



## Dalit social action in India: A Review

Pooja Gothwal

Research Scholar Dept of English and Foreign languages, MDU Rohtak

### Abstract

Indian history is closely intertwined with the caste system, as well as religious divisions. According to the Manusmriti, the scriptures explain the origins of the caste system and each caste's responsibilities, but they fail to illuminate how and why untouchability emerged. The Manusmriti teaches that people with impure wombs are considered untouchable, and thus, the ranks of the untouchable castes arose from a blend of the various pure Varna colours. In the perspective of traditional Hindus, this may be adequate, but for social scientists, something is missing. However, it's also undeniable that the most ruthless and humiliating jobs were handed out to these individuals under a system of structural discrimination. No one answer to this question has been agreed upon. The many solutions offered all fit together with diverse religious beliefs and historical knowledge interpretations.

**Keywords:** History, Traditional, Discrimination, Untouchability etc.

### Introduction

In place of the former criticism of development as a “politics against politics” paradigm, the new approach is that development is a practise of politics that occurs in various historical contexts. Development is a location for the conflicts over recognition and citizenship. But development aid remains a discussion that excludes people. A prominent example of this is caste. As a consequence of caste-networked economic structures, caste identification passes through the generations in India, and it is a feature of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, particularly for Dalits. Caste has long been a key factor in Indian culture and political politics, but it is only marginally included in the mainstream development discourse, and it is not an issue of concern for the Sustainable Development Goals, such as gender, race, or age.

India's government has had a tough time eliminating the social legacy of the caste system since it is still strongly ingrained in the nation's society. In the past, the Dalits had limited educational opportunities, and they were discriminated against. But while several explanations have been put forth for why Dalits have low rates of literacy and primary education enrolment, the most credible claim is that the reason is historical oppression and unequal access. The old Indian caste system, which has kept the Dalits oppressed for centuries, is still powerful in India. Dalits, formerly known as untouchables or members of the scheduled caste, have been denied access



to education since the 1850s. At the start of the decade, British India had a firm grasp over the region, which meant that a lot of the efforts to promote Dalit education had to come from foreign forces rather than the national government. Since of the traditional ways of thinking and acting, the Dalits were given no incentives to seek education because they were still physically and emotionally abused. An increased effort to eradicate caste prejudice coupled with other measures to improve the education system's accessibility and desirability has helped move the Dalit education system forward at a gradual pace. After gaining independence from Britain in 1948, India was left with the burden of handling social equality. Even with initiatives and laws to encourage elementary education in India, the Dalit literate population remains dramatically lower than the general Indian population. Despite the efforts of the Indian government to improve education, prejudice, discrimination, and faults in Indian society's social programmes have prevented education expansion. While programmes are in place to reduce caste prejudice and boost national social initiatives, the Dalits of India still face a lack of access to basic education and poor enrolment rates compared to the rest of the country.

### **Review of literature**

(Dalton, Weiss, & Hipwell, 2008) studied “*Transforming Dalit Identity: Ancient Drum Beat, New Song*” and discovered that Can Indian society be changed and challenged via the use of music? What type of music is most effective in helping people to organise? Can religion have a role in musical performance? The main themes of this thesis are the following. I was in southern India for five months studying the culture of the Dalits. For those who subscribe to India's caste system, Dalits are seen as being at the lowest rung in society. Dalit people suffer with oppression perpetrated by other Indian citizens in a variety of ways. While a great deal of caste-based discrimination is still very much a part of Indian life, the discussion around Dalits is seeing a dramatic change because to different types of protest.

(Manoharan, 2012) studied “*Towards a practical Dalit theology: a study on the status and relevance of Dalit theology among grass roots Dalit Christians in their struggle against caste oppression*” and observed that I have been a Dalit rights activist for about three decades, engaged in motivating and mobilising Dalits against caste-based oppression. I am also a Christian, and came to explore the world of Dalit Theology via the Christian faith. The definition of this theology and particularly its status as a practical theology will be discussed in greater detail later. My underlying contention, however, is that it seems to me that thus far in its short life Dalit Theology has remained a theology of church leaders and academics and,



if this is so, Dalit Theology should develop beyond its current limitations. Theology should be a shared Christian praxis among the faith community and should not necessarily remain only an abstract enterprise or an intellectual discourse restricted to the academy and the ecclesia. (Lee, 2015) studied “*Jagdish, Son of Ahmad: Dalit Religion and Nominative Politics in Lucknow*” And we discovered that in 1947, the Valmiki caste, who provided the majority of sanitation labour to Lucknow, neither identified to themselves as such nor were referred to as such by others. According to Lalta Prasad, who was born in 1923, “We were all Lal Begis when we were kids.” Even when I was eight, ten, and twelve years old, the word Valmiki was never spoken. Although the Lucknow-based people known as the Lal Begis, like their caste brethren across the Indian subcontinent, were known by many titles, such as Bhangi, Chuhra, Mehtar, and Halalkhor, they all identified with a prophet named Lal Beg, from whom they took their name.

(Kesalu & Srinivasulu, 2017) studied “*Dalits and Their Religious Identity in India: A Critical Look at Existing Practices*” and discovered that India is one of the most religiously diverse countries. One of the key rights afforded by the Indian Constitution is freedom of religion. It is important to guarantee that everyone has the freedom to practise and advocate their faiths. In fact, there have been many instances of religious prejudice towards Dalits on the flip side. Since the dawn of time, Dalits have been forbidden to join the mainstream Hindu faith. Because of the widespread exclusion of Dalits from mainstream Hindu society, they've been forced to turn to Christianity and Buddhism for religious fulfilment. And because of this, they are the target of Hindu extremists who label them traitors. Thus, Dalits, who make up around 20% of the country's population, enjoy formal religious freedom but not actual religious freedom.

(Wakankar, Lal, & Lal, 2013) studied “*On Dalit spirituality and writing*” Further, the renowned scholar and writer Gopal Guru stated, “Metaphysics cannot accomplish anything without politics, which is in the domain of intervention.” On Saturday, the Cochin Conference on Metaphysics and Politics heard that Sree Narayana Guru's work was "solid politics at the ground level, but metaphysical on a completely other level," as paraphrased by the Daily Pioneer. The seminar on "From Bhakti to Buddhism: The Mahars of Maharashtra" included an animated debate and attracted prominent speakers such as India's ban on Buddhism after the sixth century AD had prohibited the religion from growing. “During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Buddhism had a resurgence in the minds of the Mahars of Maharashtra.”



(Raj, 2011) studied “*Dalits and the Spirituality of the Commons*” Furthermore, they saw that Dalit religion parallels the beliefs of traditional indigenous groups throughout the globe. The religion is home-grown. On the other hand, the notion of spirituality is lacking in both its conceptualization and conception. Before the development of mainstream religions' discourse on spirit and soul, indigenous spirituality was present. No formalised religion had formed since there were no organised texts or symbols of authority to categorise. In India, its origin is pre-Aryan, but a precise date is difficult to pin down. Calling it spiritual now is confusing since it was quite different from today's spirituality concepts, which are included in mainstream faiths.

### **Socio–Economic Background**

The citizens were trapped in an oppressive world of penury and misery. A number of factors contribute to the overall loss of position that Dalits have in the Indian caste system, including being subject to untouchability, the control of resources, and the control of knowledge. Moreover, over half of the Dalit community is poor, and this compares to just one-third of the general population. As labourers in the agricultural and urban sectors, they are nearly completely reliant on the upper classes for their livelihoods. The Aryans sought to control the riches of the Buddha era. They monopolised resources to maintain control of the economy and social position. It was universally believed that the power to govern land was the basis of wealth and privilege. That was when the true exploitation started. Landownership enabled Dalits to sustain themselves, yet they lost their livelihood and were degraded to animals. They were taught to believe in all sorts of irrational and ridiculous ideas thanks to the clever Brahmins, thanks to their lack of education and the practise of untouchability. They lacked three of society's essential necessities: food, shelter, and clothes. Without nourishment, they ate rotting food and dead animals as though they were less than human. In the Dangle's Poisoned Bread tale —Cull,<sup>11</sup> written by Amitabh, the Dalits were shown to have trouble with even bones that belonged to a dead animal. It would be easier to convey the condition of the Dalits in that narrative if fewer words are used. They used scraps of cloth and thread to sew a cover for their body. People of the higher castes, such as the Brahmins, fed animals but not Dalits. The Brahmin class becomes impure if Dalit shadows fall on them, yet their food remains uncontaminated when cooked over fires fuelled by wood supplied by Dalit women, in which the blood of their cut fingers becomes embedded in the wood. This suggests that laws against Dalits are really meant to protect them. Dalits were considered filthy, therefore they were not allowed to have any contact with the four major castes. Regardless of whether they've been



directly touched or not, if a person is of the higher caste and is touched by a lower caste member, they will have to undergo a series of cleaning rites in order to purify themselves. In the same way that a Dalit has leprosy, their fellow Dalits see them as if they do.

### Conclusion

Their lives were destroyed, turned into those of animals, due to their being caught up in the inane superstitions of one side and the lack of knowledge on the other side by economic and social exploitation. In the same way as the animals, the Dalits were forced to beg for food, clothing, and land to call their own. In order to eat, the Dalits were required to do physical labour, such as scavenging, or work as bonded labourers on their own property. Some crumbs of old bread were tossed to them in payment for a day's hard work. Is it fair to call someone a human being when their economic and social status is so limited? It should be assumed that Brahmanism is the culprit for giving the caste called Dalits the reputation of animals.

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