B. R. Ambedkar was born eight years after Karl Marx died. And it was 88 years after Marx’s seminal work, *The Communist Manifesto*, that Ambedkar wrote *Annihilation of Caste*. Now if Marx could have time travelled to the 20th century and had a one-on-one dialogue with Ambedkar, it would make for a stirring debate.

To create this very debate is the object of D. Raja and Muthumohan’s book *Marx and Ambedkar: Continuing the Dialogue*. At a time when slogans of Lal Salaam and Jai Bheem are resonating together, the book is looking for a common ground between Marxism and Dalit politics espoused by Ambedkar both of which aim to strike at the roots of exploitation of the oppressed.

There are two important strains running through the book – one is to trace Ambedkar’s own views on Marxism and the second is to study interplay of concepts of caste and class. Marxism is essentially a European theory written in an atmosphere shorn off the complexities of the caste system and community ownership. “The historical context of Ambedkar in the 20th century is fundamentally different from that of Marx in the 19th century,” the authors write.

The book seeks to compare and contrast Marx’s political economy and Ambedkar’s social economy.

The caste system is a communal exploitative system and importantly it is not a purely economic category. The other distinction is that the class system does not make isolation a virtue and nor does it prohibit social intercourse.

The book explores through Ambedkar’s writings his views on Marxism. Ambedkar denounced violence in the Marxist concept. He also criticised the Marxists for ignoring the caste reality. Unlike the Marxists, Ambedkar pays special attention to religion. “To ignore religion is to ignore a live wire,” he has said.

“As for Marxism itself, Ambedkar was both attracted and alienated by it,” scholar Gail Omvedt says summing up the contentious relation Ambedkar had with Marxism.

The book digresses from its theme when it delves into depths of Hindu philosophy and Dalit consciousness in South India. One must credit the book, however, for initiating a dialogue between two giants though it leaves one thirsting for a more in-depth study of the two.