



Dalits Religious Identity in India: A Review

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Abstract

India is a very religiously diverse state. 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.

Keywords: Constitution, Freedom, Religion, Buddhism, Christianity, Population etc.

Introduction

Early in the 1980s, Christian academics in India started to develop a new theology, which was based on the day-to-day lives of Indian people. Dalit theology, focusing on India's "untouchables" (the overwhelming majority of India's Christians), includes liberation theology, postcolonialism, and Subaltern Studies. Over the last forty years, Dalit theology and Dalit studies have been firmly entrenched in the Indian academia and in ecumenical discussions on a global scale.

“Oppressed,” “broken,” or “crushed” so much as to lose their original identity, the word Dalit signifies. However, the people formerly known as “Harijans,” or “Untouchables,” have embraced this term and made it symbolic of their struggle for reform and an end to centuries of suffering under the caste system. Scheduled castes are legally defined in India as Dalits. About 166.6 million Dalits reside in India. The Constitution mandates that the government develop a list or timetable of the most deserving low-caste families to be offered financial assistance. Another 2% of the population are exempt from these scheduled castes, including those who converted to Sikhism but not Christianity or Islam.

The source of Dalit persecution is Hindu religion's caste system. Manusmriti, a holy Hindu book originating from the second century BCE, contains the concept of caste. Communities of outcasts, like those from the Untouchable caste, were prohibited from engaging in social and



religious life, and they were forced to do unclean activities, such as leatherworking and animal slaughter.

A division developed in the Indian independence movement about how to ameliorate the plight of the Dalits. Mahatma Gandhi, who championed the Dalit caste, believed in increasing their position while eliminating the demeaning and uncomfortable “untouchability” that comes with the old caste system. An untouchable lawyer, Dr. Ambedkar, headed the other method, which felt that the caste structure had to be completely dismantled in order to solve the problem of ‘untouchability.’ In addition to serving as the primary advocate for Dalits, Ambedkar served as the spokesman for Dalit special rights, on par with the rights granted to Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. Gandhi, however, rejected the proposal, thus Ambedkar was forced to give it up. He turned to Buddhism in 1956 after renouncing Hindu traditions, and many others followed suit.

The Indian Constitution revoked the legal ban on ‘untouchability’ after independence. Dalit politics is focused on getting the constitutional provisions guaranteeing them affirmative action (jobs, education, and political representation) delivered. However, the two pieces of legislation — the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955/1976 and the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 — both of which originate from the Constitution, are difficult to enforce. The issue stems from a lack of political will, bureaucratic indifference, and an inability to enact binding policies on the part of both central and state governments, among other things. The administration has focused on improving the economic standing of Dalits without helping them escape the degrading consequences of caste and untouchability. The basis of the Dalit socioeconomic crisis is caste and poverty, which are forever linked.

Review of literature

(Christopher, 2012) studied “*Between two worlds: The predicament of Dalit Christians in Bama’s works*” And Bama has shown the Dalit Christian community's real experience, something that has until now been pushed to the fringes of Indian society. Because of their faith and caste, Dalit Christians suffer a double victimisation, and Bama's art does an excellent job of highlighting this fact. However, the Dalit Christian author's distinctiveness is often overlooked, and her writing is often interpreted as Dalit literature. Critics also prefer to divide Dalit Christian subjectivity into two spheres: the Dalit element and the Christian one. The aim of this article is to interrogate such monolithic interpretations and place Bama's writing in the context of Dalit Christianity's history, theology, and society.



(Jeremiah, 2018) studied “*Dalits and Religion: Towards a Synergetic Proposal*” In India, the people live out their faith and worldviews within the context of their community. Many individuals think that religion with no real-world social manifestation is useless and worthless. Dalits and Dalit Christians in India, even though dominant religious persuasions expect them to be exclusive, demonstrate the human ability to influence their ideas, change direction, and coexist with more than one predominant religious worldview. It is a positive idea that is synergistic in nature, as it helps further the notion of multi-religious belonging by Indian communities.

(Deshpande, S. and Bapna, 2008) studied “*Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge*” and discovered that The corpus of social scientific research is vast and varied, and it reveals a reality that is now generally accepted, which is that Muslims and Christians in India are not homogeneous groups but rather ethnically and religiously diverse. With both Muslims and Christians having numerous sects and denominations, the most notable splits and distinctions are found in the Shia-Sunni or the Catholic Protestant divide. A caste, however, is an institution that is unlikely to persist beyond denominational or religious borders.

(Gupta, 2014) studied “*Intimate Desires: Dalit Women and Religious Conversions in Colonial India*” They found that in colonial India, religious conversions among Dalits have generally been discussed as huge migrations to Christianity, focusing mostly on males. But why did Dalit convert women? Did they just follow their fathers, their families, and their communities? Between caste and gender in Dalit again by using popular print culture, missionary vernacular literature, Hindu publicist writings and caste ideologues, caricatures and police records from colonial Norte India. It focuses on the two places where clothes and love happen to illustrate how large and small groups of people convert to Christianity and Islam. They are Dalit women's stories of personal rights amid a tangible world of resistance.

(Zene, 2016) studied “*Inner Life, Politics and the Secular: Is there a ‘Spirituality’ of Subalterns and Dalits? Notes on Gramsci and Ambedkar*” They discovered that the material and spiritual aspects of human life and experience have long been subjects of debate in Western thought, and this has resulted in the use of the duality of mythos and logos in Western philosophy. Mythos eventually became associated with "God's word" and was later adopted by Christianity to present the word of God to a Hellenistic audience. Despite the supposed triumph of logos



over philosophy and theology, Reformation writers nevertheless felt the tensions of the binomial despite the impending advent of the Enlightenment and Modernity.

(Dr.P.Rathna, 2018) studied “*Religion and Marginality: A Critique of Dalit Life writings*” They concluded that the lives of Dalit authors were really social biographies since their literature mostly discusses their communities rather than their own personal lives. The life works discussed here expand on the community's values, struggles, and survival in the face of marginalisation. The primary aim of this paper is to critically examine the perspectives of the Dalit community on religion and their attitude toward religion and religious conversion as revealed through the selected Dalit life writings of Baby Kamble, Bama, Omprakash Valmiki, and Narendra Jadhav.

Dalit in India

Affirmative action measures, which are legally mandated, have helped boost the Dalit population's presence in educational institutions, government employment, and elected offices. Even though Dalits have made some progress, they nevertheless remain the most disadvantaged class in Indian society. They are still plagued by the prejudice they encounter today. The Dalits continue to live in a subhuman state of existence.

More than 80% of Dalits reside in rural communities. They still suffer from economic exploitation the greatest. Most of them are agricultural workers or small landowners. While the practise of keeping workers in bondage as collateral for their debts was prohibited by law in 1976, many people are still stuck in this state because of their financial burdens. Here, labourers are borrowing money from landlords or lenders, and they must repay the debt by working for the lender until it is paid back. In reality, it is impossible to repay such loans because of the high interest rates and the fact that labourers get more and more indebted as a result of their poverty. And, it is difficult to escape the cycle of debt once it's passed on to the next generation. Many landowners in the region, who are of the upper caste, pay their lower-caste labourers the minimal wage in cash or food, or nothing at all. When they protest, the victims often face violence, including instances where they may be killed or badly injured. When it comes to anti-Dalit violence, landlords have often been found to be at the centre of the action, and the presence of such aggression has been particularly apparent when Dalit workers have taken part in labour unions or had an education and better financial prospects.

In recent years, Dalit women have been most adversely impacted. It's not only because they're female, but also because of their religious, social, and cultural backgrounds that they are forced



to accept a subordinate social position. They are vulnerable to even more abuse and exploitation because to the social stigma of untouchability. In addition, the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) found that less than 2% of rape cases against Dalit women result in convictions, while 25% of women in India are convicted of rape.

Within health, education, housing, employment, and salaries, legal rights and political involvement, the Dalit women have been cut out of laws and programmes in a huge way. The population strategy, which aims to limit the population while focusing on the Dalit and other women for family planning programmes, does so because it believes they are the source of the "explosion" of the population and of poverty. Society still fails to see these women as equal, and they remain under the yoke of abuse, oppression, marginalisation, and oblivion.

Large numbers of people move to cities or rural regions when labour is scarce in various sections of India. Many families who are from the Dalit caste have moved from rural communities to slums and pavements in fast expanding cities. They also usually accept the lowest-paying tasks, which results in worse quality. In contrast, regular pay and employment opportunities for the old-fashioned professions of sweepers are available in certain cities' municipal unions. Dalits do day labour as casual workers in quarries, brick kilns, or on construction sites. They also work as cycle rickshaw drivers or in petty commerce.

However, many more are engaged in relatively safe positions in industries such as finance, the railroads, and public service. The Dalit community is becoming a middle class, and some citizens have access to secondary and higher education in the cities. If they are able to organise themselves across boundaries of language and religion, Dalits may become a powerful and beneficial force for change in India in the next decades.

Conclusion

A social revolution called the Dalit Movement sought to alter India's hierarchical society, which had been founded on liberal values like liberty, equality, and social justice. It started earlier and got intense in the 1970s, with the movement beginning to see results at present. Uma Chakraborty argues that academics are not paying much attention, which is one cause for this issue. The novels published on the Dalit movement have failed to accurately represent the movement, since they were designed to appease the upper-caste elite. People do not want to challenge people who have authority. This is further compounded by the fact that public thinking is also influenced by hegemonic thought. Yet another important concern is that the



Dalit movement is short on individuals from all of the Dalit groups. A good example is the Maharashtra movement, when the Mahars played a dominant role.

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