrict should be given minimum of 5 acres of land.

Later, these demands were published through the handbills and were distributed among the people during DSS rallies across the district. This mobilised both the Dalit community and the cadre for the land struggles in the state. This also had an impact on the government machinery to respond to these demands.

For instance, the Nagasandra land struggle holds a mirror to the above demands. This important land struggle was launched in 1982-83. Nagasandra is a village in Gowribidanur Taluk, at that time part of Kolar District. The dwellers of this village were poor and landless. Along with the people in the village the neighbouring villages were mobilised to encroach 600 acres of govt. land where palm trees were being cultivated for the purpose of toddy tapping. The activists along with the villagers chopped the trees down in the night of 14th August 1985. The following day was Independence Day. The incident did symbolise real freedom for the people who took part in the land struggle. Thus, a slogan – Not toddy but education – was coined on this occasion. The agitation was led by N. Muniswamy, Shivanna, Lakshmipathi Kolar, Pichalli Srinivas and many others. Later the government sanctioned the disputed land to the villagers. The bonded labourers in the village were freed and they were rehabilitated in the same land.19

Like the above many land struggles were carried out across Karnataka by Dalit Sangharsha Samiti from 1975 onwards. The landlordism, caste hierarchy and bonded labour system have close social links. It was in this social context that the state bureaucracy operated. The majority of personnel in the bureaucracy too belonged to the dominant caste groups, and always worked to protect the interests the landlords. Acts like those on banning bonded labour or the prevention of atrocities against the Dalits remained only in the gazette notifications. Against this situation the lower caste communities came out to the public under

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19 See the write up by Mr. R. Gangadharamurthy collected by B. Shivanna.
the banner of the DSS. The land struggles the waged certainly dislocated the link between the caste society, landlordism and the bonded labour system. Thus, even today the land struggle has remained an important issue to the fragmented DSS Units in the state.

Therefore, the emergence of DSS definitely raised the aspirations for self–determination of the toiling lower caste communities across the state of Karnataka. The following agitation of DSS will highlight this. In 1979 a widow named Anasuyamma, aged 19 was gang raped by the Vokkaligas in a village called Hunasi Kote of Malur Taluk. She belonged to the pottery community. Mr. Kumbara Sheshagiriyappa, her father, with the support of the Malur Taluk DSS unit, decided to lodge a complaint in the police station. Seeing the threat, the Vokkaligas hatched another plot under the leadership of Krishnegowda, a Vokkali who was also the Taluk Board President of Malur. They caught hold of Mr. Sheshagiriyappa and beat him red and blue. The body was completely damaged. They took Sheshagiriyappa’s body to the main road in the night, laid him on the road and covered him with dry paddy grass. This was done thinking that a lorry would come and run over the body so that the whole episode would be turned into an accident. But that night no such lorry came that way. Early in the morning a milk man saw something moving in the grass and when he uncovered the grass, to his shock, he saw the body of Sheshagiriyappa still trying to breathe. He raised the alarm with the people in the village, but by the time people gathered to take him to the hospital Sheshagiriyappa breathed his last. The DSS took up the case and lodged a complaint.

Yet, the police force was not able to arrest all the accused persons because of the political clout of the culprits. The DSS took up the issue. The DSS conducted a two day camp and prepared a dedicated set of cadre to take the jyothi (a lamp) of Sheshagiriyappa to Vidhana Soudha by padayathra (a ‘pilgramage by food’). The jyothi symbolised Sheshagiriyappa’s spirit and was lit from his grave in Hunasi Kote Village, whereupon the march started towards Karnataka Legislature which was in session at that time. It represented Sheshagiriyappa going to the Assembly to ask the Government as to why he and his daughter were not given protection and as to why the culprits were not arrested and punished. Those in the procession, numbering about 500, were ‘latti-charged’ (charged by police with batons) when they attempted to go near the Assembly. Leaders like Prof. B. Krishnappa, O. Sreedharan, M.D. Gangaiah, N. Giriyappa, Devanur Mahadeva, Siddalingaiah – the poet, L. Hanumanthaiah, O. Rajanna, N. Shivanna, N. Venkatesh, H. Govindiah, N. Muniswamy, Indudara Homnapura, C.M. Muniyappa, K. Ramaiah, Vijayakumar, V. Narayanaswamy and others led the padayathra. Many sustained injuries in the police latti-charge and all of them were arrested and charges were booked against them. The opposition party in the Legislative Assembly, under the leadership of late Devaraj Urs, staged a walkout. Due to the pressure of the public and the media the police acted and the culprits were arrested and were put behind bars. The three day protest march from Hunasi Kote to Bangalore and the latti-Charge finally resulted in wide awakening of the lower castes across the state. The tactics that was adopted by the DSS for the padayathra were songs of awakening, pamphlets distribution, and street theatre to drive home the issue. The song that was written in the name of Anasuyamma is sung by the DSS cadre even today.

Thus, this issue also galvanized a strong base across different communities for the DSS and the DSS emerged as a strong force in Karnataka to uphold justice for all. It is this event that also gave a dignified status to DSS cadre to wage war against the caste ridden local reality. From this episode onwards, the state machinery too became sensitive to the caste atrocities and the dominant castes too were made to see the consequences of the law.

Then the gruesome incident at Billandla Halli attracted even wider attention. Billandla Halli is a village about 30 kms from Chinthamani Town. There are about 200 families of Vokkaligas and 75 houses of Madigas and Holayas (both Scheduled Castes). The Dalits
wanted to celebrate Ambedkar Jayanthi and start a DSS Unit in the village. To mark the event, the Dalits wanted to have cultural programs for the occasion. The state DSS leader N. Shivanna and others were invited for the function. Pamphlets were printed and distributed. But the Vokkaliga Yuva Vedike, which was formed in order defend themselves a few years ago, opposed the starting of a unit of DSS in the village.

On 31 August 1997 the then Social Welfare Minister, Krishnareddy, the Transport Minister, Bachelgowda, the Agricultural Minister, Byregowda and the Housing Minister and Karnataka Milk Producers Federation Chairman, H. D. Revanna – all belonged to the Vokkaliga community – attended a function for opening of a dairy building at Ragutta Halli village, the neighbouring village of Billandla Halli. The Vokkaliga Yuva Vedike leaders met the team of Vokkaliga Ministers and informed them about the inauguration of a DSS unit in the village and requested them to take a suitable action to prevent it.

On 1 September 1997, the day of inauguration of DSS unit, the Dy. Superintendent of Police, Srikantaiah and Circle Inspector, Ramachandrappa, both of whom belonged to the Vokkaliga community, contacted N. Shivanna over the phone. The Circle Inspector told him that the function at Billandla Halli might create law and order problems and might lead to bloodshed in the locality and asked him to cancel the program and not to go there. He also told him to contact Dy. SP. Srikantaiah immediately. Then N. Shivanna contacted Dy. SP. Srikantaiah over the phone, who also requested N. Shivanna to cancel the program and not to go there, since a large number of hired goons (thugs) had come there to create trouble.

N. Shivanna agreed the cancellation of the programme with the Dy. SP. Then the DSS Mungaana Halli Hobli Convener, Kodigal Ramesh, telephoned N. Shivanna telling him about the assembly of large number of Dalits to participate in the function and asked him to attend the function without fail. Shivanna informed Ramesh that the function had been cancelled on the advice of the police. However the police wanted to go to the village to prevent any untoward incident. Thinking that N. Shivanna and other leaders of DSS would be coming to attend the function with the police support the Vokkaligas had created road blocks by heaping up stones and boulders. Sudhakarreddy a Vokkaliga Yuva Vedike activist was sitting on a branch of a tree with loaded gun to shoot N. Shivanna and other DSS leaders. The police who were coming to the village started removing the road blocks. At that time Sudhakarreddy fired at them and one police constable fell dead. The police opened fire at Sudhakarreddy and he fell down dead. The Vokkaligas who were hiding behind the bushes to attack the Dalits ran towards the police and attacked them with deadly weapons. During the attack one police constable was murdered on the spot and another constable was chased to a school 1 km away where he was caught, dragged out and he too was brutally murdered in the presence of teachers and students. Many police officers and constables were injured and their vehicles were burnt. Yet there was no effective steps taken to prosecute the culprits. Against the murder of their colleagues the police personnel conducted Dharna (peaceful protest) in the police station. The DSS also protested against the brutal act of the Vokkaligas, who killed only those police constables who did not belong to Vokkaliga community. A Kolar Bundh (strike) was observed by DSS and the general public against the above atrocious act of Vokkaligas.

This incident shows that the DSS though acted as a strong pressure group to force the government to respond to their agonies. At the same time the DSS also stood with the government machinery, for that was the only democratic support they had to protect against the caste ridden society.

There are so many events and struggles like the incidents that have been described, that made the DSS cadre as well as the people more strong and dignified that they too could stand up against the caste menace. The table in the Appendix highlights the kind of issues that DSS
took up. The socio-historical conditions of Dalits in Kolar district can be inferred from the activities and struggles in the table.

It is in this situation that the DSS was formed into an organization to address their situation and re-imagine their future. In all these struggles the DSS adopted multiple strategies to confront the caste society. It used handbills, posters, rallies, Dharnis, picketing government offices, marches, Padayathras, cadre building trainings, workshops, conventions, street theatre, songs of awareness building and others to drive home the single agenda that untouchability is un-constitutional and ‘lower castes’ too had equal rights and opportunities to lead dignified life. Looking into the Dalit community, the DSS gave call to “educate, organize and agitate” so that they lead a life of dignity and self-confidence. Their ideologies were drawn from Ambedkar, Lohiaite, Periyar, Basavanna and Buddha yet they looked within the community to unravel the strength of their cultural world. However, Baba Saheb Ambedkar remained the core principle to invoke and sustain the movement apart from localized cultural heroes. The multiple issues of their struggle varied from caste exploitation to pressurizing the government to address the long pending issues of their day-to-day lives in the villages.

Having had a bird view of the DSS in the Kolar district, now let’s move to a village in order to understand concretely the socio-economic impact of DSS.

4 THE DSS AND ITS IMPACT IN VALAGALABURRE VILLAGE

“The Hindu looks upon the observance of untouchability as an act of merit, and non-observance of it as sin. My view therefore is that so long as this notion prevails untouchability will prevail.”

Further, Dr. Ambedkar says:

“The Hindu society insists on segregation of the Untouchables. The Hindu will not live in the quarters of the Untouchables and will not allow the Untouchables to live inside Hindu quarters… It is not a case of social separation, a mere stoppage of social intercourse for a temporary period. It is a case of territorial segregation and a cordon sanitaire putting the impure people inside the barbed wire into a sort of a cage. Every Hindu village is a ghetto. The Hindus live in the village and the untouchables live in the ghetto.”

This is a well-known response to those who wanted village to be treated as the basic unit of Indian civilization; he had said:

“I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India… What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?”

One has to be aware these comments regarding villages before approaching the villages in Karnataka. Though village studies do have different viewpoints to ponder; yet to understand the DSS activism in Karnataka and specifically in Kolar one has to look at the attitudes and relationships between various castes communities that unravel the dynamics of caste in the villages.

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21 BR Ambedkar, *The untouchables: who were they and why they became untouchable*. 1948. Available at: [www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/39A.Untouchables%20who%20were%20they%20why%20they%20became%20P\ART%20I.htm](http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/39A.Untouchables%20who%20were%20they%20why%20they%20became%20P\ART%20I.htm)
From this perspective, let’s enter the village Valagalaburre. The village is situated towards north of Kolar Town about 19kms away. There is no direct bus to the village. One has to get down at the main road and walk about 2kms to reach the village. There are one or two autos that reaches the villagers by charging Rs.5/- per person.

According to 90 year old Smt. Munihanumakka of Valagalaburre:

“the socio-economic conditions understood from the caste background, the Okkaliga Gowdas had rich-fertile land. At least one from every Holey and Madiga family was a bonded labour in the Okkaliga houses. This had affected their everyday lives. During famine we used to survive by eating Gottigeddel” (a small bulb that is grown in the village tanks)
In this context there was only one Brahmin family in the village which was sought after for any matter pertaining to day to day disputes to be settled. This is captured by Mr. Mulavagalappa during the interview. He says,

“In any village panchayat unless the Brahmin was present there would not be Nyaya – the settlement. It would be postponed depending upon the convenience of the Brahmin.”

This is the story of the Dalit communities at Valagalaburre!

Another profile of the area can be had from the census of 2001, in the data in figure 1. Though census data shows that they are 308 families in the village, today they are approximately 456 families. Among them about 219 are Vokkaligas and about 230 families of SCs; two families are of Bhovis and 47 families are of Scheduled Tribes (Nayaks). All together about 14 castes communities live in the village. They are the Okkaligas, the Brahmin, the Balagiga, the Kuruba, the Shetty, the Vishwakarmma, the Agasa, the Bestha, the Sawithasamaj, the Bhovi, the Nayak, the Holeya and the Madiga. The total population in the village is about 1858. Among them about 1358 are adult voters.

According to the villagers a feudatory was responsible for the formation of village. There is a big gate (Hebbagilu) at the entrance of the village. There is a wall like a structure that symbolizes its past history. There is a total of 508.33 hectares of agricultural land in the village. During the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) exercises in the village we found that much of the land i.e. 439.33 hectares are owned by the upper castes and the SCs and STs own only about 69 hectares of land. It means on an average less than one acre of land is owned by these SC and ST families. Roughly about 20-25 families are landless.

We find civic facilities like one public telephone booth owned by the government run company BSNL, and another private booth run by a Muslim person. There is a milk dairy association run by a government co-operative society and five private milk dairies belonging to people in the Vokkaliga community. There is a government run PDS (Public Distribution System) shop looked after by a Dalit, a vegetable shop owned by a Dalit, a cattle fodder shop by an Okkaliga person and a flour-mill by another Vokkaliga person. There is a community hall for all, a higher primary school, two child crèches, and a post office. Just a look at these immediately tell that the major economic sources are controlled by the upper caste communities. Though there is no tap facility for drinking water in the village, there are five bore wells in the village that cater to all.

There are also three cycle shops in the village – two by Kuruba families and another by the Agasa family. There is a clothes ironing shop owned by the same Agasa family. There are nine tea shops run by Muslims, Dalits and others. There is no untouchability practice as such today in these shops. There five liquor shops that are run illegally. There about 13 Self Help Groups, although among them three are defunct. Of those still operating, five belong to SCs and five cater to mixed upper caste people.

There is a nurse appointed by the government to look after the health of the village community, but people say she not efficient. Most of the people come to Kolar town for treatment. Apart from agriculture and horticulture, people do have sericulture in the village. At present an NREG (National Rural Employment Guarantee) scheme is run in the village and about 60 persons go there for work. But when there is no agricultural work in the village more than 200 people come for this work in the village.

There about 8 temples and a mosque in the village. The 8 temples are Gopalaswamy temple, Shanimahatma temple, Basweswra temple, Veeranjaneya temple, Gangamma Gudi and Chowdeswari temple. All of these belong to the upper caste in the village. Due to the DSS there was temple for Dalits in the Gopalaswamy temple. But today hardly any Dalit is
interested to go to the temple. A Brahmin priest officiates in Gopalaswamy temple and the rest are managed by individuals belonging to the upper castes.

Not going into other details of the village let’s look into the Dalit activism in the village that later on merged with DSS of the state unit. As the study traces, the real caste resistance stars in the beginning of 70s. Two important individuals are Mr. B. Muniappa and Mr. Sriramappa. The former belongs to the Holeya community and the latter to the Madiga community. These two were first generation among the Dalits to have access to education that helped them to get government jobs as the primary school teachers, which were considered dignified jobs in the village.

The episode that formed the spark for the resistance began in B. Muniappa’s house, which was known as Adumeso Mane (goat rearing house). Let’s hear the incident in his own words:

“In 1976, one Saturday, I finished my classes and came home. As I entered the my house I heard a shocking news – my mother as was crying narrated that the police had come and taken my elder brother and my two uncles to Kolar police station.”

Later he along with Mr. Sriramappa went to the police station. (Here, one notices how both the Holeya and the Madiga people had to support each other in order to face the caste violence). In the police station again the narration goes like this,

“the Sub-Inspector Ramakrishnagowda with powerful voice said, ‘look master, your people have cultivated paddy in the tank bed area illegally. The villagers have complained to the PWD (Public Works Department). Hence, I arrested them.’ Instantaneously, I realized that the Vokkalagas in the village have not directly lodged a complaint in the police station but with the PWD which has been used as a ploy to subdue the Dalits in the village.”

At the very instance, the elder uncle of Muniappa responded to the Sub-Inspectors as follows:

“Swamy, (Lord) it was the Gowdas of the village only asked us to cultivate at the tank bed. They only provided us with bullocks, plough and the paddy seed to sow there. In spite all these, now, they only have complained against us. How is to grasp? Tell us sir, how to believe?”

The Sub-Inspector replies,

“Yea… that might have been a support! But just now the paddy is in full growth. As the grain turn red so also the eye sore! So goes the idiom.”

All these seem to reveal at once the innocence of the Dalits and yet how the satire of the Gowdas play on this innocence in Valagalaburre. Though there is the caste hegemony, yet this hegemony of the caste seems to be not tolerant of the Dalits’ fruitful labour!

“All these years the Jaminadars had a say in our day – to – day lives; but, today the day has dawned that we would like to decide on what we want to do!”

This was the thought that came to Mr. Muniappa at the episode that was unravelling in the police station. The liberally oriented police man warned them, took a writ from them that they will not venture like that in the future and let them go. As they were coming out of the station he seemed to have challenged them saying,

“If you have guts, look around any cattle grazing ground of the government, take possession of it.”

But, that very moment, the self-dignity of the Dalits too decided to carve out a different course in the village. As they came out of the police station, they directly went to the Tashildhar’s (Taluk administrator) office and took Darkasthu applications (a government scheme for SC and ST to apply for cultivable land in Karnataka). Taking these applications
they returned to their village. Marshalling all their courage about 70 of them gathered near their well, filled out the applications and returned them to the Taluk office on the following day. On the following night they discussed and resolved that they should clear off the 300 and so acres of forest land that was adjacent to their habitat and occupy that. Under the leadership of Sriramappa and Muniappa the Dalit community cleared the forest bushes overnight and occupied the land. The Okkaliga Gowdas, being shocked at the sight, ordered the Panchayath to come immediately and stop the episode. In the Pachayath meeting the Gowdas said that the forest land should be kept aside for the cattle to graze. The Dalits by now had enough courage to say that if the Gowdas would give one-two acres of their land they would stop occupying the forest land. Hearing that, the Panchayath meeting ended without any decision. From then on a conflict builds up in the village between the Dalits and the Okkaliga Gowdas. Now-and-then socio-economic tensions among them could be seen coming up among them. But under the leadership of Sriramappa and Muniappa the Dalits stand united to face the consequences of this cold war in the village.23 There was one such incident where one Dalit bought cattle fodder (maize plants) from a Vokkaliga. But that led to a quarrel between them. This came to the forefront in the village. Both the parties somehow manage to settle down for a while. But the self-assertion of the Dalits in the village continues to become stronger. The focus for all of this was Mr. Sriramappa and Mr. B. Muniappa. They, being government primary school teachers, had enough knowledge about legal provisions of the government and they would organize meetings to share the information regarding government welfare schemes with the people. At this point there was still no DSS as such in the vicinity.

But in 1982 the tensions between the Vokkaligas and Dalits in the village reached their climax. In the nights the Dalit Colony experienced various threats like direct attack and stone throwing on their houses in the night. This continued for a number of days. The Dalits took to police protection, and for the whole of that year the reserved police stayed in the village. During this time there was one more event that occurred in the village. The Dalits used a well to draw water. The Vokkaligas poisoned the well water.

The news of this event spread across the district and reached the newly emergent DSS in the district. Some of the committee members, including Mr. Gaddam Venkatesh and Mr. C. M. Muniappa, visited the village and listen to the woes of the Dalits there. Having understood the situation, the DSS unit in the district started meeting the District Collector and pressured him to take immediate actions. In the meantime the person who poisoned the well was identified by the Dalits. But, the culprit was so poor that the Dalits, without handing him over to the police, let him go with a warning.

The Dalits in Valagalaburre now had the support of the DSS and started district cadre training camps in the village. For this Mr. Sriramappa and B. Muniappa provide the much needed resources. Thus, the presence of DSS in the village slowly forced the Vokkaligas to accept the change that is taking among the Dalits in the village, although not before social boycotts by the Vokkaligas hindered the economic life of the Dalit community in the village.

The Dalit leadership in the village, along with DSS support, handled the events in the ongoing struggle to the favour of the Dalits. Some of the important events are recorded as follows.

### 4.1 The Palanki Bande event:

Palanki Bande is a hill that was known for quarry work. The Dalits, including Madigas, the Nayaks and the Vaddas (Bhovis), used to work in the quarry as daily wagers. But as a result of

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23 B. Muniappa, Vlgalaburre – Kurukshetra, DSS News bulletin, September 2004, p. 6-7
the social boycott by the upper castes the Dalits no longer had jobs there. The DSS in Kolar came to their rescue. Persons like Specks Narayanaswamy and Rajendra Prasad took the matter to the D.C office and saw that the quarry itself would be sanctioned to Mr. Chikka Gopalapap belonging to the Madiga Community. Thus, the first socio-economic struggle was successfully handled by the DSS in the village. This was narrated by Smt. Laxmamma.

4.2 Alternative work during the social boycott:

We have seen continuous social boycotts sanctioned against the Dalits in the village by the upper castes. In order to resolve the issue Mr. C. M. Muniappa of Kolar DSS Unit took the matter to the district commissioner, after discussing with the Dalits in the village. The administration responded to them favourably and arranged alternative sources of daily work in the government schemes in neighbouring villages. Furthermore, the government came forward to give the Dalits cows in order stand on their own to sustain their livelihood. This had greatly solved the economic needs of the Dalit community in the village. This was narrated by the assistant cook Mrs. Pillamma in the school.

4.3 The Bore Well episode:

The Palanki event had its repercussions. There was a public bore well that was used by everybody to draw water. Whenever the upper castes came there to draw water, they would follow ritual cleaning the hand pump by using their left hands and left legs, in order to irritate the Dalit women. The precious time of the Dalit women was wasted and their coolie work was affected. Having tolerated that for a while, one night some Dalits came to the Bore well and pushed beef meat into the hand pump. In the morning when the upper caste women came they saw that pollution and from that day onwards they stopped coming to the bore well. Thus, the bore well was left for the use of the Dalits in the village. This was narrated by Smt. Anjanamma of the Dalit colony.

4.4 The courage to carry the buffaloes' meat in the village:

There are a large number of Dalits in the village and beef was their nutritious food. Twice in a week – Sunday and Thursday – the Holeya community individuals slaughtered a buffalo. But they had to take the buffalo not through the village but around the village. Similarly after the slaughter the meat was also carried to the houses in the same way. This brought rather a feeling of shame and guilt. But after the social boycott, the Dalits started doing this directly in and through the streets of the upper castes in the village. This was narrated by Mrs. Thotigara Kempamma. Here we notice a chain of effects of one event leading to the other where by the Dalits slowly assert their presence in the village.

4.5 Gpalaswamy Temple entry:

“Mr. Subbarayappa – a Brahmin in the village had participated in the in the Independence struggle of Gandhi. From then on he had become a Gandhian. One day he sent a word for me and I went to his house. He said that his many efforts to make the Dalits enter the temple were futile. Now, it is possible for you. If you do this, that would condole me. After thinking many days we decided to take up the issue. With the support of the DSS cadre one day we made the temple entry. There was no opposition as such from anybody.”

This was narrated by Mr. B. Muniappa.
4.6 The challenge of the PDS shop in the village:

The Vokkaligas never adjusted to the changes brought about by the Dalits in the villages. One day they removed a person called Kodalli Narasimhaiah from the milk dairy where he was working as milk can cleaner. The issue was taken as a challenge by B. Muniappa and others and it was declared that people should queue in front of Narasimhaiah to receive their ration. Later with the help of Specks Narayanaswamy and Rajendra Prasad of Kolar DSS unit, they applied to the government Food Department for a PDS shop in the village. Accordingly a PDS shop was sanctioned to Narasimhaiah in the village. Today irrespective of caste all come take their ration from this shop. This was narrated by Kosanuru Munivenkatappa, a DSS cadre in the village.

The above incidents are few examples that show how the enlightened Dalits in Valagalburre took up the serious threats that were posed to them by the upper castes and through the DSS achieved solutions. These assertions and solutions not only secured their socio-economic mobility in the village but also made their selves dignified as human persons. This doesn’t mean that their woes are settled once for all. The newer challenges are there to handle. But the Dalits in the village have gained enough awareness and strength to face those challenges.

5 THE IMPACT AND THE RESPONSES OF THE DISTRICT BUREAUCRACY

24 The district is the principal unit for administrative purposes in the state. The head of the district or the Deputy Commissioner passes orders on most of the matters relating to the collection of land revenue and administration of land. The important unit between the district and the village is the taluk or tahsil. In between the villages and the taluk office there is an executive official known as the Revenue Inspector who supervises the work of the village officers of a group of villages placed under his charge. His unit of jurisdiction is called a hobli or revenue circle. In between the Taluk and the Village Office is the Nad Kacheri for a circle. They were introduced on an experimental basis in one hobli each in totally 175 taluks in 1986. One more circle in each taluk had a kacheri opened in 1987. Nad kacheri is headed by Deputy Tahsildar/ Shereshtedar who supervises the work of village officers in his jurisdiction. Similarly for a group of taluks there is a sub-divisional officer or an Assistant Commissioner who is the appellate authority as well as supervisory officer in respect of the taluks placed under him. The Chief controlling officer for matters connected with land revenue is the Divisional Commissioner. Though the DC is head of the administration, yet there are panchayath institutions to plan and execute the developmental activities. In order to assist the process there is an official called Chief Executive Officer at the district level.

25 The district administration is evolved into a fairly clear establishment, conforming to the purpose and apparatus of Government in the district. The purpose is three-fold, i.e., maintenance of law and order (police), revenue administration (Deputy Commissioner), and the development activities for the economic and social advancement of the people (Social Welfare Dept etc) of the district. Normally inclusive of all the above is called bureaucratic administration. This is only a generalized administrative chart.


25 *Ibid*
However the very beginning of the bureaucracy in the state is highly caste bound. We still identify the importance of an official by the caste to which he or she belongs. For instance if the class one positions are straight jacketed into the upper castes, the class three and four are filled in by the lower castes. This hierarchical system is further reinforced by class status. Since this structure is power in itself, it easily associates the caste power relations that exist in the society. Hence, the bureaucracy with its secularised mask remains resistant to any reform. Even the corporate sector that emerged in the end of the twentieth century easily joined hand in hand with the bureaucracy to consolidate its profit mongering ventures. But, due to the certain constitutional provisions and other efforts of leaders like Ambedkar and other SC/ST employees associations came into existence to protect their interests. Further the Bahujan Party in India did bring in certain changes among the employees belonging to the lower castes communities. So it is interesting to see how the bureaucracy responded to Dalit struggle in the state.

There are three stages in which the bureaucracy started responding to the demands of the DSS. The first stage was a lukewarm response towards the struggles of the DSS in the beginning of the movement. When the movement started, the DSS in all its struggles took direct recourse to the local administration to address its demands. But, as the momentum picked up, both the administration and the caste society reacted quickly to the issues raised by the DSS. This was because of the mass base of the DSS. The mass base and the support of civic groups constitutes the second stage.

In the third stage, the district administration made certain radical changes in its approach to address the issues pertaining to the Dalit communities. The administration convened monthly meetings headed by the DC and all other in-charge officers of various departments to which important leaders from DSS were invited. This had a tremendous impact among the Dalit communities across the state. Thus, everyday lives of the people came to direct focus for the district administration. In this way the DSS had tremendous impact on the district administration, particularly in monitoring the atrocity cases and the implementation of social welfare programmes in the district. Even today any officer coming to Kolar district has to have certain recourse to DSS leadership before they take charge of their office.

But, this not to say that everything was rosy after the Dalit movement in the district! Let’s take a look at the ten years data regarding the atrocities committed against the Dalits in the district. This study used the RTI tool to collect data from the district police office.

If we look into the data from the files, everyday about 5 to 10 incidents have taken place in 5 taluks in Kolar district. All these have socio-economic and political overtones. From 2000 to 2010 a total of 600 atrocity cases were recorded by the superintendent of the police office. Among them, in 67 cases the culprits were punished. Another 393 cases were declared as settled. Another 46 cases were said to be occurred invalidly due to false information. In most of the cases the police have colluded with the culprits.

If we look into the reasons why 393 cases were declared finished the following trends emerge:

1) When a case comes for hearing the witness by the dalits were not taken seriously. It means witnesses should be non-dalits.

2) Even though the atrocities were committed by the upper castes, instead of condemning them they silently approve them.

3) The hidden hands of the politicians as well as the officers collude in most of the cases.

4) The differences among the dalit communities are a hindrance to fight against the cases.

5) In most of the police stations the upper castes individuals side with the culprits. Hence in time FIR (First Information Reports) will not be taken.
6) In many cases as soon as the FIR is lodged, the information leaked out. Hence the culprits find many ways to escape.

Does this mean that the DSS failed in bringing down the atrocities in the district? The answer is yes and no! For most of the time DSS concentrated in city centres rather than in the villages. Additionally there were no communication networks at the taluk level as well as at the district level. This was major setback for the DSS. Furthermore, the internal contradictions and disputes over the leadership as well as the political questions over the cultural realities of the communities had their share of contribution to the above facts. But in all these the emerging LPG policies of the nation-state has also had its impacts on the DSS. Thus, the hapless Dalits easily become victims even today. Finally as the DSS got co-opted by the major political parties various fractions emerged to negotiate for the individual gains at the cost of the people in the villages.

However, this has no way subdued the politics of the DSS in the district. The cadre base has become much more critical of their leadership. The younger generation even today has kept up the spirit of the earlier times of the DSS. This could be seen in the recent issues like Church attacks\(^{26}\) in the district, the campaign against 'cow slaughter act'\(^{27}\), the rally against the Bhagavadgita Abhiyan\(^{28}\), and the campaign for a Common School System\(^{29}\) where the DSS responded effectively by its mobilisations. All these show that the DSS is not just satisfied in taking up the caste issues at the village level alone but it actively engaged itself with state and its policies that affect the lower communities at large.

Due to the continuous efforts of the Dalit movement across India, the Government of India in recent times came out an extraordinary outlay of resources called the Special Component Plan (SCP). However the DSS yet to take up this initiative seriously, due to lack of its awareness of its importance or fears of co-option of the Dalit communities. Due to this the Karnataka

\(^{26}\) The local church in Kolar town was attacked in Novemeber 2009. Earlier across Karnataka there were similar incident carried out by the fundamentalist Hinduata forces. The DSS gave a call across the district against the attack and took out massive rally in the district centre.

\(^{27}\) As the BJP Govt. came to power in Karnataka it pursued its hidden agendas against the minorities in the state. One such case was its formulation of 'Anti-Cow-Slaughter Act 2010'. Karnataka Assembly passed the controversial cow slaughter ban Bill, which provides for stringent punishment for violators and makes the offence cognisable and non-bailable. After more than a four-hour debate, the Bill was passed by voice-vote as the entire opposition -- Congress and JDS -- trooped into the well of the House and shouted anti-government slogans, branding the BJP government "communal". Leader of Opposition Siddaramaiah, who termed the legislation "draconian", "anti-secular" and "unconstitutional" tore a copy of the the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill, 2010 -- and threw it in the air. The offence is punishable with imprisonment not less than one year which may extend up to seven years or fined between Rs 25,000 to Rs 50,000 or both; second and subsequent offence would attract a fine of not less than Rs 50,000 up to Rs one lakh along with imprisonment penalty. The bill was intended to replace the Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Cattle Preservation Act, 1964, to prohibit the slaughter of cows and calves of she-buffaloes, bull, buffalo male or female. By this act, those dependent on the products such as shoes, leather, belts, nail polish, films, buttons and other beef products would lose their jobs. "You are making their life miserable", he said. As several opposition members flayed the bill in the debate that saw sparks fly, Siddaramaiah cautioned it would create "disturbance" in society and have an adverse impact on harmony. See, Deccan Herald, Thursday 26 January 2012. The DSS took massive rally protesting against the Act.

\(^{28}\) In July 2011 the present minister for primary education in the state, Mr. Kageri ordered all schools to take up Bhagavadgita recital as part of popularizing the Hindu Holy Book. But the DSS in Kolar carne heavily on it saying the Bhagavad Gita perpetuates caste system. It held one day public debate in which I also took part as a resource person.

\(^{29}\) This was a recent state level campaign demanding the Govt. to implement 'the Right to Education Act' at all level based on 'the Common School System' principle so that irrespective all will get quality education for all. On this occasion the DSS in Kolar too held its taluk level campaigns that culminated in a district level workshop in preparation for a state level workshop.
Government has not yet been effective in its implementation of the Special Component Plan. Some of the glaring limitations could be identified in the bureaucratic set up as follows:

1) Neglect of the guidelines set by the central government
2) Lack of understanding of the action plan of the SCP
3) No SCP meeting was all held, yet the funding allocated has been utilised.
4) No implementation plan for SCP propagation exist
5) Money has been released although there is no prescribed implementation plan
6) Neglect of the family income generation element in the SCP.
7) Misdirection of the Dalit educational institutions
8) Implementation of the SCP is full of corruption
9) Neglect of Dalits by the state government
10) The implementing officer is non-Dalit and he has neglected the set guidelines.

This only points to the caste phenomenon that is still active in all walks of public life. Though people’s movements like the DSS did have an impact on the social life, the newer elements of the market continue to have its say in the ‘caste economy’. Most of the times, the discord among the various people oriented groups also encourage caste divisions to exist. The social sciences that support this trend subtly are predominantly controlled by the intelligentsia of the upper castes. This puts hurdles in claiming the right of theorizing by the non-Brahmin intellectuals.

6 CONCLUSION

Looking at the social histories of the DSS struggles in the District the followings theoretical conclusions could be formulated:

1) Due to the DSS intervention in public life, specifically in Karnataka, the normative understanding of ‘Caste’ has come to a severe questioning. Further, this has also given rise to a Dalit literary trends that exposed the caste-nuances in Kannada writings. Theoretically this can be situated in the recent trends in cultural anthropology that gave a radical shift to Dalit autobiographies.

2) This further calls one to engage seriously to relook at the theories of caste in order to, borrowing an expression from Dirks, see caste as a ‘cultural construction of power.’

According to Dirks,

“…caste structure, ritual form, and political process were all dependent on relations of power. These relations were constituted in and through history, and these relations were culturally constructed.”

As a cultural construct, it tended to continually change to reflect the actual relations of power in Indian society, even though colonial rule changed the context within which these power relations were located. The resolution of status discrepancies in this changing social scenario could be achieved because of the hegemonic power exercised by the dominant castes, which would defend their position by co-opting the upwardly mobile groups into the existing power structures. Dalit movement across the state

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31 Nicholas Dirks, ‘Castes of Mind’, *Representations*, vol. 37, Winter 1992
attempted to subvert these relations of power that are consolidated ritually in everyday life contexts.

3) This also leads one to think differently using the lived traditions of the Dalit communities like the Neo-Buddhist movements in India, the Male Mahadeshwara and Mante swamy traditions in Karnataka, the Jain and Shaiva traditions. All of these articulate identity questions differently than the Sanskrit tradition that perpetuates caste. This may offer us another point of view to theorise caste.
APPENDIX: LIST OF ISSUES TAKEN UP BY THE DSS

1974-75: DSS, Kolar (led by: K.Ramaiah, C.M.Muniappa, M.Venkataswamy & others)
Condemning the murder of Munivenkatappa and demanding justice

1976: DSS, Chintamani (led by: N. Shivanna, G. N.Venkatesh & others)
Protesting against the Gang rape & murder of Chinnamma

13/8/77: DSS, Bangarpet (led by: Taluk leadership)
A Protest against the feudalism of K.G. Ramareddy at Kapadagur Village by the affected Dalits

1978: DSS, Chintamani (led by: N. Shivanna, G.N. Venkatesh& others)
Against the atrocities on Madigas at Vinoba colony at Chintamani

1978: DSS, Malur (led by: O.Sridharan, M Shankar & Others)
Land case of Mr. Sambaiah of Malur Taluk

14/9/79: DSS, Bangarpet (led by: Committee leaders)
A Protest against the untouchability practice of C. Venkateshappa MLA

24/10/79: DSS, Kolar (led by: State Committee)
Condemning the atrocity on Sanjeevamma by the Upper castes. Because she protested against her land grabbing

19/12/80: DSS, KGF (led by: V Ramachandrappa)
Taking the Vow of Dalit Emancipation day

May 1982: DSS, Kolar (led by: C.M. Muniappa & Others)
Condemning the atrocity Against the Dalits at Mudavadi Hosalli village

12-14/09/1982: DSS, KGF (led by: V Ramachandrappa)
A Jatha from Kyasamballi to Kolar to draw attention to the problems of KGF Dalits in the villages

15/12/82: DSS, KGF (led by: V Ramachandrappa)
A Protest against the Hitler attitude of Police inspector Jayaram of Bethamangala

1982: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
Protest Dharani in front of the Taluk office demanding the Bagurhokum land rights to the Dalit in the Taluk

1983: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
Demanding rehabilitation for the Bonded labourers in the taluk

1983: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
Demanding the Govt. to fill the backlog posts

1984: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
An Ambedkar Jayanthi turned out as a protest against the atrocities of the Upper castes at Santhehalli of Malur Taluk. Dr. Siddhalingiah had come for the programme

Dr Dominic. D & Mr Shivanna, 2012
1984: DSS, Kolar
28th Death Anniversary Saptah from 20-27th December 1984

30/1/85: DSS, KGF (led by: V Ramachandrappa)
A Dharani in front of Taluk office demanding title deed and Land distribution for dalits

13/3/85: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
A Rally against the anti-reservation move by the dominant groups

11/7/85: DSS, Kolar (led by: District leadership)
District level Jatha demanding housing sites for the houseless

15/8/85: DSS, KGF (led by: V Ramachandrappa)
District level Jatha for literacy

11/7/86: DSS, Bangarpet (led by: Bangvadi Narayanaswamy)
Demanding title deed for the land of Venkataramappa of Kamatamakanahally village

23/7/86: DSS, Bangarpet (led by: Bangvadi Narayanaswamy)
A Protest against the corruption in Revenue offices & demanding transparency

30/7/86: DSS (led by: State Leadership)
A Protest against Jantha Govt for taking back the Scholarship for the Dalit Students

25/8/86: DSS, Bangarpet (led by: Bangvadi Narayanaswamy)
A Dharani demanding Land for the dalits of Kundaguru village

15/8/86: DSS (led by: State leadership)
Statewide Dharani demanding residential schools at all Taluks in Karnataka

15/9/86: DSS, Chintamani (led by: Munganahalli Narayanappa)
Cadre training Camp

9/10/86: DSS, Mulabagalu (led by: M Venkataramana)
A Big convention at Thaluru village

18/11/86: DSS, Mulabagalu (led by: M Venkataramana)
A Jatha condemning the murder of Narayanappa at Gudipalli village

1985-86: DSS, Kolar (led by: Gangadhar murthy, G.N. Venkatesh & others)
Land for the landless and Rehabilitation of the bonded labourers

15/6/87: DSS, Karnataka & Bagapalli (led by: C. M. Muniappa & Others)
Mudavadi Land rights for the Dalits

30/9/87: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
A protest rally against the Goondas in the Youth Janatha Party.

3/2/88: DSS, Srinivasapura (led by: Taluk Unit)
A protest against the negligence of the Police against the inhuman treatment of Dalits in Tharanigudda village, Gaunipalli
7/5/88: DSS, Karnataka & kolar (led by: N Shivanna & Others)
Condemning the murder of Ganeshappa of Thattihalli & demanding the arrest of the culprits

10/5/88: DSS, Kolar (led by: N Shivanna & Others)
Demanding justice took out a rally

06-21/06/1988: DSS, Kolar (led by: N Shivanna & Others)
Fasting for 16 days demanded

21/6/88: DSS, Kolar (led by: State Committee)
3000 Cadre Meet

13/12/88: DSS, Mulabagalu (led by: M Venkataramana)
A Protest rally against the atrocities and a public meeting, DVG Ranga Mandira

15/1/90: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
Jayamanagala Road Block protest at Tekal against disfiguring Ambedkar’s statue

16/4/90: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
A Rally for awareness building: Ambedkar’s Jyothi Rath arrives in Malure town

27/12/90: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
A Dharani against the illegal allotment of land to the Brick Industry of Chikka Puttappa at Parasenahalli of Malur Taluk

25/1/91: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
Against the goondaism of Beeregowda, Krishnegowda and Anjaneyagowda of kesaragere village of Maluru Taluk

12/12/91: DSS, Bangarpet (led by: Bongvadi Narayanaswamy & Others)
Dharani demanding title deeds for the Dodralli Village Dalit Sites for hosuses

6/4/92: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
A Public convention at the occasion of installing the statue of Ambedkar infront of Malur Bus stand

27/5/92: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
Inauguration of Alambadi DSS Unit

18/3/93: DSS, Maluru (led by: Mr. Thimmaiah & others)
A Protest & Dharani against the Hitler attitude of the Superintendent of Police J.M. Hayat of KGF

28/4/94: DSS, Maluru (led by: G. Venkatap Satyam)
Inauguration of Dr. Ambedkar Sangha. For this Mrs. Savitha Ambedkar had come as Chief Guest.

22/8/95: DSS, Maluru (led by: G. Venkatap Satyam)
Dharani in front of the DC office at Kolar demanding title deeds for the Dalit who were living huts in Malur town

14/2/96: DSS, Maluru (led by: G. Venkatap Satyam)
A state-wide Rally (Sapthaha) for communal harmony & Secularism
22/5/96: DSS, Maluru (led by: G. Venkatap Satyam)
Buddha, Basava & Ambedkar Jayanthi Convention at Alambadi

9/1/97: DSS, Maluru (led by: G. Venkatap Satyam)
A continued Dharni demanding Independent hostel building for the College students

10/3/98: DSS, Bangarpet (led by: Bongvadi Narayanaswamy & Others)
A Symbolic Dharani against the Police Circle Inspector for his falsely taking up case against the Thallapalli Village Dalits

14/6/98: DSS, Kolar (led by: State Body)
Demanding COD investigation

30/6/98: DSS, Kolar (led by: State Body)
Demanding Postmortem

17/5/88: DSS, Bagepalli (led by: N Muniswamy)
Againsnt atrocities on Dalits at Mulluru village

14/7/88: DSS, Bagepalli (led by: N.Muniswamy & State Body)
Demanding the arrest of Puri Shankaracharya (State wide stir)

10/9/88: DSS, Bagepalli (led by: N Muniswamy)
District level cadre training Camp

15-16/01/1989: DSS, Kolar (led by: C.M.Muniappa)
5th District Convention, Nelson Mandela Platform, Nachiketa Nilaya

23/7/90: DSS, Kolar (led by: C.M.Muniappa)
Condemning atrocity at Valagalaburre village

27/12/92: DSS, Cholaghatta (led by: Villagers)
Condemning discrimination in drinking water

9/3/94: DSS, Bagepalli (led by: N Muniswamy)
Against atrocity on Mr. Amidappa of Mastehalli village

2/5/94: DSS & SSD (led by: M Venkataswamy)
Demanding Judicial inquiry into made to eat Human excreta at Harati village: Bangalore Chalo rally

16-17/12/1995: DSS, Kolar (led by: N Shivanna)
District level office bearers Convention at Chintamani

16/12/95: DSS, Bageppali (led by: K.M. Kommanna)
District Cadre Training Camp at Srinivasapurapula

5/7/97: DSS, Bagepally (led by: N Muniswamy)
Against the social boycott of Dalits by Upper Castes

21/7/97: District DSS federation (led by: C.M.Muniappa)
Kolar Band condemning the Mubai Ambedkar statue dishonouring & Police firing on Dalits
Caste – society, state and bureaucracy: contestations from below

14/8/97: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: N Shivanna)*
Torch light rally against the failure of Govt in protecting lives of Dalits and Minorities

4/10/97: **DSS, Bagepalli** *(led by: H M Ramachandra)*
Three day cadre training at Chokkampalli

: **DSS, Bagepalli** *(led by: N Muniswamy)*
Largest Historical District Convention

06-21/6/1998: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: N Shivanna)*
About 40 village Dalits joined in 16 days fasting

15/8/98: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: State Committee)*
Fasting Protest for the arrest of the Prabhu who had murdered Ganesh

13/3/99: **DSS, Maluru** *(led by: G. Venkatap Satyam)*
‘Let Buddha Come home’: A Taluk level Jatha to drive home the teachings of Buddha

3/9/01: **DSS, Ambedkar Vada** *(led by: M Thimmaiah)*
Demanding for Social Justice: Bangalore Chalo Rally

19/9/01: **DSS, Bangarpet** *(led by: Bongvadi Narayanaswamy & Others)*
A Continued Dharni demanding for the civic amenities at Gangammanapalya Dalit village

6/12/01: **DSS, Bangarpet** *(led by: Bongvadi Narayanaswamy & Others)*
A Torch Light Procession against the Anti-Dalit Policies of the Govt.

20/1/02: **DSS, Srinivasapura** *(led by: C V Munivenkatappa)*
Jatha against the Church attack in the state, Pathanelavanki village

23/7/02: **DSS, ** *(led by: C. M. Muniappa)*
Demanding Dalit Priest agenda and implementation of Bhopal Declaration: Distribution of handbills

19/1/03: **PSM & DSS KGF** *(led by: S Sundar)*
Campaign against BJP+RSS+VHP Terrorism

01-03/02/2003: **DSS, Bangarpet** *(led by: Bongvadi Narayanaswamy & Others)*
A three Day study camp for the Taluk DSS cadre

3/5/03: **DSS, State** *(led by: C.M.Muniappa)*
Against the carnage of Dalits in Nalapalli

29/7/03: **DSS, Students Federation** *(led by: T. Vijayakumar)*
Revolutionary Songs in Dalit Hostels

7/8/03: **DSS, State** *(led by: T. Vijayakumar)*
Raj Bhavan Chalo Rally

11/8/05: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Gollalli Shivaprasad)*
Against illegal sand mining: Enclosure of D.C Office by thousands of cadre
Caste – society, state and bureaucracy: contestations from below

26/6/05: **DSS & Ryotha Sangha** *(led by: Holur Shankar)*
Against Emergency period

24/4/06: **DSS-BK, Kolar** *(led by: N Shivanna)*
AHINDA Convention on the occasion of 115th Ambedkar Jayanthi at Chintamani

30/10/06: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Arohalli Ravi)*
Condemning the Atrocity on Dalits in the village

27/1/07: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Arohalli Ravi)*
Protest against the Police Sub-Inspector who falsely lodged a complaint on Dalit of Chaluvanahalli

14/2/07: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Venkatappa Sathyam)*
48 hours Dharni demanding action against the atrocities in the district

20/2/07: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: State committee (Venkatappa Satyam))*
Demanding direct loan facility under Central Govt. Special Scheme

24/8/03: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Venkatappa Sathyam)*
Dharni Demanding Reservation in Economic programmes of Govt. like Tenders, contract etc

24/10/07: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Specks Narayanaswamy)*
Against the Bill Collectors and Village accountant who were not delivering Developmental Programmes to Dalits in the district

11/10/07: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: V. Venkatesh)*
Demanding action against Manjunath who got SC certificate from the V.A

25/5/08: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Ramesh)*
Protest against illicit liquor in the district

25/7/08: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Ramesh)*
Against the atrocities on the Dalit in Medakappali Village (Bagarpete)

14/8/08: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Ramesh)*
Condemning the attack on the Dalit students Hostel at Bangarpet

20/8/08: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Venkatappa Satyam)*
Condemning the Police attack on those who were protesting against the district administration for their apathy towards farmers and Dalits

21/2/08: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Specks Narayanaswamy and Ramesh)*
Condemning the attacks on the Christians in Orissa and Karnataka

15/9/08: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Ramesh)*
Condemning the attacks of BJP/RSS/VHP on the Christians in Orissa and Karnataka

15/1/09: **DSS, Kolar** *(led by: Vardenahalli Venkatesh)*
Against the illegitimate occupation of Govt. Land at Vardenahalli village by the Upper Castes.
16/2/09: DSS, Kolar (led by: Vardenahalli Venkatesh)
In order protect the Dalit Graveyard

18/6/09: DSS, Kolar (led by: Ramesh)
Against the donation menace of Private Educational Institutions

23/6/09: DSS, Kolar (led by: Vardenahalli Venkatesh)
Due to water sharing in the Veerenahalli village, the upper castes had attacked the Dalit families. Condemning this a protest was organised

21/8/09: DSS, Kolar (led by: Vardenahalli Venkatesh)
Against the Dalit-land grabbing by Upper Caste Kallipura and Kodiramasandra

10/10/09: DSS, Kolar (led by: Specks Narayanaswamy)
Against the Police in the district who were delaying taking FIRs from the Dalits

24/12/09: DSS, Kolar (led by: Specks Narayanaswamy)
Seminar

25/2/10: DSS & others, Kolar (led by: Various Leaders)
Largest rally against the Ban Cow Slaughter

30/4/10: DSS & others (led by: Various leaders)
Protest against control of Backward Classes Commission in the state at Kolar

30/4/10: DSS, Chinatamani (led by: Vijayanarasimha)
Dalit Unity Rally on the Occasion of 119th Ambedkar Jayanthi

6/5/10: DSS, Kolar (led by: Krishnappa B)
Kala Mela to spread Ambedkar’s Thought

12/7/10: DSS, Kolar (led by: Venkatapu Satyam)
Demanding Houses protested by carrying mock corpse of K H Muniapppa (MP)

14/7/10: DSS, Kolar (led by: V Narayanaswamy)
Against BJP Govt. that is authoritative and anti-Democracy

22/7/10: DSS, Kolar (led by: T Vijayanagar)
For the Rights of Dalits Enclosure of Vidhanasoudha

14/8/10: DSS, Kolar (led by: Venkatapu Satyam)
Thamate Movement Demanding the dissolution of BJP Govt

16/8/10: DSS, Kolar (led by: Ramesh)
Against the Cow slaughter Bill in Karnataka

15/7/10: DSS & G.P Workers Association (led by: Gandhingar Narayanaswamy)
Demanding Minimum wages and Promotions: Panchayat Chalo Rally