

MARGIN AND TRANSCENDENCE

In memory of Siddalingaiah, poetic voice of the Dalit movement

EDITORIAL AND INTRODUCTION

Laurence Simon and Sukhadeo Thorat

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Norm Entrepreneurship at the UN - Dalits and Communities
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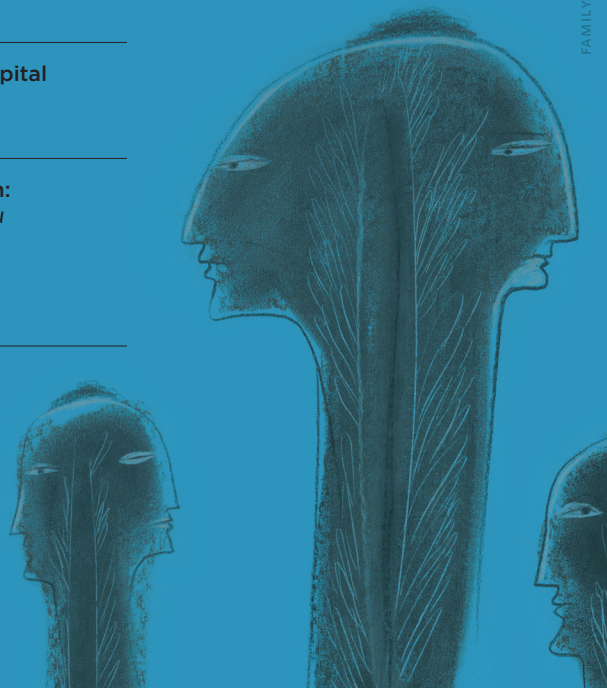
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MARGIN AND TRANSCENDENCE

In Memory of Siddalingaiah



This issue is dedicated to Siddalingaiah, the face of Kannada literature, whose warm and gentle presence radiating kindness, succumbed to COVID 19, on June 11, 2021. May his memory be a blessing!

*I must have a word with you
O cactuses and thorny plants;
I must put a question to the moon who borrows his light;
I should free the beautiful rose from thorns.
Wells are waterless and ministers speechless
Constables move about like thorny bushes,
O world, I must have a word with you.*

Excerpt from 'Maatada Beku' by Siddalingaiah

Editorial

Laurence Simon

Two years ago, we published the first issue of *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*. One objective was to encourage and raise the standard for academic research into traditional birth-based, rigid, hierarchical systems of discrimination, the influences of which persist in the present despite constitutional provisions and laws against their iniquitous nature in South Asian countries. Few university courses across the United States, even those on South Asian religions, histories and societies incorporated caste studies into their syllabi. Important intellectuals and social movements associated with caste were absent or played cameo roles. One of our Editorial Advisory Board Members, the celebrated philosopher Martha Nussbaum, once said about her own studies in literature many years ago that if women were absent from the curriculum, they were invisible, they did not count.

One reason for the absence of caste studies is that caste is a hidden discrimination in America and is only now emerging as an issue in the public domain. Except for those of South Asian background, caste is merely a vague concept from a foreign land. Yet African American studies in the 1930s were more sensitive to histories and realities of oppression. They recognized caste in the plight of the descendants of enslaved persons in such classic ethnographies as Hortense Powdermaker's *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South*,¹ and John Dollard's *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*² both of which are discussed more recently in such reviews and commentaries as Jane Adams and D. Gorton's "Southern Trauma: Revisiting Caste and Class in the Mississippi Delta"³ and the more extensive Allison Davis et al., *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*.⁴

¹Powdermaker, H. (1939). *After freedom: A cultural study in the deep south*. The Viking Press.

²Dollard. (1937, 1949). *Caste and class in a southern town*. Double Day and Company.

³Adams, J. and Gordon, D. (2004). Southern trauma: Revisiting caste and class in the Mississippi Delta, *American Anthropologist*, 106(2), pp. 334-345. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2004.106.2.334>

⁴Davis, A. Gardner, B.B., & Gardner, M.R. (1941, 2009). *Deep south: A social anthropological study of caste and class*. University of South Carolina.

Another possible reason for the absence of caste studies in many American universities may be the predisposition of faculty who believe that caste discrimination is a thing only of the past or, for some, perhaps turning a blind eye to an embarrassing or controversial tradition.

Brandeis being the first university in the United States to incorporate caste into our official non-discrimination policy has been influential with other universities, a few of which have followed suit. In a future issue, we will explore progress toward greater awareness of caste in scholarship and public affairs.

Our journal is committed to honest and critical scholarly analysis of caste-like systems of discrimination throughout the world. This commitment emanates from the founding of the university in 1948 when the trauma of the European genocide was still palpable and when Jews and other ethnic and racial minorities, and women, were confronted with discrimination in higher education in the United States. The founders established a nonsectarian research university that welcomed faculty and students of all religions and ethnicities.



ELEANOR ROOSEVELT of the United States holding a poster of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Lake Success, NY, November 1949. UN Photo

A fervent supporter of the university's founding was Eleanor Roosevelt who served on Brandeis' Board of Trustees from 1949 until her death in 1962. The widow of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, she was appointed in 1946 by President Harry Truman as a delegate from the U.S. to the United Nations General Assembly. In that role, she inspired and chaired the drafting committee for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 1 of which reads:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

This too was the founding principle for *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* and enlightens each of the articles and poems in the current issue.

Introduction

Laurence Simon and Sukhadeo Thorat

Rajesh Sampath's article *A Commentary on Ambedkar's Posthumously Published "Philosophy of Hinduism" – Part III* continues his multi-part analysis of one of B.R. Ambedkar's core texts. In part I Sampath walked the path Ambedkar took to arrive at his criteria for "justice" and "utility" which Sampath sees as shaping the modern conception of religion. In part II Sampath dove further into Ambedkar's concern that the dominant religious orientation of Indian society "forecloses the possibility of individual equality, freedom, and dignity." Part III now examines Ambedkar's engagement with the classics of Hinduism's philosophy. Ultimately, Ambedkar is undeterred in his original critique of the social and moral failures of the caste system, thereby intimating ambitious possibilities for its eventual eradication. And in carefully framed arguments, Sampath asks: "How does the 'concern' for the 'preservation' of life as the 'basis' and 'core' of religion [not the 'incidental means' of 'magic, tabu, totem, and fetish' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10)] become perverted into a logic of discipline and desire to humiliate, degrade, and ultimately vanquish any ounce of dignity in what it means to be a human being?" We await Sampath's Part IV.

Paul Divakar Namala's *Norm Entrepreneurship at the UN – Dalits and Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent* traces the journey of organizations representing Dalit and Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in raising their concerns with United Nations agencies about human rights violations and abuses. Divakar, one of their leading analysts and advocates, pinpoints critical issues facing these communities of more than 260 million people subjected to social exclusions from caste and analogous systems. He speaks of the rising tide of their voices in international forums calling for recognition of their right to life and dignity and "to evolve norm emergence leading to norm adherence." Divakar expresses concern with the limitations of the core International Human Rights instruments in addressing the diversified forms of discrimination in Asia and Africa and urges expansion of the concept of work and descent to be inclusive of them.

Timothy Loftus' *Ambedkar and the Buddha's Saṅgha: A Ground for Buddhist Ethics* explores Ambedkar's reconceptualized *saṅgha* placing ordained monks and nuns at the center of his vision for social service helping the laity toward justice and egalitarianism and driven by an ethic of care. Loftus in a clear and articulate prose explains "the role of compassion in this ethical imperative of the monk." He describes Ambedkar's efforts "as a correction, writing the wrongs done by Brahmin scholars of the past and present." Loftus contrasts Ambedkar's vision not only to those traditional views but also to the popular understanding in the West. "The story of Buddhism in the West has often been told through the lens of the contemplative, filtered by the discourses of modernity and the biases toward individualism and meditation that come with them." And finally, he brings us back to Ambedkar's world, contrasting a "religion of rules" called Brahminism as against "the religion of principles" with the "morally-oriented, egalitarian Buddhism" of social engagement.

Christopher Queen's *Reading Dalit Autobiographies in English: A Top Ten List* introduces us to Dalit autobiography which he describes as having joined protest poetry in the genre of Dalit Literature. He says that his readings identified "recurring themes of social exclusion, poverty, patriarchy, survival and assertion...." Queen is a seasoned and astute interpreter of cultural India and presents his top ten list of Dalit autobiographies as "a needed corrective to mainstream portraits of modern Indian social history." He begins with a personal history of early encounters with Indian writers and activists which set the stage for him to see the writings in their true contexts. He reviews authors who describe worlds of exclusion and pain such as the involuntary criminals forced into thievery and whole tribes classified as "habitual offenders" under the influence of the caste system. Queen though also relates the lightness and irony of Siddalingaiah's marvelous work as well as the "intimate vignettes" where "we encounter blinding hunger and disease, confinement and squalor in village and city slums, violent death by suicide and murder.... But we also meet kindly teachers... enduring friendships." Queen beautifully and with deep passion unfolds the mind and emotion of Dalits through the self-experience of writers whose inner lives had found no expression in mainstream literature.

Joseph Kweku Assan's *Ethnic Identity, Discrimination and the Shaping of Remittance Culture in Ghana* continues the journal's exploration of birth-based discriminations outside of South Asia. His article discusses the influence of ethnic identity on remittance patterns and shows that migrants from ethnic groups with strong internal cohesion and less assimilation remit more than those from more ethnically heterogeneous groups. The study also shows that migrants from matrilineal ethnicity remit more than those of the patrilineal group. Assan's work highlights the importance of a researcher's deeper understanding of socio-cultural values and traditions among marginalized and deprived ethnic minority households.

Ishita Roy's *A Critique of Sanskritization from Dalit/Caste-Subaltern Perspective* explores the social purpose of Sanskritization in which, according to M. N. Srinivas, a 'low' caste or tribal group changes its customs, rituals, or ideology toward those of 'high' castes in order to claim a higher position in the caste or social hierarchy. Roy compares the thoughts of Srinivas and Ambedkar to understand the inner purposes and impacts of Sanskritization and concludes that it is essential to critique the process from a Dalit point of view. Rather than seeing it as a process of mobility and fluidity with caste structures, we understand instead its reinforcement of the very continuity and sustenance of the caste system. Many low castes are today, however, influenced by a process of social change that speaks of their inherent dignity, equality and freedom of mind and body.

Ashim Shil and Hemraj P Jangir in their *Exclusion of Tribal Women from Property Inheritance Rights: A Study of Tripuri Women of India* report on the role of gender in inheritance of property and how the traditional common exclusion of Tripuri women from property ownership affects their income and position in the household. Change does not come easy though as the authors show a correlation between female possession of property and violence against women in relation to access to their property rights under law. Affirmative action by the state has advanced the cause of Tripuri women to transcend the age-old practices of exclusion though the path is still long ahead.

Shriyuta Abhishek and Nanda Kishore Kannuri in their *On the Margins of Healthcare: Role of Social Capital in Health of Migrants in India* present the

findings of their study showing a link between social capital and healthcare access especially among women, disabled and elderly people. As the concept of social capital has remained largely unexplored in public health in India, this study is timely given the immensity of pressure internal migrants are under in the pandemic. The study adopts the WHO's framework for the Social Determinants of Health and relates it to a social capital assessment as influenced by caste.

Roshni Babu's *Tending Immanence, Transcending Sectarianism: Plane of Mixed Castes and Religions* explores the notion of hybridity in Ambedkar's reflections on mixed castes and the origin of untouchability. Babu utilizes Ganeri's idea of 'dissent from within' to understand the dawning 'Dalit milieu' which Babu gracefully and insightfully describes as "commanding assent-worthiness whereby adjoining communities constituting the least privileged in the caste system, and emergent fragmented communities, communities of mixed castes and half-castes, and half-religious minorities, communities who have been looking for a more inclusive secular platform, all find themselves clamoring to mobilize this canon under various names, whereby one of the more encompassing canopies of becoming assumes the form of becoming 'Dalit'".

In this issue's **FORUM** we have expressions of inner realities, longing and a search for transcendence from two young and inspired poets.

Ari Varutada A Poem by Chandni Girija

Reflection A Poem by Gaurav J. Pathania



And finally, we are pleased that *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* has recently been selected to collaborate with JSTOR to digitize, JSTOR preserve and extend access to our journal.

A Commentary on Ambedkar’s Posthumously Published “*Philosophy of Hinduism*” – Part III¹

Rajesh Sampath¹

Abstract

This article forms part III of a running commentary on Ambedkar’s posthumously published “*Philosophy of History*” (Ambedkar, 2014a). We attempt to follow Ambedkar’s reflections on the early origins of religion and his initial distinctions of the religions of “savage society” and “civilized society” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 9). Using the tools of philosophical critique, we see his attempt to dissect the real “principal” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) of religion beyond the apparitional nature of rites, rituals, and taboos. This leads to a series of deductions of what constitutes the very “core,” “source,” and “substance” of religion rooted in the “preservation of life” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). However, this is also a moment that will foreshadow Ambedkar’s ultimate judgement of Hinduism’s status as a religion when founded on the unequal social structure of caste. We argue the following in this article: what Ambedkar says about the architectonic of “savage society” and the failure to undergo a profound revolution in the nature and concept of religion bears an eerie resemblance to what ultimately takes the place of “savage society” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 9) over time, namely the Hindu caste system. This makes modern Hinduism a strange hybrid of pre-history and a future history whose conclusion is uncertain. Whether caste can disappear from society is the burning question. And this is intertwined with profound metaphysical

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¹This article is dedicated to the memory of the pioneering scholar on caste and untouchability, Gail Omvedt. She passed away on August 24th, 2021 in her village, Kasegaon Sangli, Maharashtra, the state where Ambedkar was born. Retrieved from: <https://thewire.in/society/india-will-remember-gail-omvedt-forever>

questions of time, life, birth, and death, which only philosophy can deconstruct if a religion, like Hinduism, were submitted for critical judgement. The article concludes with an attempt to set the stage for the next phase of the commentary: there Ambedkar will transition from a general discussion about the philosophy and history of religion as a concept to an actual engagement with the philosophical contents of the religion known and practiced by hundreds of millions of adherents as Hinduism. As we already know, his conclusion is dire: a religion can only be true if it is rooted in 'justice' and serves the 'utility' of individual freedom (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 22).

Introduction

In Part II of our Commentary on Ambedkar's posthumously published "Philosophy of Hinduism"² we left off on the issue of a massive epochal shift in the philosophy of history: one that involves a rearrangement of fundamental relations of society, God, and man (human). At the core of Ambedkar's conviction is the need for new theoretical concepts to understand the nature and process of revolutionary change. To recall, Ambedkar is dealing with the revolution in the philosophical conception of religion (Ambedkar 2014a, p. 9), and not a particular historical event, text, or person upon which a religion is founded. Ultimately his goal is to achieve the practical realization of radical revolution and recreation of society. The stakes are so high. Even a decolonial achievement of creating a modern, constitutional, secular, and legal democratic constitution was not sufficient in trying to achieve actual equality and liberty. We must make a phenomenological distinction between revolutions in philosophical concepts of religion and historical events of revolutionary change in either philosophy (say from one great thinker to another like Kant to Hegel) or religion (say the creation of a religion hatching out of another, for example gentile Christianity emerging out of first century CE Palestinian Judaism under Roman rule). Throughout this commentary, we have asserted the necessity of a genuinely philosophical investigation into the practical possibility of reimagining Indian society without the caste system. These notorious divisions of laborers within classes (as opposed to a mere economic division of classes) engineers a social system aimed at perfecting degradation and indignity. Matter of fact, the animus of the whole system is based on antipathy for the other. The problem for Ambedkar is why and how this system descended from Hinduism, in particular, and nowhere else in world history.

Main Text

Let us pick up where we left off in Ambedkar's text. At the foundation of his thought, Ambedkar is concerned with the notion of how religion and society became fused to the point of no return: this is the moment which yields a certain social structure of generalized behavior that goes unquestioned, namely the stringent caste system. If in other contexts, secularism replaces metaphysical-religious cosmology as the basis of the legal, political, economic, and cultural structures of a society, as it happened in the

²The First Edition was published by the Education Department, Govt. of Maharashtra: 14 April, 1987. See *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 3*, ed. Hari Narake, 2nd Edition (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundations, 2014).

late eighteenth century West, particularly the French Enlightenment and the French and American democratic revolutions, the question then becomes why religious hierarchies continue to persist in secular, liberal, pluralistic democracies. In principal, democracies valorize individual equality and liberty above all else. This constitutes the ultimate paradox: namely the persistence of religious hierarchy and Hindu caste as hierarchies within a hierarchy in a postcolonial Global South democratic state like today's India. Democratic states are by nature non-hierarchical and ensure separations of power to decentralize any chance for tyranny or fascism to take root. The rule of law is paramount, and individual rights sacrosanct. But in the Indian context past and present, the notion of an individual is an illusion.

In other words, it is not enough to say secularism merely replaces religion; it is not sufficient to say that there is a change in principle of organizing society (say secularism instead of theocracy), for there must be change in substance too. Secularism is the substitute for the religious gluing of elements to compose a hierarchic society and the political-economic legal anatomy of its differentiated body of inequality; yet it is limited. Religions, which for the most part continue due to the enduring mystery of the origin of life itself and the fact of ceaseless human mortality and death, is not the pure object of philosophical study. Some religions, like Western Roman Catholicism, require hierarchy to maintain ownership of the cumulative body of knowledge descending from heritage: the purpose is to ensure that adherents maintain their duty to obey certain principles and rituals on a chronological calendar. However, the religious hierarchy fused with social hierarchy is something else, particularly in the Eastern context where democracies were born after decolonization. Instead, Ambedkar is attempting to articulate yet another revolution that is necessary, one that has not taken place thus far in his early to mid-twentieth century South Asian historical context, even after decolonization and the birth of legal, constitutional, secular democracy. And it is one that remains suspended even in our day.

After introducing the forces of traditional secularism brought on by scientific revolutions (Newton's and Darwin's as the most influential) and science (and industrial technology) shaping modern knowledge in general, Ambedkar turns to another revolution which must be critically examined (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 9). One plane of world history is the movement of religion as the dominant horizon that shapes all reality to the 'modern' age of science and secularism. But for Ambedkar, we need to inquire about another level of history that is not so visible: there in its murky realm from the depths of a unique, non-Western philosophical imagination an interesting theoretical conceptual critique emerges. It is to this critique that we will devote this section of our commentary. Through Ambedkar's text, one discovers the *absence* of a revolutionary change in the very conception of religion itself irrespective of the grand transition of religion in general to secularism; such transitions can be taken for granted in say contemporary Western European liberal democracies where majority atheist populations now exist. Perhaps in some histories and civilizations the shift in the concept of religion took place, but in others it has failed to materialize. He states:

 this Revolution is so great and so immense that it has brought about a complete transformation in the nature of Religion as it is taken to be by savage society and by civilized society although very few seem to be aware of it (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 9).

The question again is one of revolution and the nature of transformation itself, not just the transformation of the nature of something, in this case religion. Prior to the transition from religion to secularism is an internal transition within the conceptual structure of religion itself—namely the movement from “savage society” to “civilized society” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). Truly the a priori dimension in a philosophy of historical changes of epochs—like religion to secularism—has in a non-circular way its basis in a fundamental transformation of the nature of society. Society is the ontological foundation by which there can be any history, even though one thinks of society as something atemporal or ahistorical.

Ambedkar is not making a simple statement about an empirical fact of how historical reality changed at some juncture, for example an important event like the French Revolution. Rather, he is unfolding a philosophical-history of how religion altered its fundamental nature through a change in the essence of society and hence a change embedded within a change: this realm exists at a deeper level of historical time beyond the historical empirical contents of religions and their epochal shifts. For example, one could describe how early Christianity arose after the first century CE context, post-Roman destruction of the Second Temple period of the ancient Jewish context, with the first Gospels written by Jews who lived around the Mediterranean and what is modern Egypt and Turkey and St. Paul’s far-flung journeys and letters; but then over centuries it developed into the modern institutional structure of Christianity today, for example Roman Catholicism, which is upheld by the Vatican’s universal jurisprudence. Modern and ancient Christianity seem worlds apart even though the religious proclamation of faith is one rooted in historical continuity given the papal lineage that descends from the living disciple of Jesus, namely St. Peter.³ There, history and divine revelation are intertwined. But that pertains to a specific history of a specific religion. Instead, Ambedkar, one can say, is interested in a philosophy of a general historical transmutation in the conception of religion itself. How philosophy, history, and religion come into mutual encounter with one another is of the utmost urgency with regard to discovering a principle of justice to enact radical social change. This seems to pulsate throughout Ambedkar’s incomplete manuscript.

Taking his earlier statement on how the “Revolution touches the nature and content of ruling conceptions of relations of God to man, Society to man and of man to man” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 9), which we analyzed in part II of our commentary, we can now go deeper with Ambedkar’s description of the essential features of social structures. The key focus of this section of our critical analysis will be on vital questions of the philosophical change in religion. We have to get at the heart of the issues of historical temporality and movement in the mutation from “savage society” to “civilized society” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 9). Ambedkar offers interesting definitions of both types of society, however preliminary they may appear in his text. They are certainly ripe for further distillation given the legacy of his profound thought.

The variation of relations (God to human, society to human and human to human) is itself enfolded in a deeper event of metamorphosis from ‘savage’ to ‘civilized’ (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10); but as long as caste persists in today’s Indian modernity, then one can say there are mechanisms by which the failure of this revolution is reproduced, thus maintaining an indefatigable status quo. One can make a distinction between a top-

³See the formidable volumes by Anglican theologian N.T. Wright- *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003) published by Fortress Press.

down political grip on society, like a dictatorship, and the naturally or organically self-reproducing system of microscopic powers that reproduce the same behavior from one generation to the next. If dictatorship is like a vice that traps something and squeezes, caste is like a pinball machine with one entrance (birth) and one exit or loss (death). We must inquire into these mechanisms that reproduce the status quo, and in that regard Ambedkar gives us the tools to further shape certain parameters to distinguish between the 'savage' and the 'civilized' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10).⁴

When it comes to 'savage' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) society, Ambedkar notes several important aspects. Although many Western anthropologists, such as Lévi-Strauss, throughout the twentieth century would take note of the phenomena of totem and caste, let alone their distinctions, Ambedkar gives us two primary elements (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) that compose this type of Eastern social formation. He speaks from an Eastern mind, not that of a Western-raised anthropologist. We must put aside any immediate intuitions of 'savage' as something 'backward' or 'underdeveloped.'⁵ First is the linkage between "the practice of magic or tabu" and "the worship of fetish and totem" (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10).⁶ These are not terms that can be easily collapsed

⁴A separate work, mentioned in part II of commentary, would be an unrelenting engagement with Lévi-Strauss's structuralist attempts to compare, without collapsing, different systems such as 'totem' and 'caste.' His magisterial works, *Totemism (1962)* and *The Savage Mind (1964)*, are ripe for appropriation while reading Ambedkar's entire corpus, particularly his most theoretically inventive ones.

⁵This could take us straight into debates about Marxist critiques of development, Latin American theories of development and underdevelopment, and Wallerstein's world-systems analysis. Those would be critical investigations if one were interested in the pitfalls of capitalist political-economy and the tenacity of caste as social inequality. But political-economic analysis would have to follow a prior analysis of social revolution as Ambedkar says in *Annihilation of Caste* (Ambedkar, 2014b).

⁶It would be tempting to dive into Marx's conception of the "the fetishism of commodities" at this point even though he is critiquing the modern form of capitalism and labor exploitation. We could transfer his definitions and telescope what he says about commodities to the creation of caste bodies in Hindu metaphysics. On the 'fetish' Marx says: "A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. In the same way the light from an object is perceived by us not as the subjective excitation of our optic nerve, but as the objective form of something outside the eye itself. But, in the act of seeing, there is at all events, an actual passage of light from one thing to another, from the external object to the eye. There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things quâ commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

into one another, for example in an anthropology of Indian culture from Vedic antiquity to the present. So we must bracket what these relations mean, particularly the relation between ‘practice’ and ‘worship’ (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) within a generalized system of oppression. Worshiping deities or practicing rituals is one thing; but if the animation or vital force within worship and practice is designed to enforce indignity and inequality, then we need a genealogical investigation into the causes of how a system has come about, its dispersed causes and roots. For these forces are not seen in the self-justification for the particular kind of worship and practice.

Such a system governs the dynamics of everyday life down to the tiniest details, for example who gets to draw water from the well or who gets to walk in certain spaces with their shoes (as opposed to being forced to take them off as a sign of submission); the complexity of the manifestation of details are infinitely differentiated making them barely perceptible to the outsider’s eye. The exteriorization of humiliation is something that remains invisible to the outsider, but internally an object of constant anxiety and pain in the internal consciousness of the oppressed. The invisible and the visible switch places so that nothing appears to be happening. Ambedkar’s thought will help us develop new ideas on these relations later in this section of the text.

The other aspect involves how “rights, ceremonies, magic, tabu, totem and fetish” become apparent in “their connection with certain occasions” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). Such events in life’s journey center on the “crises of human life,” which include “birth, the birth of the first born, attaining manhood, reaching puberty, marriage, sickness, death and war” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). All these do not occur in a vacuum, but are “marked out for the performance of rites and ceremonies, the use of magic and worship of the totem” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). The event of reproduction is not just climacteric for dynastic cycles of power and the reproduction of labor for ceaseless exploitation in any economy, not just capitalist ones. It is paramount for ritualistic reasons that reinforce the hierarchies of identity that are prohibitive for true individuality to develop. Furthermore, birth is central one can say, but also birth of the first-born son given the nature of patriarchy in a son-preference culture.⁷ Birth goes beyond the mere biological propagation of the species; it is highly guarded, almost predestined in its embryonic stage, so that the whole social structure is guaranteed protection from any external threats. Patriarchy, masculinity, Hindu caste are in fact aligned at their very core.

This Fetishism of commodities has its origin, as the foregoing analysis has already shown, in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them “ (Marx, 2015, pp. 47-48). Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>. Although Marx is introducing a supersensory notion of how commodities become a unique object of uncontrollable desire, while occluding the labor process that is exploited in their creation, he links his idea of the ‘fetish’ to the “fantastic” and “mist-enveloped regions of the religious world” (Marx, 2015, p. 48). With Ambedkar’s critique of caste, which too involves the sadistic dimension attached to labor as differentiated, one has to go a step further in terms of the fetish of caste itself or the separation of human beings as metaphysical entities marking out transitions of birth, death, and rebirth. The nature of the task even as duty for the sake of duty in a specialized labor of a certain caste member is inconsequential; the reality of its oppressive nature is not. This is something, obviously, Marx could not penetrate in his Western European context. We would have to re-read these precious sections in Marx’s *Capital* volumes again with the unrelenting will to deconstruct caste with new terms and concepts.

⁷See Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

We will pause here because the interesting thing to notice is that all of these life events are constituted as a "crisis." That means at their ontological level there are conditions by which these events cause an impenetrable anxiety (not simply a psychological one), which will turn out to be the problem of the temporality and movement of karmic cycles and reincarnation.⁸ The act of birth for example is so shocking, not because it marks the joyous occasion or miracle of welcoming new life into the world; but the dark secret of passage from something that has died into a new body. Although the newborn may not be forsaken by being aborted or committed to infanticide (except for example with the atrocious gender preference for male rather than female babies), it becomes a living object of mourning stripped of autonomous dignity and the fullness of life. The more impure, the more death is inscribed in birth. Desecration and waste must be guarded against, not just through sacred rituals but abjection of living human beings. That is just one example, others being the event of death and cremation, or rites of passages into adulthood with its masculinist and patriarchal overtones since men can only attain to Brahmin priesthood. But for sure they need to be differentiated from any empirical or concrete specific notion of 'crisis,' for example a difficult pregnancy or even miscarriage; in fact that would be the embodiment of death in a birth that did not happen, an entirely different matter.

Rather, this question of 'crisis' at the most general level regards a fundamental anxiety that the system of caste tries to contain in the tightest of strictures around human relations, associations, and contact given the distinction between purity and impurity. The tighter the bonds at the most minute levels, the more the system preserves itself and actually grows stronger over time. Purity and impurity relate to a long, complex theological heritage, which itself interrelates birth, death, and rebirth, the nature of creation and time, and the idea of the divine, particularly the unity of Self (Atman) and the Absolute (Brahman). Such a self-proclaimed ancestry dates back as far as the Upanishads, which followed the Vedic age, over two millennia ago.⁹ However, Ambedkar will attempt to discover a deeper basis in the philosophy and history of the religion of Hinduism to see what gives rise to this macabre theological content. This is tantamount to articulating a new philosophy by way of critique and deconstruction that can *explain* the possible origins of how Hindu metaphysical concepts came about and started to congeal into one another and into intricate interrelations. Obviously this borders on speculative thought with a genealogical tinge because the aim is not to offer empirical proof by way of ancient history, archaeology, and physical anthropology on actual cause-effect relations. The purpose is not to establish historical facts.

Let us try to develop some further propositions. What is 'savage' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) is not merely a stage in chronological historical time: one that is in the distant, physically measurable, datable past, say 3000 BCE; one that could be

⁸We repeated several times the unavoidable need to read Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) as a new contribution to the philosophical critiques of caste in Ambedkarite studies. This is particularly important when Heidegger discusses 'anxiety/dread/malaise/uneasiness,' 'care and concern,' and the authentic approach towards death as a possibility for orienting one's life (Heidegger, 1962, p. 227). Of course Heidegger was responding to the Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly the Catholic-medieval underpinnings of Western metaphysics of the conscience and the soul, and certainly not Hindu dogmas on sin, death, transmigration, and reincarnation. That would take us into an entirely other realm, which is not and could not be articulated by Heidegger.

⁹See Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin, 2010).

discovered through the work of physical anthropology and archaeology, for example through carbon dating. It is by no means reducible to a simple relation between present and past, or even the remnant or trace of the past in the present, the past living on in and as the present, not just a legacy.¹⁰ Rather, the question here is that Ambedkar names the ‘savage’ as a certain concept of religion, not a pre-religious or pre-historic notion before the birth of canonical world religions that are extant, for example Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Those religions center single non-historical (depending on who you ask) and historical human beings and texts attributed to them- Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, and the Prophet Mohammed. (In the case of one of them, an actual historical person is equated with the Godhead during His lifetime and certainly after his death and allegedly witnessed bodily resurrection.) However, the linkage between the ‘practice of magic or tabu’ and the ‘worship of fetish and totem’ (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) is the material actualization of supersensory notions surrounding birth and death in stratified and segmented hierarchies of bodies in space. Perhaps the events of birth (which seem internal to a womb) and event of death (as the passage of a possible soul out of a body and the world) are in fact externalized and repeated in the microscopic acts of alleged signification in a ritual or incantation. This may sound strange, but the phenomenological critique requires it as a possibility for explanation. Birth, death, and rebirth are actual objects in the world, an externalized and material immanence of the most transcendental metaphysical mysteries; typically the latter are invisible and non-physical like a concept of the ‘soul.’ However, things are different in this Eastern context. Taking a mere condescending attitude from say a modern secular and scientific gaze of some ‘primitive’ prehistorical past will not help the critical endeavor to dismantle caste today. We have to go inside the system and get to the roots in order to pull them out of the ground.

Here, once again, Ambedkar makes a critical distinction between the actual “origin,” “source,” and “substance” of religion to what is merely “incidental” rather than its “principal” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). We will quote the full passage here:

The principal thing in the Religion of the savage are the elemental facts of human existence such as life, death, birth, marriage etc. Magic, tabu, totem are things which are incidental. Magic, tabu, totem, fetish etc., are not the ends. They are only the means. The end is life and the preservation of life. Magic, tabu etc., are resorted to by the savage society not for their own sake but to conserve life and to exercise evil influences from doing harm to life. Thus understood the religion of the savage society was concerned with life and the preservation of life and it is these life processes which constitute the substance and source of the religion of the savage society. So great was the concern of the savage society for life and the preservation of life that it made them the basis of its religion. So central were the life processes in the religion of the savage society that everything which affected them became part of its religion. The ceremonies of the savage society were not only concerned with the events of birth, attaining of manhood, puberty, marriage, sickness, death and war they were also concerned with food (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10).

¹⁰Heidegger is important here too, particularly his chapter on ‘temporality and historicity’ in Division Two of *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 424-427).

The process of life and its preservation form the main purpose. Life and preservation of life is the core and centre of the Religion of the savage society (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10).

Let us draw some more distinctions. There is much to glean from these crucial passages based on what we quoted earlier: differentiating the 'origin,' 'source,' and 'substance' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) of religion when derived from a deeper 'principal' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) rather than a derivative manifestation, or what is not core to the essence of something but only 'incidental' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) and apparitional. These distinctions are so pivotal. They have a tendency to differ and delay any simple meaning that can be deduced or discovered when we think of metaphysical categories of 'origin' and 'source' and 'substance.'¹¹ Ambedkar is going after the 'principal' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) and not the phenomenal manifestation of early religions' most salient attributes—namely 'magic, totem' and their associated 'rites, ceremonies' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). For the 'principal' becomes a weapon so to speak of a powerful theoretical critique. The aim is to reveal the uncanny. What happens when a system of religion is propelled by an internal driver that justifies the real reason for a religion's existence, namely a sadistic fetish to humiliate other human beings openly and publicly? Ambedkar has yet to get to that outcome of the analysis in the "Philosophy of Hinduism," but the purpose of the commentary is to see how these earlier moments in the text foreshadow the indictment to come. How can consciousness of this public evisceration of basic human dignity become a transcendental norm for consciousness to surpass itself: that is when rites and rituals drenched in a fetishistic frenzy of seemingly paranormal proportions occlude the reality of daily oppression of labor? The more sacred the wisdom that is manifest in the tiniest of ritualistic practices, the more justified a horrific distancing of pure and impure human beings become. Twice-over, oppression is inverted; first it passes itself as the duty to obey caste function, and then through a bizarre inversion makes the public display of the oppression a daily norm, i.e. the average treatment of Dalit laborer in public amidst higher castes. A theory of the public nature of ritual debasement of humans in relation to the transcendental consciousness of false supra-human meditation is required here. The problem worsens with the metaphysical linkage with actual biological events of life, such as birth, maturation, and death, that literally brings alive the living hell of a system of human organization founded primordially on inequality and intentional mortification.¹² The processes of dehumanization have their own perverse logic,

¹¹This is what Derrida's deconstruction illustrates (Derrida, 1974).

¹²Again, it is tempting to look at the theoretical innovations in philosophy and the social sciences, particularly anthropology and sociology, in twentieth-century European intellectual history. But leveraging the tools of critical theory to dismantle false assumptions about the superiority of modern civilization (which Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud submitted to a virulent internal critique) falls short for a variety of complex reasons. The Western gaze remains myopic: one must work within the lifelong oppression of caste like Ambedkar to develop a truly subaltern consciousness. Taking a non-violent and sanguine view that in fact the 'primitive' could have more complexity than an 'advanced' modern mind is willing to admit: indeed that is new type of neocolonial superiority intrinsic to the Western anthropological view, which itself has already accepted the self-critique of the West. Many today from the non-West and racial minorities within the white

which has to be deciphered through critical theory and philosophical deconstruction. In this conflation at the heart of ‘savagery’ one can say are the elemental forms that would eventually be used to build divisions of laborers (caste) within a division of commodified labor (class). But we move too fast. Let us take a few steps back and return to the Ambedkar passage. There is so much to unpack there before we have a remote chance to move on in this all-important section in Ambedkar’s manuscript of the “Philosophy of Hinduism.”¹³

gentile majority West are calling for the decolonization of Western anthropological science; the latter was born in the late nineteenth century during the peak of European colonial empires. But truth be told; the West had already begun its own self-critique in the twentieth century. This is the spirit of critical thought that pervades intellectual movements such as structuralism. Lévi-Strauss’s *The Savage Mind* (1964) and *Totemism* (1962) can consume an entire study in that regard. It would appear at this juncture in our commentary on Ambedkar that it is now virtually impossible to ignore Lévi-Strauss’s incredibly, inventive formulations. Structuralism against dialectics (the movement of oppositions synthesizing themselves and differentiating themselves again ceaselessly) is not a simple matter. One cannot easily dismiss these debates of structuralism vs. dialectics, particularly when comparing and connecting across so many differences and relations. For example, as much as Lévi-Strauss searches for how “homology,” or connection of how two systems of difference (that can never be collapsed into each other), occurs (Lévi-Strauss, 1964, p. 115), he still maintains complex differentiated relations within relations. For example, totemism as human relation to animal is distinguished from caste as ‘endogamous’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1964, p. 115) stratification of society with differentiated roles for different groups that appear natural. And both phenomena map differently in their own internal organizations regarding the differences and relations between the terms of ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1964, p. 124). Yet as we shall in continuing our commentary, even these formulations cannot be applied to understand Hindu caste, let alone forge the theoretical tools to destroy it. Nature and culture do not dissolve into their dialectical opposites; they become entirely other to any Western etymology and topology. Taking theoretical concepts out of their Western contexts of invention, even Lévi-Strauss on ‘primitive’ or non-Western systems, and plunging right into the universe of Hinduism is no easy task. For Lévi-Strauss, connections and relations in the systems of difference that do not collapse into a synthesized whole can be continuously analyzed and broken down into ever finer distinctions, inversions, and reciprocal substitutions. The endeavor is endless. Having said all this, we will have to do a whole study of “Totem and Caste” in Lévi-Strauss’s *The Savage Mind* (1964) and Ambedkar’s critique of the philosophy of Hinduism as the social basis of caste.

¹³To recapitulate the manuscript offered in volume 3 of the collected writings is roughly ninety-two pages long. Embarrassingly, the author of this commentary (through a series of articles of which this is the third part) is still only on page 10. This section in the manuscript of the “Philosophy of Hinduism,” which is the first one-fourth of the whole text, is what Ambedkar calls, ironically, a long and necessary ‘detour’ (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 22). In other words, Ambedkar saw the need for an extended philosophical grounding of the possibility of his own investigation into the “Philosophy of Hinduism” before getting into the actual texts and concepts of Hinduism, for example the Manu law codes that consecrate the onerous system of caste. It is our firm belief that we traverse this section slowly, methodically, and painstakingly. We must spend this much time with each paragraph, sometimes a phrase or sentence, in Ambedkar’s manuscript: for our aim is to develop new philosophical tools to unpack the mysteries of caste for the purpose of its ultimate annulment in Indian society. This requires leveraging philosophical theories, particularly from the twentieth-century continental European tradition (especially German and French philosophy) to which Ambedkar did not reference or appropriate. Therein lies the justification for our slow moving, prodding textual exegesis, which is part of the heritage of critical theory, phenomenology, structuralism, and deconstruction.

The 'principal, source, origin, and substance' are not 'magic-taboo or fetish-totem,' 'practice and worship' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). Those are 'incidental' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). Nor are the occasions of life construed as 'crises' known as 'birth, death, maturation, sickness, war, death' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10), at least not entirely. Now Ambedkar is going for the actual motor force—the 'preservation of life' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) and the madness involved in a preservation at all costs, which means the means can justify the end. Caste—as segmented and segregated spatialization of human beings in compartments for which the only entrance is birth and only exit is death—is like one large metaphysical panopticon that hierarchizes and views all of society in a glance.¹⁴ The supervision functions to guarantee the omnitemporal plane of transmigration of souls, which then gets telescoped down to the microscopic activity of daily life within the caste system. The mystery is how this is linked to the fundamental 'principal' that marries 'preservation of life' with avoidance of 'evil' and 'harm' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). This is a prior distinction before we get to purity-good and impurity-demonic distinctions, around which the entire social system is organized. To think this hinges strictly on the biological truth of the survival of the species is merely superficial.

Turning back to the passage, this is what we find. All philosophies and religions across space and time have tried to excavate the mysteries of 'human existence such as life, death, and birth' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). Anthropologists add in rites such as passage into adulthood, marriage, and funerals, among other major life transitions and events. However, the quest for the principal (before any good and evil distinction emerges) cannot be divorced from the 'principal' substance of religion as concerned with the vagaries of life on earth, why we are born and have to die. Before attempting to describe how rites and rituals of 'magic, tabu, totem, and fetish' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) function and what they mean, one needs to start with a prior clearing of assumptions. Ambedkar says those elements are merely the 'means' to a larger 'end' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). If they are not the end but only the means, then this raises the question of what constitutes the end for which religion was born and upon which it stands.

Ambedkar tells us, in an unsurprising way, that the "end is life and the preservation of life" (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). This seems totally intuitive. All of evolution of life points to the propagation and preservation of life even as life evolves in new directions; life has to change to adapt to changing environments or it will disappear; and in fact some species do disappear. The teleological purpose of our life-supporting planet is to extend life, not to terminate it. (Human actions like the creation of climate

¹⁴We have always longed for a full investigation in to all of Foucault's corpus, the early works on madness, medicine, and the organization of the social and natural sciences, to the later works on prisons/discipline, sexuality, biopower, governmentality, security, and population management. A Foucaultian analysis of caste by way of an appropriation of concepts in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1977) would be necessary. But that means certain concepts like "disciplinary technology" (Foucault, 1977, p. 227) of power and "microphysics of power" (Foucault, 1977, p. 28) would have to be reformulated so they have greater purchase in understanding phenomena in postcolonial Global South development contexts, not the long duration of Western history and society. Foucault, of course, only knew of the latter.

change is another matter.) All of this makes sense and is always an oceanic source of joy and appreciation that in fact life did start on earth and those living now are the beneficiaries of this rare occurrence in the physical universe. The more we step back and see of all humanity (over eight billion people on the planet), the more in awe we are of this beautiful mystery. Obviously anything that brings ‘harm to life’ or ‘exercise evil influences’ (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) must be guarded against. Anything that would destroy life is tantamount to evil.¹⁵ We quote the second half of the passage again:

Thus understood the religion of the savage society was concerned with life and the preservation of life and it is these life processes which constitute the substance and source of the religion of the savage society. So great was the concern of the savage society for life and the preservation of life that it made them the basis of its religion. So central were the life processes in the religion of the savage society that everything which affected them became part of its religion (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10).

The process of life and its preservation form the main purpose. Life and preservation of life is the core and centre of the Religion of the savage society (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10).

Isolating the fundamental terms of the passage, namely “savage society” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10), if one were to avoid judgement of what ‘savage’ here means, is actually quite remarkable, even from a modern standpoint. Our laws and most states, other than the very few that commit genocide on its own people or so oppress them to the point of oblivion, have as their goal the security, sustenance, and development of its people; in democracies that includes liberty, in non-democracies that means collective submission to larger social ideals. States exist to protect people from inhibiting themselves from achieving these goals.

But upon closer scrutiny about the ‘religion of savage society’ as ‘concerned with life and preservation of life’ (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10), we begin to see the beginnings of what will be a powerful critique made by Ambedkar in his judgement of Hinduism as a religion. We already know from him that this most ancient of extant religions is not founded on ‘justice and utility’ (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 22). We now have to examine the nature of this ‘concern’ for the ‘preservation of life’ and how ‘life processes’ have come to constitute the ‘substance and source of religion of ‘savage society’ (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). We repeat these terms because they are so profound in their meaning when it comes to the philosophy of religion. Life for life’s sake or the will to live do not penetrate the depths of philosophical understanding in that regard. Any utilitarian logic to increase pleasure and minimize pain is only scratching the surface of the matter.

For the critical investigator of the philosophical and religious origins of caste, we are struck immediately with a series of aporias and paradoxes. How does the ‘concern’ for the ‘preservation’ of life as the ‘basis’ and ‘core’ of religion [not the ‘incidental

¹⁵We can compare and contrast with the Abrahamic, monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all of which point to the divine origin of life and the sacred nature of human life itself.

means' of 'magic, tabu, totem, and fetish' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10)] become perverted into a logic of discipline and desire to humiliate, degrade, and ultimately vanquish any ounce of dignity in what it means to be a human being? This would mean that the great concern for life became fused with the great demoralization of life; the increase of one, leads to the increase of the other. There is no transcendence of biological finitude, or physical death. And so the anxiety around the approach to death is turned backwards to birth, the beginning of life, which must be controlled throughout. Birth is emptied of any value as a unique, one-time, irreproducible event. Guarding the passages from death to birth, which is a rebirth, and the passage of birth to death to the threshold of another rebirth point two arrows of time neither of which flow in a linear or circular manner. The two poles of 'birth' and 'death' do not lead to a stretch of life in-between called an individual; they are crossed out, what is other to birth is the passage from death to rebirth and what is other to death is the conquest of its grip and a loosening of its finality.

As we shall see, the entire architecture of these fundamental problems of being, time, birth, and death must be contrasted with the Western philosophical tradition.¹⁶ The 'basis, center, core, source, substance, and origin' of religion is motivated by the 'concern for the preservation of life' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). The central question for Ambedkar in his text is why did this 'savage' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) system not undergo a revolution in the concept and nature of religion; and because of this delay or postponement of radical change in the nature of everything, a perversion took root, a degeneration of which the consequences would be enormous.

When the obsession about life-preservation at all costs loses consciousness of the reason and intention of why life must be preserved no matter what, so that life for life's sake becomes an unquestionable dictum, then that is one thing. The automation of life is the automation of the will to live. However, when it is glued to the material domain of rites, rituals, taboos, and beliefs to ward off 'evil' and 'harm' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) that is yet another development. However, when a metaphysical architecture of what life means, inclusive of its origin (*arche*) and end (*telos*) but crossing out of those poles (physical birth and physical death) in the concept of reincarnation, is melted with extreme concern and anxiety for life, then a whole new order of society is born. But that means the society, which should have been created out of the origin of religion based on the 'concern for the preservation of life' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10), yields a monstrous other. And the worse form of a social contract is born; in fact it is an anti-social contract.

¹⁶What we must investigate will be in total contrast to everything Heidegger says in *Being and Time*, particularly in section 72 of Chapter V of Division Two on "being-towards-the-beginning" and "being-towards-death," "'connectedness of life,'" how existence "stretches along between birth and death," and the "sequence of Experiences 'in time'" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 425) all point to complex problems of life, time, and movement, about which the Western philosophical traditions have anguished. From the Pre-Socratics in ancient Greece to Hegel to Heidegger, no definitive answers have been found. Heidegger himself tried to destroy all previous metaphysical conceptions by calling into question linear time and spatialized motion, even the idea of being in time (Heidegger, 1962, p. 436). Faith-based religions, like Christianity, may try to provide answers, and theology serves the purpose of providing a philosophical rationality for otherwise unprovable, even irrational notions, such as an 'afterlife' or 'heaven'; but that does not mean philosophical logic independent of religious subjectivity has come to any definitive answers.

One can say the creation of Indian society founded on caste involves the erasure or aborting of another birth that should have happened. A historical reincarnation becomes self-fulfilling in an inverted way when a new birth does not replace death, but one birth replaces a birth that did not happen but *should* have happened. If the traditional notion of reincarnation is the movement from death to another birth, then here we speak of a reversal, when one birth prevents another from happening. Could this be the secret logic of the caste system?

Staving off 'evil' and preventing 'harm' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) through segregated rites and rituals for the salvation of an elite few (the Brahmins) through a constituted Other as permanently impure, namely the Dalits, may be a weird curiosity for outsiders who try to visit and see Indian society for the first time. But then the hierarchical ladder of worth—of higher castes descending to less worthy lower ones in between the highest (Brahmin) and the lowest (Dalit) —constitute a whole that we must investigate following the reflections of Ambedkar. Trying to justify the destiny of certain births to an abhorrent life of labor means the Hindu apotheosis and celebration of futility: namely the inability to transcend class and function but also essentialized identity (Dalit must equal demonic impurity) too forms a nightmare of proportions we are barely able to fathom. The perpetual sacrifice of dignity is the only guarantee for the preservation of life. This falls so far below the threshold of the moral basis of a human right (Shue, 1980) that one can no longer speak of human beings. We are just a few steps away from the next major plateau in Ambedkar's analysis, which we can foreshadow here in our conclusion.

Conclusion

By tracing the movement of Ambedkar's thought from the unsubstantial surface of 'magic, totem, tabu, and fetish' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10) we arrived to the 'substance' itself, the 'core and center of the Religion of savage society' founded on the 'preservation of life' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). What seems like a remarkable quality of 'savage' society, namely the 'preservation of life' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10), will be at the end something extremely deleterious when the social structure of caste finally emerges. In terms of ideological dissimulation, the rites, rituals, and ceremonies, which are embodied in the practices of 'magic, totem, tabu, and fetish' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10), seem to constitute the essence of religion. But for Ambedkar they are not. The real problem is that 'savage' society construes the basic events of life's journey, birth, sickness, and death as 'crises' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10). The key point is at this early stage, 'birth' is considered a crisis. How this prepares the conditions for theological reflection in Hindu metaphysics on birth, death, and rebirth becomes an open question for philosophical speculation.

Before Ambedkar can engage the actual contents of Hinduism's main texts, the Upanishads, the Epics, and the Manu law codes, he must pass through another set of reflections on the philosophy and sociology of religion. He will return to the earlier consideration we saw in Part II of commentary on the relations of society, God, and man (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 9); but this time he will introduce a series of fissures that

links what he calls the transition, or rather philosophical revolution, from the religion of 'savage' society to the religion of 'civilized society' even though there is an initial similarity between them (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 11), namely the need to preserve life.

But then a fissure takes place whereby morality is detached from religion in 'savage' society (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 12). This occurs when the Idea of God is born paving the way for the religion of 'civilized' society (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 12); the latter marks a stupendous event where concern for the well-being of human dignity is primary, not the ceaseless drive to reproduce life whose mysteries are guarded by supernatural ritual. This event of the divorce of morality and religion requires a genealogical analysis, which cannot be a replica of any Western analysis of a similar divorce in its context.¹⁷ In traditional Western metaphysics and its Judeo-Christian roots, God may be considered the Origin or Cause of the Creation; but in this Eastern context, we have submerge into the darkness and abyss that constitutes the 'origin' of God.

We decided to pause this part of our commentary here. To traverse what follows next in Ambedkar's sweeping narrative on the philosophy and history of religion, we had to take these necessary steps. In part IV of the commentary, we will make our deep dive into Ambedkar's examination of morality, the idea of God, and even the origin of the idea of God (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 12). This will take us into a speculative philosophical realm; not for the purpose of an unnecessary and abstract metaphysics but because the heuristic reason is established to set the stage for a massive philosophical critique of Hinduism. Through Ambedkar, we will discover the failure of two revolutions spread out in historical time, namely the lack of transition from 'savage' to 'civilized,' and then within 'civilized,' the demarcation of 'ancient' and 'modern' (Ambedkar, 2014a, pp. 12-13). The implications for our philosophical understanding of a different idea of historical time are immense; to truly understand how Hinduism might have emerged as a justification of the unequal and inhuman system of caste means we must disentangle ideas of 'savage' and 'civilized' and 'ancient' and 'modern' from their traditional senses. All of them begin to combine and mutate in strange ways. This means that in the very ground and conditions for the emergence of caste is something uncanny: it has everything to do with how we appropriate the legacy of Ambedkar in reconceiving the task of a philosophical critique of religion by way of a theoretically rigorous analysis of historical revolutions.

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¹⁷For example, Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* of 1887.

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Norm Entrepreneurship at the UN-Dalits and Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent

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Abstract

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings. However, caste-based discrimination is one of the areas that most human rights mechanisms overlook. As a result of several interventions by Dalit and human rights organisations, the erstwhile United Nations body, in 2000, has termed it 'discrimination based on work and descent'. The above Dalit and other International organisations have also brought evidence before the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which has endorsed caste-based discrimination as part of the discrimination based on descent, in Article I of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Further, it was also brought to the notice of various Special Rapporteurs and UN Committees that communities discriminated on work and descent (CDWD) face severe human rights violations and abuses that continue to restrain the socio-economic development of these specific groups of people in several countries globally. Dalit organizations and their solidarity bodies have gone ahead through a process of 'norm entrepreneurship' at the UN levels. This article narrates and analyses the challenges and human rights consequences of caste and discrimination based on work and discusses the norm entrepreneurship journey of Dalits and CDWD at the UN level.

Keywords

Norm entrepreneurship, Caste-based discrimination, Dalits, communities discriminated on work and descent, modern slavery, treaty body, exclusion, intergenerational discrimination, CERD

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Discrimination based on work and descent is any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on inherited status such as caste, including present or ancestral occupation, family, community or social origin, name, birthplace, place of residence, dialect and accent that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life. This type of discrimination is typically associated with the notion of purity and pollution and practices of untouchability and is deeply rooted in societies and cultures where this discrimination is practiced.¹ — Prof. Chin-Sung Chung

Human Rights are Rights Inherent to all but ...

United Nations several organs are the single most collective institutions for protecting and promoting human rights across the globe. The UN asserts that human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. However, of a particular category of status, which has not sufficiently been stressed on or has not been mentioned or deemed to have been covered under one of the lists mentioned above, there is the possibility that the particular issue or community get excluded from being covered under the umbrella of guaranteed rights.

Awareness of caste-based discrimination and that of other communities and discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) has been as old as the UN itself. While framing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1946, one of the considerations expressed by W.E.B. Du Bois,² who was a proponent of the rights of Afro-descendants, was how to include the concerns of the so-called ‘untouchable’ communities of South Asia. This was also attempted again while evolving the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CEDR) in 1965, when it was presumed that the concerns of the so-called ‘untouchables’ would be handled with that instrument.

After all these decades, it has been proved that it is an arduous task to include caste-based discrimination as one of the areas for human rights mechanisms to address. Why? There may be three reasons for this gap. The decision to have an issue or name a particular community, under a convention or a resolution rests on the member states at the UN. It is evident that there is a solid resistance to interrogate this issue of caste-based discrimination and genuinely seek its remedies by the member states. Second, unlike many others, this is not a north-south issue between member states. In all the countries, caste-based discrimination exists; it is an issue within the

¹Human Rights Council. Eleventh Session 2–19 June 2009, Agenda item 5. Human Rights Bodies and Mechanisms. *Final report of Mr. Yozo Yokota and Ms. Chin-Sung Chung, Special Rapporteurs on the topic of discrimination based on work and descent*. 1A/HRC/11/CRP.3, 18 May 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session11/A-HRC-11-CRP3.pdf>

²W.E.B. Du Bois Papers. Series 1. *Correspondence Letter from B. R. Ambedkar to W.E.B. Du Bois*. Retrieved from <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b109-i132>

borders of the member states. No country is ready to ‘wash its dirty linen’ publicly. Therefore, there is a great deal of resistance, and even an active effort, to block any resolution or attempt to address this issue. Several technical reasons are given to assert that the respective instrument or mandate does not cover the particular issues of caste-based discrimination. Third, there is an illusion that it is an internal matter and refers to a culture of the land and particular to one specific sub-region and therefore does not warrant UN’s intervention. Despite these barriers in accessing UN mechanisms, Dalit and Human Rights organisations have pursued the realization of a ‘norm architecture’ as the issues facing DWD Communities are severe and have been for too long unaddressed, and if addressed in some countries, the implementation is relatively weak. It was recognized in the early years itself that there are major gaps in UN norms in addressing caste and DWD concerns.

Issues facing CDWD

CDWD, numbering more than 260 million people worldwide, are among the most marginalised and excluded peoples, many of whom are living in conditions of slavery often tied to descent. They transcend religious, geographical and ethnic boundaries and are a global phenomenon. Previously described as communities who are affected by ‘caste and analogous systems’ of social stratification and ‘discrimination based on work and descent’,³ they are commonly known as Dalits, Roma-Sinti, Quilombola, Burakumin, Haratine, Oru, Shambara, amongst many other names and fall under the umbrella term ‘Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent’ (CDWD). The following are some of the specific types of human rights issues faced by CDWD.

Intergenerational discrimination and violation of fundamental human rights: CDWD faces intergenerational discrimination,⁴ exclusion from public resources and entitlements, and are routinely segregated⁵ despite constitutional and legal protective measures in many countries. In most countries, they are subjected to contemporary and even traditional forms of slavery.⁶ In Asia, they face a particular form of exclusion and violence commonly known as ‘untouchability’.⁷ Any attempt

³United Nations General Assembly. Human Rights Council. Thirty-first session. Agenda item 3. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues*. A/HRC/31/56, 28 January 2016. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A_HRC_31_56_en.doc

⁴United Nations General Assembly. Human Rights Council. Thirty-fourth session. Agenda item 3. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues on her mission to Iraq*. A/HRC/34/5, 9 January 2017. Retrieved from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/002/44/PDF/G1700244.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵United Nations General Assembly. Human Rights Council. Twenty-third session. Agenda item 9. Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mutuma Ruteere. A/HRC/23/56, 2 April 2013. Retrieved from http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/UN/SP/HRC23_report_SR_Racism.pdf

⁶UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). *UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Concluding Observations*. Mauritania, 10 December 2004, CERD/C/65/CO/5. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/42d2676f4.html>

⁷UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. *Concluding observations on the combined 17th to 23rd periodic reports of Nepal: Committee on the Elimination of Racial*

to challenge discriminatory practices is countered with severe and extreme forms of violence. Women and children among these communities bear additional layers of discrimination and violence.

Violence against women: Girls and women among the CDWD face extreme forms of violence by wider society, are paid unequal wages, and are underpaid.⁸ There is a greater, significant proportion of unpaid work among these women. Often women of CDWD face extreme violence, sexual assault, rape and even murder and mutilation as form of vengeance against the whole community.

Children of CDWD: They face extreme forms of violence and discrimination at schools and in society in several countries. Practices of forced child labourers⁹ and trafficking are prevalent among them.

Poverty and hunger: CDWD are disproportionately affected by hunger,¹⁰ food insecurity and poverty, primarily as a result of systemic and systematic discrimination and the arbitrary nature of daily wage labourers regarded as ‘inferior’, their lack of social, economic and political power and reliance on volatile agricultural harvest due to climate change and other factors. Insufficient data is available to paint a conclusive picture of malnutrition or undernourishment rates of CDWD. Special measures need to be undertaken to ensure that the country and community-specific interventions are provided the most immediate needs of the most vulnerable regarding rights to food.

Exclusion and Discrimination in Education: CDWD face discrimination at all levels of education, from primary to higher to technical and professional education in most countries. Cultural practices and beliefs deny millions the right to receive quality education. Notions of ‘impurity’,¹¹ child slavery, trafficking, and poverty are factors that prevent children, youth and adults of CDWD from receiving and accessing quality education.

Denial of Access to water and sanitation: 2.2 billion people worldwide do not have secure access to safe drinking water. This has devastating consequences for the health of the affected persons and leads to poorer education prospects and is a threat to female empowerment since the burden of collecting water often falls on women and girls. To be noted here is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, access to water, hygiene products and sanitation facilities were severely restricted for CDWD. CDWD

Discrimination. 29 May 2018. CERD/C/NPL/CO/17-23. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/CERD_C_NPL_CO_17-23-EN.pdf

⁸Eduardo Araújo and Givânia Maria da Silva. Racism and Violence against Quilombolas in Brasil. *Confluencias*. Vol.21. No.2. 2019, pp.196-208.

⁹United Nations. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Human Rights Committee. *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Nepal*. 15 April 2014. CCPR/C/NPL/CO/2. Retrieved from https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/NPL/CO/2&Lang=En.

¹⁰United Nations. International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Seventieth session. *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 9 of the Convention: Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination- India*. 5 May 2007, CERD/C/IND/CO/19. Retrieved from https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD/C/IND/CO/19&Lang=En.

¹¹United Nations General Assembly. Human Rights Council. Seventeenth session. Agenda item 9. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Githu Muigai*. 25 March 2011, A/HRC/17/40/Add.2. Retrieved from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/700115?ln=en>

face additional challenges even during normal times due to exclusive social practices. During the COVID-19 pandemic, cases in Asia and Europe emerged in which access to public water and sanitation facilities were either restricted or denied. This situation escalated in South Asia during the summer months when infections peaked; Dalits were prohibited from accessing public water/sanitation facilities for being considered 'unclean'. Despite such rampant discriminatory practices, governments fail to ensure access to these facilities across the globe for CDWD.

Access to housing and adequate shelter: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of adequate housing and shelter became evident when, during lockdowns and curfews, millions either did not have a home to go to or the virus was able to rapidly spread in inadequate and cramped conditions of housing. This problem is particularly pertinent for CDWD who are denied housing facilities and experience discrimination in housing conditions. Alongside segregation in housing, other related problems need to be addressed to guarantee all persons, their economic, social and cultural rights to adequate housing and shelter.

Access to land and livelihoods: To achieve decent work conditions and alleviate some of the negative effects of the pandemic, land tenure and ownership have been claimed as a vital condition for CDWD. In Brazil, the Sahel and the large parts of South Asia, land rights and land tenure and ownership remain a central demand for many CDWD and represents a multitude of possible consequences such as food security and economic opportunity, reduction of poverty and homelessness, etc.

Frontline healthcare workers and sanitation workers: Conversely, frontline health care workers, sanitation workers, street cleaning workers, workers in the mortuaries and burial or crematoriums in several countries such as India, Pakistan and Nepal are almost exclusively from CDWD. They are being denied both personal protective equipment like masks or gloves, and they are excluded from the healthcare system by not having healthcare insurance or other support mechanisms.

Contemporary forms of slavery for millions: Poor implementation of the existing legal framework at the national and international levels and the state's apathy to tackle the issues of modern forms of slavery are of serious concern to CDWD. According to the latest available comprehensive data, 40.3 million people globally are facing the problem.¹² With CDWD, factors like intergenerational discrimination, the perpetuation of social hierarchies, and restrictions to social mobility make these communities susceptible to contemporary forms of slavery. In addition, key features of modern forms of slavery are closely associated with the concept of CDWD, including debt bondage, forced labourers, child labourers, unpaid and underpaid work, trafficking and forced marriages. However, while discussing contemporary forms of slavery, CDWD is often ignored or invisible in the discussion, and the link between the established discriminations faced by these communities and contemporary forms of slavery is grossly overlooked.

Climate change: Climate change is the most significant and severe contemporary global threat to the planet, which a decisive global action must stop. But what is worse is that climate change perpetuates inequalities and severely affects the most vulnerable,

¹²Global Slavery Index 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/>

particularly those whose livelihoods depend on natural resources. Many CDWD are highly dependent on earnings from agricultural labourers and livestock, forests and other lands.¹³ With fewer to no resources and options to combat, mitigate or adapt, the internalization of discrimination and exclusion continue to deepen their state of deprivation and marginalisation. Their locational, social and economic vulnerabilities place a greater strain on their adaptive capacity to climate change and ability to deal with shocks, stresses and change.

Discrimination in disaster relief and rehabilitation and in Disaster Risk Reduction Practices: CDWD face discrimination in several disaster risk reduction (DRR) practices. This has been evidenced in several countries during several DRR practices, including pre-disaster warnings, habitations located in vulnerable geographical areas, exclusion from rescue and relief measures, not being counted in rehabilitation entitlements and facing exclusion in rehabilitation measures. Therefore, clear measures need to be framed to ensure inclusive measures and practices.

Access to relief and health care during COVID-19 pandemic: Several instances of discrimination were evident when accessing health care and other assistance during the pandemic. In fact, the existing discriminatory practices surfaced in their most blatant forms during the pandemic, impeding healthcare and state relief programs.

Discrimination in access to public finance and development: CDWD, especially women, children, people with disabilities and sexual minorities among them face exclusion in access to civic amenities including education, health care and other entitlements. Within countries it is also observed that there is an inherent bias in the management of public finance management and in access to development.

This is indeed a grim picture of CDWD across the regions. In some areas, the communities face extreme poverty and are subjected to severe human rights violations. The narratives from ground-level activists are even grimmer. This is evidenced by compilations from the UN thematic bodies and special procedures mandate holders apart from the data generated from CSOs and human rights organisations working in respective countries. Over the last two decades, from the year 2000 onwards, several organisations and individuals have made focussed and informed interventions to the UN bodies through collated data and evidence on the issues of DWD in the wider societies, particularly among the Asian, African and European and the Latin American regions. These efforts have strengthened the network among CDWD and through these networks, they have made interventions into both the Geneva-based UN bodies and New York-based organizations.

The Norm Entrepreneurship Journey of Dalits and CDWD at the UN

The Dalit communities having experienced generation of the above forms of ‘untouchability’ resulting in discrimination, exclusion and violence, have persisted to address effectively through a process of norm entrepreneurship¹⁴ at national and UN levels. This was initiated with the coming together of diverse groups of Dalits

¹³Amita Bhaduri. *Impact of Climate Change on Life & Livelihood of Dalits: An Exploratory Study from Disaster Risk Reduction Lens*. New Delhi: NCDHR and SPWD. 2013. p. 3.

¹⁴The process of non-state actors creating new norms has been termed ‘norm entrepreneurship’ in International Relations (IR) scholarship. Florini (1996), p.375; Finnemore and Sikkink

and those in solidarity from several sections of society, initially in India, as National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) in 1998, and then building up an international solidarity movement across northern countries, that is, the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) in 2000. Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) was then initiated in 2009 to link the CDWD communities in Asia. In early 2019, Africa Network of communities discriminated on work and descent against slavery (ANDS) was initiated with organisations working in Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritius, Somalia and some pan-African networks. The International Congress of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (ICDWD) held in New York in September 2019 consisted of 121 representatives from twenty-four countries. They gathered to forge the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD).

Over two decades, this journey moved towards building policy norms concerning human rights of the CDWD, initially with a Dalit focus and later collectively with such communities as Roma, Burakumin, and Haratine Quilombola, etc. This journey may be seen in four phases since the emergence of the International Covenant for Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD): 1) Pre-World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), 2) WCAR and its Prep, 3) CERD and HRC, and 4) UN GA and ECOSOC phase.

Pre-World Conference Against Racism Phase

The first phase, Pre-WCAR Phase, from 1996 till 1999: In 1996, CERD recognized human rights abuse and discrimination faced by Scheduled Castes and Tribes¹⁵ referring to the continued discrimination and violence they face despite constitutional mechanisms. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) first noted severe shortcomings in the performance of the Government of India and noted in the concluding remarks to the reports submitted in 1997 that ‘despite measures taken by the Government, members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, as well as the so called backward classes and ethnic and national minorities continue to endure severe social discrimination and to suffer disproportionately from many violations of their rights under the Covenant, inter alia inter-caste violence, bonded labourers and discrimination of all kinds’.¹⁶ In 2000, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) raised numerous questions on the plight of Dalit women in response to India’s country report. There were only tentative and intermittent interventions made mainly to the CERD, Human Rights Committee (HRC) and CEDAW and the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial

(1998), p. 889 cited in Corrine Lennox. *Transnational Social Mobilisation and Minority Rights: Identity, Advocacy and Norms*. London: Routledge, 2020.

¹⁵UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). *UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Concluding Observations, India*, 17 September 1996, CERD/C/304/Add.13. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6aeeb10.html>

¹⁶UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), *UN Human Rights Committee: Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee, Slovakia*. 4 August 1997, CCPR/C/79/Add.79. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b032c.html>

Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. However, they did not raise much of a debate nor a serious step to take necessary action against discrimination and violence. These remarks were mainly due to the interventions of some international human rights organisations, and the participation of Dalit rights organisations was very limited; the latter's focus was mostly on the domestic measures, and that, too, mostly sub-national.

WCAR, Durban and its Preparatory Phase

The second phase was of WCAR and its Preparatory Phase. In this phase the most notable process has been the emergence of Dalit organisations both at a sub-national and national level in India. In this period, Dalit CSOs had mobilised a host of human rights organisations—Dalit and other international human rights organisations—to demand inclusion of caste-based discrimination in the list of causes for human rights violations. This is the beginning of 'norm entrepreneurship' taken up by the Dalit movements and CSOs working for the cause of human rights and Dalit rights. This was done through several diverse spaces that were identified by the Dalit CSOs, and systematic interventions were made towards upholding the cause of Dalit rights.

As a preparation for the World Conference, six Regional Experts' Seminars were held between 1999 and 2000 in Geneva, Warsaw, Bangkok, Addis Ababa, and Santiago de Chile. The objectives of each seminar were to discuss the issues of priority concern for that particular region, advance the regional dialogue on racism, raise awareness, share information on the issues of racism and intolerance, and share the 'best practices' to serve as agenda for the future.

The African Regional Seminar of Experts on the prevention of 'ethnic and racial conflicts in Africa' in Addis Ababa, October 2000, called for 'in-depth study of the question of castes, in particular in Africa'.¹⁷ In the Asia Pacific Preparatory Meeting held in Tehran, April 2001, again the issue of caste-based discrimination (CBD) was raised by the Dalit representatives of the CSOs. The admission of the Government of Nepal of the problem of caste discrimination against Dalits in their country and their willingness to have the issue squarely addressed in the WCAR was very encouraging to those who were raising the issue of caste discrimination.¹⁸

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, acting as the Preparatory Committee for WCAR commissioned the International Human Rights Law Group led by Dr. Gay McDougal to prepare a draft agenda for the WCAR conference. This was held in January 2000 in Bellagio, Italy. N. Paul Divakar of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)¹⁹ was among the invitees who participated in the Bellagio Consultation and raised the issue of CBD and the criticality of WCAR addressing this crucial issue faced by a vast section of the global population.

¹⁷Joint statement submitted by the Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme and the Lutheran World Federation to the Sub Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, 17th August 2001.

¹⁸N. Paul Divakar and Ajai M., UN Bodies and the Dalits. In Sukhdeo Thorat and Umakant. (Eds.) *Caste, Race, and Discrimination: Discourses in International Context*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2004.

¹⁹Corinne Lennox. *Transnational Social Mobilisation and Minority Rights - Identity, Advocacy and Norms*. London: Routledge, 2020.

Two preparatory intergovernmental meetings were planned to bring further the concerns raised by the Regional Experts Seminars and discuss and finalise the agenda drafted by the Bellagio Consultation. The first was held in Geneva from 1 to 5 May 2000, and the second was also held in Geneva from 21 May to 1 June 2001. In both these 'Prep Coms' (preparatory committee meetings) the Dalit representatives were exceptionally well prepared and their participation was intense and focussed. In fact, at all the consultations, there were Dalit representatives and other human rights organisations who were well equipped with evidence-based data and clarity of purpose to make a strong appeal that WCAR must address CBD.

It was during this WCAR preparatory phase from the year 2000 onwards that the caste-based discrimination became globally visible and became a hotly contested subject for two parties as well as a matter of concern for UN agencies - CSOs on the one side, voicing ground-level concerns of increasing and persisting discrimination and violence against CDWD, and the member states on the other, shielding themselves from the international gaze against this heinous crime whereas Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and members of several monitoring bodies like CERD supporting the stand of the CSOs and demanding inclusion of this issue of caste-based discrimination in the WCAR documents and the UN mechanisms.

Solidarity and support also came in from another major platform. The NGO Conference at WCAR, Durban, strongly demanded the inclusion of 'work and descent' based discrimination in the discourse and document of WCAR.²⁰ The NGOs at the Conference came together to identify the continuing forms of exclusion, discrimination and violence faced by communities in different parts of the world. Many representatives from Asia and Africa identified the issue of caste and analogous types of discrimination based on one's birth as forms of 'hidden apartheid' requiring attention and addressal of the world community. A strong contingent of over 200 delegates of Dalits from across South Asia, the Buraku people of Japan, the Osu and Oru people of Nigeria, the Griots of Senegal and other communities voiced that similar forms of discrimination exist and have not been recognized under any UN treaty. Specifically pointing out the context of women and children of these communities who were distinctly vulnerable to brutal forms of violence, the NGO Conference recognized the role and task of individual states and the UN as a body to eradicate work and descent-based discrimination, including caste discrimination and untouchability.

On the opening day of the WCAR on 31 January 2001, at the Round Table of Heads of Member States, the NCDHR was one of the three organisations invited to present their issue. Paul Divakar presenting the issue appealed to the Heads of States to make necessary provisions to address the concerns of the 260 million people who are victims of caste discrimination in South Asia and Western Africa. Fidel Castro, the then President of Cuba, expressed shock that such a system is still being practiced but no resolution has come out from the Roundtable on the issues of caste discrimination.

At the 'Voices of Victims' programme organized as part of the official programme of the UN World Conference Against Racism, in 2001, Manimalai, from Tamil Nadu, India, wife of slain panchayat (village council) president Murugesan, presented her case. Murugesan was dragged out of the public transport, beheaded and murdered in

²⁰Ibid.

broad daylight as he had dared to contest in the panchayat elections against the diktat of the dominant caste community. The irony was that the panchayat seat was reserved for Dalits and Murugesan enjoyed the right to contest!

On 5 September 2001, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), an independent body monitoring human rights violations in India and represented by Justice K Ramaswamy, made its statement at the WCAR conference. Referring to the two preparatory consultations organized by the Commission within the country in preparation for the WCAR and in the light of the myriad cases dealt with by the Commission, Justice Ramaswamy stated that while India has formulated legislations, discrimination against scheduled castes (Dalits) continued to be the reality and that Member States, including India, must take this opportunity to address this vexatious problem while respecting the international human rights regime established under the auspices of the United Nations, and accordingly observe the discipline of the treaties to which they are States Parties.²¹ This was undoubtedly a big boost to the campaigning Dalit organisations.

One of the member States, Barbados, observing the interventions brought by the Dalit organisations and other International Human Rights Organisations proposed a clause which was in the Draft Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) and this was included as para no.73 of the DDPA. Para no.73 read as follows: ‘to ensure that all necessary constitutional, legislative and administrative measures, including appropriate forms of affirmative action are in place to prohibit and redress discrimination based on work and descent, and that such measures are respected and implemented by all state authorities at all levels’.

The perseverance of the Dalit organisations continued. The NGO representatives and survivors of caste and analogous forms of discrimination met with state representatives and UN CERD members, including Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights, to submit written representations requesting that the conference recognizes this CDWD issue as of paramount importance.

Tearing down the wall of caste

Madam Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR, Geneva in an *Opinion Piece: Tearing down the wall of caste*,²² while receiving a group of representatives from caste-affected communities in Asia including Wilson Bezwada of Safai Karamchari Andolan (Movement for the Elimination of Manual Scavenging), who presented the High Commissioner with a piece of brick from the wall of a torn down dry latrine, said that the brick symbolised the global struggle against the caste and discrimination based on work and descent. Madam Pillay also recognised that ‘Untouchability’ is a social phenomenon affecting approximately 260 million persons worldwide. She also opined that the time has come to eradicate the shameful concept

²¹Justice K. Ramaswamy. ‘Statement by National Human Rights Commission, India at WCAR’. In Sukhadeo Thorat and Umakant. (Eds.) *Caste, Race and Discrimination*. New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2004.

²²United Nations Human Rights. *Opinion Piece: Tearing down the wall of caste*. UN High Commissioner for Human rights, OHCHR, Geneva <https://newsarchive.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=9540&LangID=E>

of caste. ‘Other seemingly insurmountable walls, such as slavery and apartheid, have been dismantled in the past. We can and must tear down the barriers of caste too.’

Despite the intense advocacy of engaging with the State Party Delegates, raising international media visibility and generating support from a wide network of civil society organizations, Para 73 referring to ‘discrimination based on work and descent’ did not find place in the DDPA. This was a great disappointment for Dalit rights organisations. However, the fallout of this denial caught global attention. This also caught the attention of the OHCHR and the UN Thematic Conventions such as CERD and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and other Special Rapporteurs as to why such a legitimate concern, a human rights issue concerning 260 million people could be set aside by the WCAR. This gave impetus to all concerned bodies and organizations, both civil and UN, push the CDWD issue to move towards its third phase.

CERD and HRC phase

The third phase of the norm entrepreneurship of CDWD rights is significant in carving out detailed policy framework to protect and promote the CDWD rights from several perspectives. There are five critical elements in this phase: (a) UN CERD General Recommendation 29²³ on caste-based discrimination and communities discriminated by work and descent, (b) UN Sub-Commission reports of Special Rapporteurs – Goonesekere’s report; Asbjorn Eide and Yozo Yakota’s report culminating in the document ‘Principles and Guidelines for Elimination Caste and Discrimination based on Work and Descent’ by Yozo Yokota and Chin-Sung Chung, (c) UN Treaty Bodies Concluding Observations with reference to caste discrimination (1991–2017),²⁴ (d) UN Special Measures and, (e) Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) commissioned ‘Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination: Key Challenges and Strategic Approaches to Combat Caste-Based and Analogous Forms of Discrimination’ to be used by the UN agencies and other stakeholders in addressing caste-based discrimination,²⁵ (f) Parliamentary Resolutions and Motions, and (g) Parliamentary Forums

(a) CERD General Recommendation 29: CERD has played a critical role in the international recognition of caste and discrimination based on descent in the UN from 1996. Dalit and human rights organisations have been engaging with CERD to address caste-based discrimination as a form of discrimination in order to take note

²³Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. *General Recommendation 29, Discrimination Based on Descent (Sixty-first session, 2002)*. U.N. Doc. A/57/18 at 111 (2002), reprinted in *Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies*, U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6 at 223 (2003). Retrieved from <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/cerd/genrec29.html>

²⁴IDSN. 2021. *Caste Discrimination and Human Rights– Compilation of UN References*. Retrieved from <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/UNcompilation-Jan-2021.pdf>

²⁵United Nations. 2017. *Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination: Key Challenges and Strategic Approaches to Combat Caste-Based and Analogous Forms of Discrimination - United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/GuidanceToolDiscrimination.pdf>

of (i) the several reviews of the country reports of India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Japan, Micronesia, UK and many other countries and (ii) the way caste-based discrimination was avoided in WCAR. Taking note of the appeals from the Dalit organisations, CERD held a special session to address caste-based discrimination.

General Recommendation 29 of CERD reaffirms that discrimination based on descent includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification such as caste and analogous systems of inherited status which nullify or impair their equal enjoyment of human rights; and condemns descent-based discrimination, such as discrimination on the basis of caste and analogous systems of inherited status, as a violation of the Convention. It further endorsed that all states take 'steps to identify those descent-based communities under their jurisdiction who suffer from discrimination, especially on the basis of caste and analogous systems of inherited status' (General Recommendation XXIX on article 1, paragraph 1, on the Convention (Descent) of CERD). This is the first such direct pronouncement on addressing caste-based discrimination by any of the UN Convention monitoring bodies. It spelled out a set of good practices to address discrimination based on caste and analogous systems.

CERD has been the most expressive on the subject of discrimination on work and descent including caste. It has made several concluding remarks while examining the country reports of Bangladesh (2001), Sri Lanka (2016), Japan (2001, 2010, 2014), UK 2003, 2011, 2016), Yemen (2006, 2011), Nigeria (2005), Mauritania (2004), Madagascar (2004), Senegal 2002, 2012), Chad (2009, 2013), Mali (2002), Ethiopia (2003,2009), Ghana (2003), Mauritius (1996, 2013), Burkina Faso (1997, 2013) and Suriname (2015) - a total of 16 countries and 39 citations on Caste and DWD. In addition, several other treaty body conventions have cited on DWD and Caste, which are detailed in Annexure 1 and a little more in detail in the UN treaty body section below.

(b) UN Sub-Commission and HRC: Parallely, another stream of actions were initiated by the Dalit organisations through the erstwhile UN Sub-Commission on Protection and Promotion of Human Rights. In 2000, the Sub-Commission entrusted R.K.W. Goonesekere, its member from Sri Lanka, with the task of preparing a pioneering working paper on the subject in order to identify communities facing discrimination on work and descent, examine the existing constitutional, legislative and administrative measures for the abolition of such discrimination and to make concrete recommendations and proposals for the effective elimination of such discrimination as may be appropriate in the light of such examination.

The Sub-Commission in 2004, appointed Special Rapporteurs Asbjørn Eide and Yoko Yakota who submitted their report on Prevention of Discrimination based on Work and Descent to the ECOSOC. In this report both Eide and Yakota categorically identified caste or DWD communities found in the globe, including Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, India, Japan, Kenya, Mali, Micronesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Yemen. Further, they found DWD identities in various diaspora in Europe and Americas and similarly discriminated communities existing around the world.

Principles and Guidelines for eliminating DWD – Yozo Yokota and Chin-Sung

Chung: This is the first such UN instrument proposed by the two Special Rapporteurs which is a potential tool for Elimination of DWD including caste and analogous forms of discrimination. Unfortunately, in the transition process from UN Sub-Commission to UN HRC, this is one of the powerful instruments that has been left hanging in limbo as the HRC neither accepted this report nor rejected it. Efforts are still being made to have the HRC adopt these Principles and Guidelines.

(c) **UN Treaty Bodies Concluding Observations with reference to Caste Discrimination (1991–2017).**²⁶ In another parallel stream, Dalit rights organizations and human rights bodies had intense and active engagement with the Treaty Bodies—CERD (1965), CCPR (1966), CRC (1989), CEDAW (1979) and CESCR (1966). In this respect, the IDSN must be commended a great part of this facilitation of Dalit and CDWD voices from the ground to intervene with clear facts and figures and put forward recommendations in addressing the CDWD concerns. A total of 19 references were made by Treaty bodies concerning 10 countries in Africa—Nigeria, Mauritania, Madagascar, Senegal, Chad, Mali, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritius and Burkina Faso. In eight countries in Asia, Middle-East and the Pacific—Micronesia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Japan and Yemen—wherein 65 Observations have been made by the UN Treaty Bodies observing the need to address either DWD or specifically caste discrimination. Similarly, three observations in Europe (UK) and one observation in the Latin American Region (Suriname) have been made by the Treaty bodies. This massive piling of evidence of pervasive global nature decisively brought out the prevalence and perpetuation of discrimination based on work and descent (For details, see Table 1 in the Annexure).

Table 1: Details of the Treaty Bodies Concluding Observations with reference to Caste Discrimination (1991–2017). This table details country-wise concluding observations made by Treaty bodies. The brackets after the country refer to the number of times Treaty bodies have referred to caste or discrimination based on work and descent.

Country	Treaty Bodies	Year of Concluding Observations
Bangladesh (7)	CCPR	2017
	CERD	2001
	CRC	2015; 2009; 2003
	CEDAW	2015; 2011
Sri Lanka (4)	CERD	2016
	CRC	2010; 2018
	CEDAW	2017
	CCPR	1991
	CESCR	2017

²⁶IDSN. 2021. *Caste Discrimination and Human Rights– Compilation of UN References*. Retrieved from <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/UNcompilation-Jan-2021.pdf>.

Country	Treaty Bodies	Year of Concluding Observations
Japan (10)	CERD	2014; 2010; 2001
	CEDAW	2009, 2016
	CRC	2004; 2010
	CESCR	2001
	CCPR	2014; 1998
United Kingdom (3)	CERD	2016; 2011; 2003
Yemen (9)	CERD	2011; 2006
	CESCR	2011; 2003
	CRC	2014; 2005; 1999; 1996
	CCPR	2012
Nigeria (1)	CERD	2005
Mauritania (3)	CERD	2004
	CRC	2009
	CEDAW	2014
Madagascar (1)	CERD	2004
Senegal (3)	CERD	2012; 2002
	CRC	2016
Chad (2)	CERD	2013; 2009
Mali (1)	CERD	2002
Ethiopia (2)	CERD	2009; 2003
Ghana (1)	CERD	2003
Mauritius (2)	CERD	2013; 1996
Burkina Faso (2)	CERD	2013; 1997
Micronesia (1)	CRC	1998
Suriname (1)	CERD	2015
Total number of concluding remarks on CDWD in Treaty Bodies	CERD (39); CRC (24); CESCR (9); CEDAW (14); CAT (1); CCPR (8)	Asia (56); Africa (19); Middle East (9); Europe (3); The Americas (1)

(d) **The UN Special Rapporteurs:** Table 2 in the Annexure lists the twenty UN Special Rapporteurs, UN Working Groups or UN Independent Experts who have made references addressing caste-based discrimination or discrimination on work and descent during the period 2005 to 2017.²⁷ To be noted is that IDSN has meticulously documented these data by culling out these references from the vast UN sources.

²⁷Ibid.

Table 2: List of UN Special Procedure Mandate Holders who have made references and recommendations on Caste and/or Discrimination on Work and Descent

S. No.	UN Special Procedure Mandate Holder
1	Special Rapporteur on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance
2	Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences
3	Special Rapporteur on minority issues
4	Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context
5	Special Rapporteur on the right to food
6	Special Rapporteur on the right to education
7	Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
8	Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
9	Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences
10	Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief
11	Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation
12	Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty
13	Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health
14	Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the freedom of opinion and expression
15	UN Working Group on discrimination against women in law and practice
16	Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, arbitrary or summary executions
17	Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association
18	Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
19	UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent
20	Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons
Total no. of UN Special Procedures Mandates (20) with DWD or Caste Discrimination Reference	

Among the UN Special Procedures Mandate Holders, there have been quite a few who have made consistent efforts to bring to light the DWD or caste discrimination in their reports to the Human Rights Council. In 2009, a group of Special Procedures Mandate Holders have brought to light the issue of caste and other forms of discrimination in a joint memo as their significant contribution during the Durban Review Conference (DRC).

Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, in March 2016²⁸ had consistently raised this issue and brought it to the notice of the HRC stating that DWD and caste discrimination constitute serious human rights violation prevalent

²⁸Rita Izsák-Ndiaye. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. UN. Human Rights Council*. 2016. Retrieved from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/831486?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>.

in several countries and that this needs to be urgently addressed. What is important to note here is that this brought ire to many states which expressed their displeasure against the mandate holder.

What is to be highlighted here is that the norm entrepreneurship coordinated by the Dalits and those in solidarity has been remarkable in this third phase. It generated a vast amount of data and evidence across all the continents on the prevalence of DWD and its effects on communities. Moreover, the member states' failure to effectively address the human rights violations has been brought out powerfully in this phase. General Recommendation 29, after an intense thematic discussion at the CERD, is an important milestone of this phase. Further, a significant contribution in this phase is the document of the two special rapporteurs, Yozo Yokota and Chin-Sung Chung, namely, 'The Principles and Guidelines to Eliminate Discrimination based on Work and Descent', an essential tool for policy guidance, monitoring and review. Later, as observed earlier, with the transition in the UN structure of the Sub-Commission for Protection and Promotion of Human Rights to the HRC in 2006, the Principles and Guidelines for Elimination of DWD was left in limbo. It was neither rejected nor accepted by the Human Rights Council. Needless to say, that the resolve of the member states to resist any appeal to address DWD began to get stronger in the period of the HRC.

The UN General Assembly resolved to convene in 2009 the DRC. It did not evoke much of a response from the NGOs nor the Member States as its relevance then was much debated owing to the contradictions that had surfaced in WCAR among the various countries on such issues as racial discrimination, caste discrimination, reparation for colonial slavery, etc. Dalit organisations, however, participated in the NGO events prior to and during the DRC in 2009, although with only a handful of delegates including a small cultural team. What needs to be underlined here is that in the DRC Outcome Document,²⁹ no significant changes were visible regarding the position of the Member States on the Dalits and their concerns, and thus once again 'work and descent-based discrimination' was left out. However, the Dalit organisations and those in solidarity with them did not give up the process of norm entrepreneurship but continued it perseveringly and persistently after DRC.

(e) Guidance Tool for UN functionaries to address the concerns of Dalits and Descent based Discrimination Communities. Due to repeated advocacy efforts of IDSN and Dalit groups, the OHCHR prepared an inclusive guidance tool on caste-based discrimination in 2017, titled, 'Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination: Key Challenges and Strategic Approaches to Combat Caste-Based and Analogous Forms of Discrimination'. This tool is to be used by UN agencies and other stakeholders in addressing caste-based discrimination. This is probably the first such instrument for the UN functionaries on identifying the communities discriminated by descent, and what areas and the strategies are to be used to work with them.

This phase has been the most effective in framing policies to address caste-based discrimination leading to the wider phenomenon of discrimination on work and descent.

²⁹Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference. Retrieved through [https://www.un.org/en/durban review2009/pdf/Durban_Review_outcome_document_En.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/durban%20review2009/pdf/Durban_Review_outcome_document_En.pdf)

The mobilization of Dalit communities and those in solidarity in the entire process of the preparatory conferences and during the Durban World Conference has galvanized other UN bodies like the Committee for Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Sub-Commission, and later the Human Rights Council and the Special Measures of Mandate Holders had begun to evolve policy measures to address caste discrimination.

To be recognized is that the CERD and other HRC bodies have captured the concerns of the CDWD from its myriad angles—from the civil and political rights, broad spectrum of social-political and cultural rights, economic rights and also individual and collective rights.

More importantly, the CERD and other HRC bodies have also captured the geographical spread of the incidence of DWD in at least twenty-six countries—across Asia-Pacific including the Middle East (8 countries) and Africa (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritius, Somalia, Ethiopia); the Dalit diaspora in UK and USA have also been identified, thereby confirming this issue as a global concern with a UN mandate to address it.

However, the members states continue to resist strongly that (1) caste is not race, (2) countries already have laws to address this issue, and (3) it is an ancient system which will take its due course to disappear.

At this juncture, the Dalit organisations led by NCDHR and the IDSN and all those in solidarity decided to make a shift in their strategy. This then marks the beginning of the fourth phase. The shift has a focus more on the global nature of DWD and to mobilise the communities across the world on this issue. The location of this has also shifted from Geneva with the HRC to New York where the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC functions.

(f) Parliamentary Resolutions and Motions. From 2006 to 2018 and beyond, several Dalit solidarity bodies and leaders have urged their respective parliaments to take cognizance of the CDWD including ‘untouchability’ and caste-based discrimination across the world and to take necessary steps to address in all the areas as they deal with respective governments and also in their trade and development initiatives. Prominent among them are the three resolutions passed by the European Parliaments in 2006, 2012 and 2013 and the motion passed by the Australian Parliament in 2018.

European Parliament Resolutions

The first EU Parliament resolution on the Human Rights situation of Dalits in India was in 2006³⁰ which expressed concern over the lack of substantive EU engagement with the Indian Government, notably within the EU-India Summits, on the vast problem of caste-based discrimination. The resolution urged the EU members of the Joint Action Committee to develop dialogue on the problem of caste-based discrimination in terms of its discussions on democracy and human rights, social and employment policy and development cooperation. EU resolution reiterated its expectation that EU

³⁰European Parliament. *Human Rights of Dalits in India: European Parliament resolution on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India*. 1 February 2001. Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2007-0016_EN.html?redirect

development programmes in India include specific measures to ensure that minorities such as Dalits and Adivasis and other marginalised communities, tribes and castes, are able to close the wide gap with the rest of the population regarding the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Due to the consistent concerns being raised in the UN and related bodies by Dalit solidarity bodies in the EU countries, EU Parliament passed its second resolution³¹ in December 2013 which called for the EU to promote the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent as a guiding framework for eliminating caste discrimination, and to promote their endorsement by the UN HRC. EU Calls on the Commission to recognise caste as a distinct form of discrimination rooted in the social and/or religious context, which must be tackled together with other grounds of discrimination, i.e. ethnicity, race, descent, religion, gender and sexuality, in EU efforts to fight all forms of discrimination; calls for the EU, in its policies and programmes, to consider people affected by caste-based discrimination as an identifiable group; The EU Parliament urged the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to mainstream the fight against caste-based discrimination in EU legislation, policies and programming documents and to adopt operational guidelines for its implementation and called on the EEAS to enhance monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess effectively the impact of EU action on the situation of people affected by this form of discrimination.

The third EU Parliament resolution passed³² in 2013 built on the previous two resolutions in 2006 and 2012. This resolution based its recommendation on the CERD General Recommendation 29, the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent, published by the HRC and citing the serious concerns, observations and recommendations of the UNHCHR with regard to caste discrimination. It also took cognizance of the recommendations by UN Treaty Bodies and UN Special Procedures Mandate-Holders on the topic of caste based discrimination (CBD).

This third EU resolution recognised that despite the steps taken by the governments of some caste-affected countries, caste discrimination and untouchability continue to be widespread and persistent, It encouraged the EEAS to strengthen its policy and human rights dialogues and promote joint initiatives to eliminate caste discrimination with the governments of states, such as India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, where caste-affected communities are subjected to so-called ‘untouchability practices’, and, more broadly, to combat discrimination based on work and descent, which occurs in various countries, including Yemen, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Somalia – which has gone unmentioned in agreements with many of these states. This third resolution also called for the inclusion of caste-based discrimination as a human rights issue in future EU human rights policies, strategies and action plans.

³¹European Parliament. *Caste Discrimination in India: European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2012 on caste discrimination in India* (2012/2909(RSP). 13 December 2012. Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2012-0512_EN.html?redirect

³²European Parliament. *Caste based discrimination: European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2013 on caste-based discrimination* (2013/2676(RSP). 10 October 2013. Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2013-0420_EN.html?redirect

It urged the EU Commission to provide stronger support for development projects combating caste-based discrimination as a serious human rights violation that exacerbates poverty, and to take this form of discrimination into account in all projects with a focus on education, women, access to justice, political participation or labourers in relevant countries. It specifically urged the Commission to develop and apply caste-sensitive approaches in times of humanitarian crisis and ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered to all marginalised groups, including people suffering from caste-based discrimination. It also urged the Commission and the EEAS to include, where relevant, a ‘caste-based discrimination clause’ in all trade and association agreements, including affirmative action for Dalits and similarly affected people in the labourers market and the private sector. As the SDGs were being discussed and being developed at that time in 2013, this resolution called for the EU to promote a caste-sensitive post-2015 development agenda, with the reduction of inequalities based on or aggravated by caste as a crucial and measurable goal, ensuring that caste discrimination is explicitly addressed as a major structural factor underlying poverty, and as a root cause of structural inequalities.

Australian Senate Motion³³

Senator Lee Rhiannon of the Australian Senate, in June 2018, placed a motion which was passed. She stated that there are over 260 million people across the globe, including around 210 million Dalits in South Asia who face discrimination based on work and descent, including caste and untouchability, as well as Burakumin communities in Japan and those in Africa, Latin America (Quilombo) and Europe (Romani). She called on the Australian Government to develop and apply sensitive approaches in times of humanitarian crisis and ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered to all marginalised groups, including people suffering from DWD. She also urged the Australian business partners to promote more inclusive recruitment and management practices in countries where caste discrimination is prevalent and to strengthen the policy and human rights dialogues and promote joint initiatives to eliminate DWD together with the governments of states, such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. She urged Australia’s international development program to provide support for projects combating DWD as a serious human rights violation that exacerbates poverty.

(g) Parliamentary Forums. Asia Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns (APFDC)³⁴ is a forum of Parliamentarians from South Asia, which was formed to address the issue of discrimination and exclusion faced by the Dalit and excluded communities. The Forum came to exist at the South Asian Parliamentarians’ Conference on ‘Dalit Concerns: Enabling Equity and Inclusion’. It aims to engage with governance institutions and actors in South Asian countries, individually and

³³Commonwealth of Australia. *Parliamentary Debates - The Senate Motions Discrimination Based on Work And Descent*. 27 June 2018. Retrieved from https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansards/bccfc0a7-1a8d-4257-b829-fa7e3b0f0fc7/0104/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

³⁴ADRF. *Asia Parliamentarians’ Forum on Dalit Concern*. Retrieved from [http://asiadalitrightforum.org/assets/publications/doc/65643492Asia%20Parliamentarians%20Forum%20on%20Dalit%20Concerns%20\(1\).pdf](http://asiadalitrightforum.org/assets/publications/doc/65643492Asia%20Parliamentarians%20Forum%20on%20Dalit%20Concerns%20(1).pdf)

collectively, to address Dalit concerns in South Asia. It also enables Parliamentarians from across the region to share knowledge and learning that can strengthen the work being done in their respective countries towards promoting equitable and inclusive growth and development.

International Parliamentary Forum on the DWD Concerns (IPFoD)³⁵

Parliamentarian representatives from nine countries formed the International Parliamentarians Forum on DWD with Hon. Meena Biswakarma (Parliamentarian from Nepal) as the Convener and Hon. Mohammad Nur Iftin (Somalian Parliamentarian) as Co-convener. This International Parliamentarians Forum focuses on the engagement and interventions of Parliamentarians on DWD issues, nationally and internationally, including before the UN and its various organs. This Forum also has support from some parliamentarians from Europe. The IPFoD members have decided to strengthen this forum in order to demand inclusive development for the peoples discriminated by work and descent at the UN and at the domestic level in their respective countries. This Forum is slowly growing in Africa, Asia and in other regions.

The UN General Assembly and ECOSOC phase

Dalits and CDWD have shifted their focus to intervene at the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to continue with a view to evolve norm entrepreneurship of developing policies which would effectively address DWD concerns. The previous 15 years were spent on the HRC mechanisms, mostly at the Geneva hub of the UN. Considerable elements of policy for addressing discrimination based on work and descent including caste were developed at the HRC. A stalemate seems to have emerged at the HRC in Geneva. Treaty Bodies and Special Rapporteurs and other mechanisms have noted, pointed out and directed member states that they have not got traction at the domestic front. At this stage there was a re-think on the strategy by the Dalit groups, primarily headed by the ADRF to shift gears and to strategise an effective theory of change for UN to address DWD and also Dalit and other concerns that have already been brought out during a decade and half.

This phase of the involvement at the UN General Assembly can be seen in five areas of work:

- i) Engage with the regional mechanisms of UN HLPF to have a broader base and to build pressure from below;
- ii) Intervene at the UNGA bodies – the HLPF of SDGs, Financing for Development and the UN Third Committee;
- iii) Build a global forum and expand the spectrum of DWD communities from Asia to Africa and Latin America and to link with Roma, Sinti, Gypsy and Traveller Groups in Europe;

³⁵Trust Africa. *A week to speak on discrimination based on work and descent: Leaving no one behind*. Retrieved from <https://www.trustafrica.org/Fr/les-ressources2/actualites/item/3453-a-week-to-speak-up-on-discrimination-based-on-work-and-descent-leaving-no-one-behind>

- iv) Engage with the UN Member States to form an informal Working Group on CDWD;
- v) Entry in the UN DESA – liaison body –to enter into the MGOS Coordination Mechanism

This strategy necessitated the need to evolve and strengthen a global platform of CDWD from across the regions. The first initiative was the Asia Dalit Solidarity Forum which brought actors together from Dalit organisations in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who were primarily Dalit rights forums or those in solidarity with Dalit rights cause. Buraku Liberation League (BLL) and their international movement International Movement against All forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) functioning in Japan and the Dalit groups in Malaysia initially also were connected but later it was mostly the South Asian Dalit rights groups who were actively engaged in the Asian global network process.

i) Engaging with the regional mechanisms of UN HLPF. ADRF started its campaign for the inclusion of DWD in the regional mechanism in Asia. UN ESCAP, based in Bangkok, is the regional hub for the UN SDG in the Asia Pacific region of UN. The NGOs in this region have formed Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (APRCM), a civil society platform, aimed at enabling stronger cross constituency coordination and ensuring that all sub-regions of Asia Pacific are heard in intergovernmental processes at a regional and global level. ADRF researched and brought out an advocacy note demanding a goal with the agenda to end caste, work and discrimination by 2030 through a publication ‘Dalits and the Post 2015 Development Agenda’.³⁶ ADRF continued with an appeal to address the concerns of Dalits and DWD in the Asian region and participated in the official UN Asia Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD). Through this, the regional platform was strengthened and the issues of Dalits, mainly from South Asia, were represented. The gain from this engagement with APFSD is that in 2019 a separate constituency has been allotted for ‘Dalits and DWD’ for the concerns of DWD in general.

ii) Interventions at the UN HLPF. ADRF together with collaborating partners in Asia, Europe and North Americas gathered at the UN New York headquarters in order to engage with international NGOs and UN experts to appeal for elimination of DWD with the publication ‘260 Million Dalits Appeal for Inclusion in the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)’.³⁷ In fact, since the start of the UN SDGs in 2015, ADRF has been planning and organising several events by collaborating with several international organisations to highlight the need for inclusion of the concerns of DWD communities in achieving sustainable development goals. The prominent series of events were held, along with Regions Refocus and other International NGOs in New York, when the SDGs were presented and accepted by the General Assembly at UN, New York in 2015.

³⁶ADRF. *Dalits and the Post 2015 Development Agenda: Addressing the hidden apartheid of millions will be key to the success of the SDGs*. New Delhi: Asia Dalit Rights Forum. Retrieved from <http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/assets/publications/doc/13645922013.pdf>

³⁷ADRF. *260 Million Dalits Appeal for Inclusion in the post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals*. New Delhi: Asia Dalit Rights Forum. Retrieved from <http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/assets/publications/doc/1142297951123.pdf>

Around 150 delegates were present from the South Asia region together with the Dalit diaspora from US and Canada. Nine Parliamentarians from Asia also joined this effort to include the issue of DWD rights in the SDGs. In the same year ADRF participated in the Civil Society Forum during the Third International Conference of Financing for Development (FfD) advocating for the financial inclusion of CDWD.³⁸ Measures suggested at the FfD were: (1) To address barriers to development due to DWD discrimination; (2) Financial inclusion of the Socially Excluded, especially of gender and caste inclusion; and (3) Targeted Budget Allocations for the intergenerationally excluded DWD communities.

ADRF participated in the Sixth Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators on 14 November 2017 at Manama, Bahrain, placing an appeal for a clear data disaggregation to monitor the development indicators for CDWD and other social groups.

In 2016, ADRF organised two side events: (i) 'Leave No One Behind - Ensuring Inclusion of the Most Marginalised and Socially Excluded Communities in SDGs' along with Minority Rights Group International, CIVICUS, Asia Development Alliance, Rural Development Centre, Stakeholder Forum for Sustainable Future and Global Call to Action Against Poverty; (ii) Another side event, 'Inclusion Check: Dalit and other Marginalised Women Challenging Inequalities in SDGs 2030' was also held; several international NGOs and members of the Permanent Missions at the UN participated and expressed an interest to promote the concerns of the DWD communities in the SDGs.

Every year from 2015 onwards till 2019, Dalit organisations headed by ADRF have been organising a series of events, numbering eleven, to bring to light the concerns of DWD communities and placing suggestions for addressing them at the HLPF which is the monitoring body of the SDGs at the UN in New York. ADRF has also collaborated with several international organisations such as CIVICUS, Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), Amnesty International, Asian Development Alliance, Save, Regions Refocus, Minority Rights Group International, Development Centre, Stakeholder Forum for Sustainable Future, Dr Ambedkar International Mission in order to mobilise support to the CDWD cause. One notable feature is that the UN Women has actively supported and engaged with the CDWD groups to bring to light their concerns in the UN HLPF.

iii) To build a Global Forum for expanding the spectrum of DWD. The shift from a Dalit-focussed advocacy to CDWD-based advocacy needed a theoretical framework for a common identity of DWD groups across the continents. The implication was the need to recognize and understand the disadvantages, restrictions and barriers faced by CDWD across the continents. A publication explaining the basis for this was brought out in 2018, namely, 'A Framework on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, Including Caste'.³⁹

³⁸ADRF. *Promoting Inclusive Economic growth of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (Caste)*. New Delhi: Asia Dalit Rights Forum. Retrieved from <http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/assets/publications/doc/1102077081ffd3-new.pdf>

³⁹ADRF. *Towards a unifying global identity: A Framework on Discrimination based on Work and Descent, Including Caste*. New Delhi: Asia Dalit Rights Forum. 2018. Retrieved from

In November 2018, ADRF organised exploratory network meetings with groups and individual leaders in Africa—Nairobi, Kenya and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—on the Discrimination based on Work and Descent. The similarities between the caste-based discrimination found in South Asia and the social systems which caused enslavement of certain communities Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and other East African countries were starkly clear and striking.

Following on the visit to East Africa, ADRF had discussions with groups from western Africa facilitated by Trust Africa organization and then reached out to a group of organisations in the Sahel region working with communities forced into the traditional forms of enslavement. Following this, in April 2019 the Dakar Consultation was held on the theme ‘Discrimination based on Work and Descent in Africa - Exploring UN Mechanisms’ and organised by The Inclusivity Project, Trust Africa, Asia Dalit Rights Forum, Amnesty International, Dalit Solidarity in Deutschland, African Regional UNESCO, SAVE international, Regional GCAP and others. At the end of the consultation, the African groups met to decide on the formation of ANDS.

With this ground work standing as backdrop, the International Congress of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (ICDWD) was held in New York from 21–23 September 2019 with 121 representatives from 24 countries. The aim was to forge a global forum calling upon the United Nations and States Parties to adopt effective measures toward ending all forms of discrimination and violence based on work and descent, casteism, antigypsyism, traditional and contemporary forms of slavery and other analogous forms of discrimination. Accordingly, deliberating on the need to have a global forum of peoples similarly discriminated on work and descent, ICDWD formed a global network and came out with the New York Declaration to be presented to the United Nations and Member States and other international agencies.

New York Declaration: Global Call To Eradicate Discrimination And Uphold Human Dignity And Equality:⁴⁰ Citing the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); taking note of several attempts been made under international human rights law to eliminate discrimination and violence based on work and descent, casteism, antigypsyism, traditional and contemporary forms of slavery and other analogous forms of discrimination, while at the same time feeling appalled at the impunity manifested by state and non-state, the ICDWD called on the United Nations and its Member States: (1) to adopt the ‘Draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent’; (2) to declare a Decade of DWD Communities that will focus on combating discrimination and violence based on work and descent, casteism, antigypsyism, traditional and contemporary forms of slavery and other analogous forms of discrimination; (3) to establish a Special United Nations Fund to support the effective participation of DWD communities in all national, regional and international processes geared towards eliminating discrimination and violence based on work and descent, casteism,

<http://www.ncdhr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/648455134Global-report-single-page-format.pdf>

⁴⁰New York Declaration. 24 September 2019, *Global Call To Eradicate Discrimination And Uphold Human Dignity and Equality*. Retrieved from http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/assets/publications/doc/New_York_Declaration_b9ja6.pdf

antigypsyism, traditional and contemporary forms of slavery and other analogous forms of discrimination; and (4) to adopt a Declaration on the Rights of the CDWD.

The New York Declaration also called on the member states: (1) to officially recognize the people, culture and the rich heritage of DWD communities; (2) to establish and implement various legal and policy frameworks, administrative and judicial instruments in order to accelerate equality and justice for all; (3) to ensure that there is no direct or indirect discrimination against women in all its forms; (4) to enact and strengthen national laws and policies that promote gender equality and prevent gender-based discrimination and violence; (5) to ensure accountability of all crimes against women and to end the culture of impunity; (6) to promote the rights and entitlements of children and youth of DWD communities in order to develop their potential to grow as full-fledged citizens; (7) to ensure equitable and proportional representation in governance to members of DWD communities, especially the women; (8) to evolve and implement plans, policies and programs in public and private sectors aimed towards sustainable economic empowerment of DWD communities; (9) to end all forms of state-sponsored violence and repression against DWD communities so as to ensure they live a secured life of equality and dignity; and (10) to establish an independent body of members of DWD communities in order to monitor and review the implementation process of Sustainable Development Goals, 2030.

iv) Engage with the Member States and Parliamentarians. The advocacy efforts have been directed towards two other key areas—the Permanent Missions and the Parliamentarians as they both are critical to evolving policy both at the UN as well as at the domestic levels. In this area three Roundtable Meetings were organised with the Permanent Missions together with the Parliamentarians. In September 2019, a roundtable meet was hosted by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Senegal to United Nations. Ambassador Cheikh Ndiaye not only addressed the twenty-eight delegates from twelve countries from four continents including nine Parliamentarians from six countries but also gave a commitment to take the DWD concerns to the UN SDG process through the HLPF of SDGs which is the monitoring body for the implementation of the SDGs.

Another Roundtable was organized jointly by the GFoD along with the Permanent Mission of Germany and the International Parliamentarians Forum on DWD during the UN General Assembly week in September 2020. This was a virtual meeting due to the Covid pandemic. It had three objectives: (1) To build solidarity and fellowship among the MPs based on DWD rights cause; (2) To evolve a charter of specific and concrete strategies for effective intervention on DWD issue at global/regional level; and (3) To outline concrete measures for building up IPFoD (International Parliamentarians Forum of DWD) which can operate as an effective platform at global/regional level. Nine MPs from several countries and the CDWD leaders from eleven countries participated and the German Ambassador gave his commitment to represent this issue to the UN Third Committee specifically on the issue of Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation.

Accordingly, a Roundtable on the access to safe drinking water and sanitation rights for all was hosted by the Permanent Mission of Germany along with the Permanent Mission of Spain and was jointly organised by GFoD with several international organisations. The Roundtable discussed how the communities that are discriminated based on work and descent could be better organized and included in the task of

achieving SDG 6 and how the UN could be engaged to support these efforts. Starting with this roundtable, there is a greater openness and momentum among the Permanent Missions to discuss and act on the concerns of DWD communities.

v) Entry in the UN DESA—liaison body—so as to enter into the MGOS Coordination Mechanism. Another major breakthrough at the UN General Assembly CSO processes is the formal recognition of the CDWD as part of the MGoS—Major Groups and other Stakeholders. MGoS is a forum of CSOs categorized on the thematic or constituency groups that are recognised by the UN DESA. UN DESA upholds the development pillar of the United Nations and is guided by the UN SDGs processes. Since the time of recognition of Global Forum of CDWDs as a formal part of the NGO interventions in 2021 HLPF, CDWD leaders and youth have created space to be part of the panel in the official sessions of the HLPF, and have been selected by the MGoS to intervene through formal statements on behalf of the CDWD communities and their concerns. This latest development is a major breakthrough in the norm entrepreneurship emergence and will lead to the point where possible resolutions may be taken in the future UN Assembly sessions.

Working towards a UN Declaration on the Rights of CDWD

CDWD number over 260 million spread across all over the globe in all the continents. As observed earlier, the most visible among them are the Dalits of South Asia and the Burakumin of Japan but since the year 2000, the presence of various CDWD has been established across all the continents. They do not have the same narrative of their origin but all of them undergo similarly severe human rights discriminations and violations due to (a) notions of purity and pollution, (b) segregated living, (c) forced unclean occupations and (d) the practice of endogamy.

It is evidenced beyond doubt that CDWD across nations have been ‘enslaved’ within their own regions/countries. This phenomenon has happened much before the transatlantic slave trade to the northern countries took place. This ‘enslavement’ still continues in varying forms that are termed as ‘modern forms of slavery’, and in some countries traditional form of slavery still continues. CDWDs face extreme forms of violence in a routine manner when they assert their rights to dignity, liberty, equality and right to life.

Another peculiar feature of the CDWD is that they have been dis-membered in their location of habitation. They are not present in one geographical section of the country or the region. Even though their overall population percentage at the national level is quite large in proportion to that of other communities, they have been dis-membered into minute or small groups and have been kept under the domain of the settlement of the dominant castes/groups at the village or at a primary habitation level for the purpose of residing close to the dominant castes/groups and providing all kinds of menial services to them. This in fact is a manipulative strategy of managing a fairly large group of minority populations under the control of the dominant castes/groups. This has been found to be true not only within a given country but also across the globe. It can very well be said that this has been the reason for this DWD issue to have remained invisible for centuries and being able to survive international scrutiny for over a few decades.

Except for a handful of nation states who have ensured legislated rights protecting CDWD right to life in their territories, most DWD communities still continue their life of being vulnerable to and being exposed to exclusion and violence. In each of those countries where the DWD practices exist, there have been several attempts by the people to protect themselves by demanding policy frames from their governments to address these forms of discrimination and violence. In this respect, it is to be noted that this process of norm emergence is becoming stronger in South Asia.

Historically, CDWD have attempted to reverse the dominant caste/group's dismemberment strategy that has caused the communities to be split into small groups scattered all over the sub-national spaces. Efforts in the South Asian region brought the CDWD under one identity in the colonial period. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an icon of the Dalits in South Asia has given them the term 'depressed classes' which later was known as as Scheduled Castes and then further on as Dalits. Today this term has come to be accepted in most of the South Asian countries.

United Nations took efforts to bring the concerns of these communities right at the time of constituting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the prime charter of rights of the United Nations, but the attempts did not succeed. There is documentary evidence to show that W. E. B. Dubois has reached out to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who brought the concerns of Dalits to the international audience, but for some reason the UN did not bring the specific concerns of Dalits into its legal purview. In contrast, however, the concerns of the racial minorities were brought within the legal framework of the UN Charter.

Recent decades, however, have seen positive trends. For the first time CERD recognized in 1996 that the term 'descent' does cover the concerns of Scheduled Castes and that of caste-based discrimination but this was strongly contested by some of the member states at the UN. The member states led by India's representatives stated that caste and race were different. And it was also argued that the caste system is not an 'apartheid system' where the state condones and that the country has constitutional provisions, legislative and administrative measures to curb the practice of caste-based discrimination. It was also contended that the member states have the ability to address the DWD concerns within the countries and so a UN body like CERD does not have to deal with this type of issue.

The WCAR generated an intense discussion once again raising the concerns of CDWD. Dalit groups along with many international human rights organisations also were instrumental in initiating intense debates with irrefutable evidences placed before the UN bodies. However, it appears that some technicalities prevented WCAR from bringing out a resolution on the CDWDs in its Declaration and Programme of Action.

The norm entrepreneurship of the Dalit groups continued, however, and they along with other solidarity bodies have generated enormous systematic evidence for the benefit of several UN bodies—the Treaty Bodies, Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and also the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. On the whole eighty-six recommendations were given by CERD, Child Rights Committee, Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women, Committee against Torture and Human Rights Committee, referring to DWD issues from all over Asia, Africa, Middle East and the Americas. Twenty-one Special Mandate Holders have officially addressed caste-based discrimination and used the term 'discrimination based on work

and descent' as distinct and different from race or ethnicity. The Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council has several times raised the issue of DWD and caste-based discrimination, but the Member States continued to resist reporting on the issues of caste-based discrimination.

The Dalits groups at this stage, therefore, shifted their strategy to (a) intervene in the UN General Assembly and the ECOSOC bodies, keeping the SDGs as the primary focus, and b) build a GFoD by involving Asian Dalit communities, African groups challenging traditional and modern forms of slavery, Roma, Gypsy, Sinti communities from Europe and Quilombola communities from Latin America. The Burakumin communities from Japan have expressed interest but have not managed to participate in the ICCDWD held in September 2019. The GFoD was constituted in the same year of the Congress and it continues to challenge DWD and push for norm entrepreneurial engagement at the UN. States of Senegal, Germany and Spain have openly supported the issue of CDWD and appealed to the UN to bring the issue to discussion in the UN.

Given the experience of the past millennia, the CDWD have exhibited enormous amount of resilience, creativity, and fortitude to endure and survive through myriad, intersecting forms of oppression, discrimination and injustice. They have risen to stand in solidarity to claim their humanity, achieve full recognition of their status equal to all other citizens of nation-states. It is already twenty-five years since the first cognizance of the DWD issues had taken place with the formal endorsement of CERD in 1996.

Today, the DWD communities and organizations demand legitimate acknowledgement by the worldwide community, especially the UN to recognise the right to life and dignity of the communities and to evolve norm emergence leading to norm adherence. They are also attempting to constitute a Working Group to promote and draft the Declaration on the Rights of CDWD.

There are some critical lessons to be learnt from the experience of the groups, which while advocating the cause of the indigenous peoples, have managed to demand and get the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) even by crossing over the barriers from the states at the different stages of norm entrepreneurship. No doubt concerns of 'norm adherence' do exist but then concerns of adherence to policies will always remain a challenge to be encountered and responded to adequately and effectively. It is hoped that renewed strategy of CDWD and the systematic efforts of GFoD will result in the long-awaited Declaration of the Rights of CDWD in the near future.

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Ambedkar and the Buddha's Saṅgha: A Ground for Buddhist Ethics

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Abstract

The *saṅgha* is one of the three jewels of the Buddhist tradition. While undervalued in many other Anglophone iterations of Buddhist modernism, Ambedkar's approach to Buddhism placed a reconceptualized *saṅgha* at the center. Where traditional accounts often limit the boundaries of *saṅgha* to ordained monks and nuns, Ambedkar sought to include all lay Buddhists within its frame. He suggests that the role of the *saṅgha* is not, as many traditional accounts might suggest, the personal liberation of the monks and nuns who join it, but instead social service directed toward the community at large. Ambedkar's commitment to the development of a religion that champions egalitarianism naturally lead to his inclusion of women as full participants in his image of the *saṅgha*, despite the historically patriarchal limits placed on them in many traditional Buddhist settings. This wide-tent approach to the *saṅgha*, along with its emphasis on service and egalitarian principles, are defining features of Ambedkar's unique approach the Buddhist tradition.

Keywords

Ambedkar, Ambedkarite Buddhism, Buddhist ethics, Buddhist sangha, women in Buddhism, Ambedkar and gender

Introduction

While there exist numerous social scientific treatments of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Buddhist conversion movement, Religious Studies treatments remain relatively few. Social scientists have historically approached Dr. Ambedkar's interest in and conversion to Buddhism as instrumental and have framed it as politically

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expedient,¹ while Euro-American Buddhist Studies scholarship has largely ignored Dr. Ambedkar's unique approach to Buddhism. Where it is treated, it has been accompanied by caveats regarding its novelty, with reference to an orthodox "Buddhism" often defined by traditional received Western Buddhism.² This received Buddhism is characterized by its emphasis on meditation and pursuit of individual spiritual liberation and by its emphasis on textual authority. Dr. Ambedkar's modernist approach to Buddhism, though, emphasizes the ethical and meliorative dimensions of the tradition and largely ties its liberation from suffering to engagement, justice, and egalitarianism practiced together with self-cultivation. Combined with Dr. Ambedkar's position from the margins as a Dalit, this difference in emphasis and position has often rendered his Buddhism less than visible in the Euro-American Buddhist Studies academy. This article aims to explicate some of the core Ambedkarite Buddhist theological content from inside the tent of Religious Studies. Specifically, it explores the theological work that the Buddhist concept of *saṅgha*, or community, does in service of Dr. Ambedkar's approach to Buddhism. What follows is an exploration of his unique and idealized frame for the *saṅgha*, the theoretical roots for his perspective on the *saṅgha*, and finally his writing on the place of women in the *saṅgha*.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar outlined four core problems to be solved before the modernization of the Buddhist tradition, the religion he saw as uniquely suited to modernity, could be complete. The first problem relates to clarifying the reasons for the Buddha's renunciation while the second and third relate to the teachings on suffering and karma, respectively.³ The final problem that Ambedkar explicitly set out to settle in his writing on Buddhism, and which will be explored in this article, was related to the proper understanding of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, or more specifically, the role of the *bhikkhu*.⁴ He asks,

What was the object of the Buddha in creating the Bhikku? Was the object to create the perfect man? Or was his object to create a social servant devoting his life to service of the people and being their friend, guide, and philosopher? This is a very real question. On it depends the future of Buddhism. If the Bhikku is only a perfect man he is of no use to the propagation of Buddhism, because though a perfect man he is a selfish man. If, on the other hand, he is a social servant, he may prove to be the hope of Buddhism.⁵

On display in Ambedkar's framing of this question is his commitment to approaching the Buddhist tradition through the lens of the social. The two loaded choices he presents in answer to the question he poses, those of a selfish and reclusive mendicant or an engaged guide of the people, intentionally reveal his implicit position and frames his presentation in contrast with that of other, here unnamed, presentations of the *saṅgha*; presentations that frame the *saṅgha* as, in his terms, a "perfect" though "selfish" body. Ambedkar sees this question as critical, or "a very real question," on which the future of Buddhism depends, and as such, can be argued to be the central problem

¹See: (Zelliot, 2004, p. 168), (Jaffrelot, 2006, pp. 119–142)

²See: (King, 2009, p. 161), (Queen et al., 2003, pp. 22–24)

³(Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. xxix)

⁴*bhikṣu* (Sanskrit) and *bhikkhu* (Pāli) – monk or religious mendicant

⁵B. R. Ambedkar, Aakash Singh Rathore, and Ajay Verma, *The Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition* (New Delhi ; Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxxi.

related to the creation of his religious movement. Insofar as Ambedkar approaches the *buddhadharma* as a project aimed at shaping a religion that is compatible with democratic values, the center of his Buddhism is naturally, in some ways, the *saṅgha*. For this Buddhism to be this-worldly oriented and other-facing, concerned with the establishment of a moral ground and a religion of principles, he must deal with the reality of monks and nuns who, in their decision to leave the world and remain cloistered in monasteries, have historically often not acted as the “devoted social servant” of the people. In characteristically direct style he states:

The *Bhikkhu Saṅgha* in its present condition can therefore be of no use for the spread of Buddhism. In the first place there are too many *Bhikkhus*. Of these a very large majority are merely *Sadhus* and *Sannyasis* spending their time in meditation or idleness. There is in them neither learning nor service. When the idea of service to suffering humanity comes to one's mind every one thinks of the Ramakrishna Mission. No one thinks of the Buddhist Saṅgha. Who should regard service as its pious duty the *Saṅgha* or the Mission? There can be no doubt about the answer. Yet the *Saṅgha* is a huge army of idlers.⁶

Ambedkar addresses this problem by applying an hermeneutic of suspicion, suggesting that the Buddha, an eminently rational and care-oriented individual in Ambedkar's estimation, would have necessarily established the original *saṅgha* in accord with those qualities. For Ambedkar, a rational Buddha whose activity was animated by a desire to uproot injustice and oppression, grounded as they are in the power imbalance between a priest class and those at the margins, would have necessarily created a *saṅgha* driven by an ethic of care; one actively engaged with the laity and one that would model compassion for those around it. The Buddha that Ambedkar is appealing to here is the Buddha who exhorted the *bhikkhus* to work actively for the welfare of all beings at the end of the first rains retreat.⁷

Saṅgha as a Model Community

In most Euro-American Buddhist approaches to Buddhism, of the three jewels of the Buddhist tradition, the *saṅgha* is often given short shrift in favor of a presentation of the jewels of Buddha and *dharma*. Explorations of the jewel of *Dharma* has allowed for fruitful academic cross-cultural philosophical investigation and psychological self-help applications in popular approaches to Buddhism. The jewel of the *Buddha*, likewise, is also given more weight in comparison. A scientifically compatible Buddha who, for the educated and often elite Western receivers of the tradition, can play the foil to the culturally familiar Christian creator God has played a central role in the construction of Buddhism in the West.⁸ For Ambedkar though, the jewel that takes center stage in his modernist reception of the Buddhist tradition is, in some ways,

⁶B. R. Ambedkar, “The Buddha and the Future of His Religion,” Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Volume 17, Part 2, pp. 107. https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_17_02.pdf

⁷Dharmachari Lokamitra notes, “At the end of his first post Enlightenment rainy season retreat, the Buddha exhorted his first disciples to travel the roads and pathways of for the welfare and happiness of the many people (*bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukkhaya*).” (Lokamitra, 2004)

⁸See (Lopez, 1995) And (Lopez, 2012)

the *saṅgha*. This shift in emphasis from other English-language modernist receptions of Buddhism is perhaps one of the reasons for the relative dearth of literature on Ambedkarite Buddhism in the West. Where Ambedkar sees the *saṅgha* as the heart of the tradition, Western receivers often see little of it in their quest to mine the tradition for its wisdom teachings on liberation for the individual seeking personal spiritual enlightenment. For Ambedkar, the *saṅgha* becomes the vehicle through which the work of social transformation, his ultimate goal, can actually take place.

Ambedkar opens his discussion of the Buddhist *saṅgha* in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* by noting the ways in which the Buddha's idea of *parivrāja* differs from that of the "old Parivrajakas." He notes,

The Buddhist Bhikku is primarily a Parivrajaka. This institution of Parivrajaka is older than that of the Buddhist Bhikku. The old Parivrajakas were persons who had abandoned family life, and were a mere floating body of wanderers. They roamed about with a view to ascertain the truth by coming into contact with various teachers and philosophers, listening to their discourses, entering into discussion on matters of ethics, philosophy, nature, mysticism, and so on... These old type of Parivrajakas had no Sangh, had no rules of discipline, and had no ideal to strive for. It was for the first time that the Blessed Lord organized his followers into a Sangh or fraternity, and gave them rules of discipline, and set before them an ideal to pursue and realise.⁹

Ambedkar is keen to contrast, as he presents it, the individual-focused practice of renunciation exemplified by the wandering *sādhu* tradition with that of his socially-oriented Buddha. Ambedkar contends that the Buddha's practice of renunciation is special because for the first time it centers human relationships and community, or, as Ambedkar frames it in Enlightenment-inspired terminology, "fraternity." In this sense the Buddha's followers are not renouncing society writ large, but society as conceived and ordered by the Brahminical system. To renounce in this context means to consciously form a new social order that centers a relational morality in place of the individual path to personal liberation as practiced by previous renunciates.

Following the *vinaya*, Ambedkar taxonomically divides the Buddhist *saṅgha* into two parts: the *śrāmeṇera* as anyone who takes the ten precepts and the threefold refuge,¹⁰ and the *bhikkhu*, or fully ordained person. Where Ambedkar's presentation takes a unique turn is in his attempts to answer a question regarding the Buddha's intended audience for his ethical teachings. Did the Buddha intend his teachings on prescriptive action only for the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* (female renunciants) or did he intend for those teachings to apply to householders as well? Ambedkar argues that the Buddha had householders as well as monastics in mind. This idea is central to Ambedkar's reconceptualization of the *saṅgha*. He intends to make the *saṅgha* into an exemplary community that can serve as a guide for the wider society, and as such, he envisions it as necessarily engaged. He notes,

⁹(Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 222)

¹⁰"The entrants into the Sangh were divided into two classes: Shrameneras and Bhikkhus. Anyone below twenty could become a Shramenera. By taking the Trisaranas and by taking the ten precepts, a boy becomes a Shramenera." (Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 223) Rathore and Verma note that Ambedkar is referencing *Mahāvagga* I: 56 here.

...the Blessed Lord also knew that merely preaching the Dhamma to the common men would not result in the creation of that ideal society based on righteousness. An ideal must be practical, and must be shown to be practicable. Then and only then do people strive after it and try to realize it. To create this striving, it is necessary to have a picture of a society working on the basis of the ideal, and thereby proving to the common man that the ideal was not impracticable but on the other hand realizable. *The Saṅgh is the model of a society realizing the Dhamma preached by the Blessed Lord. This is the reason why the Blessed Lord made the distinction between the Bhikkhu and the Upasaka.*¹¹ [emphasis added]

For Ambedkar, the proper motivation for joining the *saṅgha*, either as a *śrāmeṇera* or a fully ordained *bhikkhu*, is to provide service to the world, not to retire from the world in search of personal liberation. It is worth noting that Ambedkar's reconceptualization of the *saṅgha* here is similar in some ways to other twentieth century Buddhist modernist reform movements in Asia, including the work of A.T. Ariyaratne and the *Sarvodaya Shramandana* movement in Sri Lanka and Sulak Sivaraksa's and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's influence in Thailand, among others.¹² For Ambedkar, the Buddhist *saṅgha* is the social organization *par excellence*. It required of its members a commitment to equality and a simplicity in living that could serve as a model to all. Ambedkar is keen to dispel what he sees as common misunderstandings that Buddha's teachings were intended only for the *bhikkhu*. He argues that while references to the *bhikkhu* are found all over the canonical material, he argues that a rational, care-oriented Buddha would have certainly had the laity in mind when presenting his teachings. He points to the five precepts, the eightfold path, and the *pāramitās* as evidence in themselves that the Buddha was primarily concerned with the whole of his followers, not simply with those who had received full ordination. He states:

Merely because the sermons were addressed to the gathering of the Bhikkhus, it must not be supposed that what was preached was intended to apply to them only. What was preached applied to both. That the Buddha had the laity in mind when he preached: (i) the Panchasila, (ii) The Ashtanga Marga, and (iii) The Paramitas, is quite clear from the very nature of those things; and no argument, really speaking, is necessary. It is for those who have not left their homes and who are engaged in active life that the Panchasila, Ashtanga Marga, and Paramitas are essential... When the Buddha, therefore, started preaching his Dhamma, it must have been principally for the laity.¹³

Ambedkar notes that the historical practice of privileging the *saṅgha* resulted in an only loosely organized laity and he argues that while there was a formal ordination ceremony for joining the *saṅgha*, there did not exist a similar path of commitment for the laity. A natural consequence of this, he argues, was that members of the Buddhist laity tended toward opportunistic religious seeking. This failure of the Buddhist tradition to create a commitment ceremony, or Dhamma-Diksha as Ambedkar terms

¹¹Ibid., 232.

¹²See (Queen & King, 1996)

¹³(Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 238)

it, was a contributing factor to the decline of Buddhism in India.¹⁴ In his inclusion of the additional twenty-two vows during his Dhamma-Diksha ceremony in Nagpur in 1956, Ambedkar links his presentation of the *dharma* with his vision for the *saṅgha* and attempts to correct this oversight of the earlier Buddhists by committing the laity to the Buddhist teachings.

The very nature of the *bhikkhu* for Ambedkar demands social service. He sees it as the primary motivation for taking *parivrāja* and in this sense, his presentation of the Buddha's decision to leave home reflects this. When the Buddha, faced with a decision to accept the Sakya Sangh's decision to wage war on their neighbors or to be exiled from the community as described in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Siddhārtha chooses the latter. He is motivated by a desire to minimize the material and emotional suffering that will result from the decision to wage war. Likewise, in regard to the motivation for the *bhikkhu* to take *parivrāja* he states,

A Bhikkhu leaves his home. But he does not retire from the world. He leaves home so that he may have the freedom and the opportunity to serve those who are attached to their homes, but whose life is full of sorrow, misery, and unhappiness and who cannot help themselves. Compassion, which is the essence of Dhamma, requires that everyone shall love and serve, and the Bhikkhu is not exempt from it. A Bhikkhu who is indifferent to the woes of mankind, however perfect in self-culture, is not at all a Bhikkhu. He may be something else but he is not a Bhikkhu.¹⁵

While Ambedkar emphasizes the social responsibilities and the role of compassion in the ethical imperative of the monk, it is worth noting that he does not reject the role of personal religious cultivation. In the story of Siddhārtha's path to Buddhahood, for example, Ambedkar presents Siddhārtha as inducing "his companions to join him in practising meditation"¹⁶ and he states, "Siddharth believed that meditation on right subjects led to development of the spirit of universal love."¹⁷ And at the end of the biographical section of *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar states clearly that mental self-cultivation is essential to the Buddhist path. He states, "if mind is comprehended, all things are comprehended. Mind is the leader of all of its faculties... The first thing to attend to is the culture of the mind." He goes on, "Whatsoever there is of good, connected with good, belonging to good – all issues from mind... the cleaning of the mind is, therefore, the essence of religion."¹⁸ There are numerous passages in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* that stress the necessity of self-cultivation, particularly amongst the ordained *saṅgha* for true and lasting social change to take

¹⁴On the lack of Dhamma-Diksha, Ambedkar states, "This was a grave omission. It was one of the causes of the which ultimately led to the downfall of Buddhism in India. For this absence of the initiation ceremony left the laity free to wander from one religion to another and, worse still, follow them at one and the same time." (Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 238)

¹⁵(Ambedkar et al., 2011, pp. 232–233)

¹⁶Ambedkar, Rathore, and Verma, 9.

¹⁷(Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 9)

¹⁸(Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 62)

place and highlight the need for the development of wisdom alongside compassionate action. Ambedkar states:

Is the Bhikkhu to devote himself to self-culture, or is he to serve the people and guide them? He must discharge both functions. Without self-culture he is not fit to guide. Therefore he must be a perfect, best man, a righteous man and an enlightened man. For this he must practice self-culture.¹⁹

Pradeep Gokhale has noted the ways in which Ambedkar is at times wrongly charged with totally ignoring the role of meditation in his teachings. He has suggested that Ambedkar's subordination of the role of meditation has parallels in other Asian Buddhist modernist movements and suggests that Ambedkar's approach to meditation can be compared to Sulak Sivaraksa's and is consonant with other engaged Buddhist approaches in its presentation of meditation as supplemental to social engagement.²⁰

Origins of the Saṅgha

I argue that the theoretical origins of Ambedkar's thought regarding the *saṅgha* can be found in his work, *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables*.²¹ While the *saṅgha* is not explicitly addressed by Ambedkar in *The Untouchables*, his perception of who the early Buddhists *were* is significant for an understanding of his conceptualization of how the *saṅgha* should be rightly conceptualized in the present. In *The Untouchables*, Ambedkar undertakes an historical reconstruction of the conditions that gave rise to untouchability. He concludes, in brief, that contemporary Dalits are heirs to classical-period Indian Buddhists. The preface of the book makes clear that his methods are necessarily limited by a significant dearth of evidence and as such, is more of a hypothesis than a work of historical scholarship. He notes that scholarship in India had traditionally been dominated by Brahmins and consequentially the idea of "untouchability" as an object of study had long been overlooked, leaving little data for use in understanding how the practice of untouchability arose.²²

Ambedkar sees his efforts, therefore, as a correction, writing the wrongs done by Brahmin scholars of the past and present. In a move that anticipates Foucault and Asad, Ambedkar deploys an historical methodology that skillfully weaves together a reconstructive narrative while skirting the boundaries between evidence-based historical scholarship and speculative fabrication.²³ He likens his work to that of an archaeologist, who through the piecing together of artifactual data, can reproduce a coherent picture of a city or a paleontologist who can reconstruct an extinct animal based on disparate bones and teeth.²⁴

In short, his argument is that the root of untouchability, which according to Ambedkar's theory came into existence as a practice only around 400 CE, originates in the "contempt and hatred" of Buddhists by Brahmins. Ambedkar considers and rejects

¹⁹(Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 232)

²⁰(Gokhale, 2020, p. 270)

²¹(Ambedkar, 2018)

²²(Ambedkar, 2018, p. xi)

²³For a more detailed treatment of Ambedkar's method of writing history from below, see S. Anand and Alex George's commentary on *The Untouchables*, (Ambedkar et al., 2019, p. 68)

²⁴(Ambedkar, 2018, p. xiv)

arguments that untouchability is rooted in racial or occupational differences and instead argues that it was in the larger social transition from nomadic social organizations to settled agrarian communities that created the conditions in which some peoples found themselves outside of the newly developing village. He terms these people “the Broken Men,” who resisted urbanization and lived in tension and conflict with the wealthier and more powerful settled communities. They are “broken” because while previously they had tribal identities within which they found community and power, conflict with the increasingly dominant settled people broke them down into smaller and disparate groups that could no longer effectively resist the power of the settled communities.²⁵ In Ambedkar’s reading, during the Buddhist golden age of India, which he dates from the Ashokan period to around 400 CE, many of those Broken Men, along with much of the subcontinent, adopted Buddhism because it offered a source of authority outside of the Brahminical system, within which they existed at the margins. This marked them as particularly loathsome to the Brahmins in that in addition to their stigmatized status as outsiders to the village, they were also proponents of a rival religious tradition.

In answer to the question of why not all Buddhists became “Untouchables,” why only the Broken Men, Ambedkar points to the practice of beef eating amongst the Broken Men, which, in combination with their Buddhist identity, gave rise to their untouchable status.²⁶ Ambedkar’s thesis here, while perhaps curious at first, is that in competition with Buddhists for supremacy, Brahminical religionists adopted many of the ethical and metaphysical stances of their more powerful Buddhist opponents, often in an exaggerated and imitative way, in a bid to regain power. His argument in this work regarding the power of imitation and its role in the formation of caste is an idea that Ambedkar originally developed and advanced decades earlier in his 1917 work *Castes in India* where, in reference to French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, he suggests that the practice of endogamy and the power of imitation were the initial key components in the establishment of castes in India.²⁷ Here again, he appeals to the power of imitation, in particular in regards to dietary practices, to explain the formation of untouchability. He notes the textual evidence for the existence and widespread practice of beef eating and animal sacrifice (particularly that of cows) in pre-*śramanic* Vedic India and suggests that the pressure exerted by the ethically oriented *śramanic* religionists produced an overzealous appropriative response from the Brahmins. Ambedkar theorizes that the Brahmins rejected their increasingly unpopular practice of animal (cow) sacrifice and adopted an even stricter (than the Buddhists), totally vegetarian diet. He suggests that the Buddhist *saṅgha*, driven primarily by the ethical practice of *ahimsa* and by a theological rejection of Vedic ritual injunctions, were practicing an ethically conscious form of mindful eating; consuming meat as it was

²⁵Ambedkar’s argument here strikingly anticipates James Scott’s work in *The Art of Not Being Governed* and *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, where he explores the origins of the state and the persistence of stateless people and their resistance to the nation-state project from the margins. See (Scott, 2017) and (Scott, 2009)

²⁶See Ambedkar, *The Untouchables Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables*, chapter 10.

²⁷Ambedkar notes, “This propensity to imitate has been made the subject of a scientific study by Gabriel Tarde, who lays down three laws of imitation. One of his three laws is that imitation flows from the higher to lower or, to quote his own words, ‘Given the opportunity, a nobility will always and everywhere imitate its leaders, its kings or sovereigns, and the people likewise, given the opportunity, its nobility.’” B. R. Ambedkar, *Castes in India*, Delhi: Siddharth Books, 1945; 2009, 26

offered but were not, at the time, strict vegetarians. When the Buddhist golden period ended, this form of strict Brahminical vegetarianism and reactionary cow worship, adopted initially in response to Buddhist hegemony, then appeared to have always already been a Brahminical practice in contradistinction to the less restrictive Buddhist concerns about ethical eating. Taken together, Brahminical hatred of Buddhists and disgust for beef eating created the conditions for the rise of untouchability. Those Broken Men who continued to identify as Buddhists and who remained eaters of beef became literally untouchable. Ambedkar turns to the *Manusmṛiti* to demonstrate that Brahminical aversion toward the “broken men” was already established before the dominance of Buddhism in India²⁸ and he suggests that as Brahminical power grew and that of Buddhism declined, their aversion developed into the practice of untouchability. He states:

This antipathy can be explained on one hypothesis. It is that the Broken Men were Buddhists. As such they did not revere the Brahmins, did not employ them as their priests and regarded them as impure. The Brahmin on the other hand disliked the Broken Men because they were Buddhists and preached against them contempt and hatred with the result that the Broken Men came to be regarded as Untouchables.²⁹

He appeals to various sources of Brahminical textual material to support his claim that the Brahmins harbored a deep-seated hatred towards Buddhists. He again points to the *Manusmṛiti* and Sanskrit *nāṭya*³⁰ works, such as the *Ṙicchakaṭika*, to demonstrate anti-Buddhist animosity.³¹ An example he cites from the *Manusmṛiti* states, “if a person touches a Buddhist or a flower of Pachupat, Lokayata, Nastika and Mahapataki, he shall purify himself by a bath.”³²

The framing of contemporary Dalits as lineage holders of the anti-Brahminical Buddhist holdouts, the “Broken Men,” has several obvious advantages. First it provides a plausible empowering narrative for contemporary Dalits while simultaneously flipping the script on the dominant, Brahminically-inflected version of South Asian history. As such, it narrates a version of history where Dalits are not inheritors of the *karmic* deeds of their past lives, as Brahminical religionists would maintain, but instead, they are the successors of a people who, for centuries, once ruled over their current dominators. Contemporary Dalit suffering can be contextualized as a low

²⁸Ambedkar references *Manusmṛiti* Chapter 10, verses 51–56. For example:

X.51 – But the dwellings of the Chandalas and the Shvapakas shall be outside the village, they must be made Apapatras and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys.

X.52 – Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments and they must always wander from place to place... See (Ambedkar, 2018, pp. 25–26)

²⁹(Ambedkar, 2018, p. 73)

³⁰*nāṭya* – Sanskrit – a play (theatrical), performing arts

³¹On Ambedkar’s use of the *Ṙicchakaṭika* for support in *The Untouchables*, George and Anand note that Ambedkar may be stretching a bit in his reading of anti-Buddhist sentiment. See (Ambedkar et al., 2019, p. 66)

³²(Ambedkar, 2018, p. 74)

point in an ongoing struggle between the righteous and their corrupt oppressors; not a reflection of some degraded inherent nature. Religiously, it associates the movement with a tradition, or in Sanskritic terms, a *sampradāya*. More specifically, those Dalits who convert (back) to Buddhism are simultaneously both newly becoming Buddhists while also returning from the wilderness, back to a home they had forgotten they belonged to. In this sense Ambedkar's vision of the *saṅgha* is rooted in a pre-Sangh Parivar, bottom-up version of *ghar wapsi*.³³

Women in the *Saṅgha*

While Ambedkar's writing often defaults to the traditional epicene masculine pronouns, his awareness of gender inequity was markedly progressive. Drawing on the tradition of the non-Brahmin equality movement instigated by Savitribai and Jyotiba Phule in nineteenth century Maharashtra, Ambedkar's mobilizing efforts amounted to a broad tent movement that reached out to marginalized people in terms of caste, class, and gender and as such it was the first successful large scale mass mobilization movement of "Untouchables" across India.³⁴ In Ambedkar's early work, *Castes in India*,³⁵ he argues that functionally, the practice of endogamy is the key defining feature of caste and he suggests that consequently the control of women is fundamental to the maintenance of the caste system. Because caste, in his frame, is principally about regulating and limiting marriage and there are only so many available men or women for marriage at any given time, the policing of women's life choices became essential. He argues that practices like *sati* (widow burning), enforced widowhood, or childhood marriage arrangements arose as necessary practices for the maintenance of caste in this sense. He points to the *Manusmṛiti* frequently to highlight the openly prescribed rules that outline who is allowed to marry whom, and he emphasizes the ways in which women are explicitly described as property in the text. For Ambedkar, to truly understand caste in India an appreciation of the way in which the subjugation of women is at the base is necessary. As Pratima Pardeshi has noted in consonance with Ambedkar's analysis regarding the regulation of women's bodies in the maintenance of caste,

These practices are exploitative of women and thus Ambedkar underlines the fact that castes are maintained through the sexual exploitation of women. It is only through the regulation and control of women's sexuality that the closed character of the castes can be maintained; in this sense, he argues that women are the gateways to the caste system.³⁶

³³*ghar wapsi* – (Hindi) "return home," is a term that refers to the Hindu right's attempts to "reconvert" non-Hindu South Asian people "back" into the Hindu fold. It is based on a Hindutva ideology that maintains that all South Asians were originally, at some point in the past, Hindu before they were forcibly or coercively converted by outside forces. Much of the rhetoric of the proponents of *ghar wapsi* focuses on the "reconversion" of Christians and Muslims in particular, who are presented as having fallen victim to the depredations of colonial era Christian missionaries and Mughal period Islamic authorities.

³⁴(Pawar & Moon, 2008, p. 21)

³⁵(Ambedkar, 1945)

³⁶Pratima Pardeshi, "Ambedkar's Critique of Patriarchy," in (Ambedkar, 1945)

And again, in highlighting the ways that Ambedkar's anti-caste position is also necessarily feminist:

The subordination of women will not automatically end with the end of capitalism. Ambedkar argues that to achieve this purpose the caste system and patriarchy will have to be attacked. The subordination of women cannot come to an end in a caste-based society and it is therefore women who must lead the struggle for the annihilation of caste. He sees organic links between the struggle against the caste system and the struggle for the liberation of women. Thus, the idea of women's liberation is intrinsic to his ideology and not a token add-on.³⁷

As the first Law Minister of India, Ambedkar's efforts to advance the Hindu Code Bill in 1950 sought to establish protections and rights for women in the areas of marriage and divorce, guardianship and adoption, and inheritance and property ownership, all of which were severely regulated in pre-independence India. He undertook extensive study of the textual and theological justifications behind the orthodox Hindu resistance to gender equity and highlighted the ways in which Hindu textual appeals were illiberal. In short, as Pardeshi has rightfully noted in Ambedkar's feminism, he sought to make political and public what had been personal and private.³⁸ This was met with such stiff resistance from his political opponents that his version of the bill was ultimately defeated and it marked the end of his political career.³⁹

Given Ambedkar's deep abiding concern for the rights of women and his awareness of the ways in which patriarchy was inextricably linked to the maintenance of a dominant Hindu social order, he was naturally concerned about the undeniable patterns of patriarchal domination in the history of the Buddhist tradition. In a piece published in the *Maha Bodhi Journal* entitled "The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman," in response to what he perceived to be unfair attacks on Buddhist gender inequality, Ambedkar mounts a strong defense of the Buddhist tradition's record on women.⁴⁰ In it, he considers the ways in which the Buddha could potentially be found guilty of oppressing women. First, he turns to a passage in the *Mahāparanibbāna Sutta* that suggests the Buddha viewed women as objects of potential defilement.⁴¹

³⁷Ibid., 144.

³⁸See Pratima Pardeshi, "Ambedkar's Critique of Patriarchy," in Gokhale, *Classical Buddhism, Neo-Buddhism and the Question of Caste*, 144.

³⁹For details of the Hindu Code Bill proceedings, see (Keer, 2018, pp. 417–425)

⁴⁰Ambedkar states, "In the journal of the Maha Bodhi for March 1950 there appeared an article on "The Position of Women in Hinduism and Buddhism" by Lama Govinda. His article was a rejoinder to an article which had appeared in Eve's Weekly of January 21, 1950, and in which the Buddha was charged as being the man whose teachings were mainly responsible for the downfall of women in India. Lama Govinda did his duty as every Buddhist must in coming forward to refute the charge. But the matter cannot be allowed to rest there. This is not the first time such a charge is made against the Buddha. It is often made by interested parties who cannot bear his greatness, and comes from quarters weightier in authority than the writer an Eve's Weekly can claim. It is, therefore, necessary to go to the root of the matter and examine the very foundation of this oft repeated charge. The charge is so grave and so vile that the readers of the Maha Bodhi will, I am sure, welcome further examination of it." https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_17_02.pdf, 109

⁴¹Ambedkar references chapter 5, verse 9 of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: "How are we to conduct ourselves, (asked Ananda) with regard to womankind? As not seeing them, Ananda. But if we should see them, what are we to do? Not talking, Ananda. But if they should speak to us, Lord,

Ambedkar argues, first, that this passage should be regarded as a later interpolation by male monastics for two reasons. First, he appeals to reason and notes that because of the large gap in time between the events of the *sutta* and when they were actually written down there is ample occasion for error. This is all the more likely, he suggests, when considering that it was primarily male monastics writing for a male monastic audience. After appealing to Caroline Rhys Davids for support, who also expresses suspicion about the providence of the passage in question, he applies his hermeneutic of suspicion and concludes that any anti-woman sentiments were most likely merely heuristic, aimed at maintaining male celibacy and not literal statements about the nature of women. He states:

There is therefore nothing very extravagant in the suggestion that this passage is a later interpolation by the Bhikkhus. In the first place the Sutta Pitaka was not reduced to writing till 400 years had passed after the death of the Buddha. Secondly, the Editors who compiled and edited them were Monks and the Monk Editors compiled and wrote for the Monk. The statement attributed to the Buddha is valuable for a Monk to preserve his rule of celibacy and it is not unlikely for the Monk Editor to interpolate such a rule.

Ambedkar doesn't stop here though. He then engages in a more rigorous comparative text-historical *sutta* investigation to determine the passage's authenticity. By comparing other *suttas* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* that contain passages from the *Mahāparanibbāna Sutta* he notes that none replicate this particular passage. He also notes that Chinese versions of the *sutta* lack the passage in question.⁴²

He then turns to some of the charges made against Ananda at the First Council, namely those that suggest it was he who allowed women into the *saṅgha* and as such committed a grave error. Ambedkar again, suggests that this position is inconsistent with the actions and words of the Buddha in numerous other places throughout the *sutta* material. He offers various examples, noting,

Where are the facts? Two examples at once come to mind. One is that of Visakha. She was one of the eighty chief disciples of the Buddha with the title of "Chief of Alms-givers". Did not Visakha at one time go to hear Buddha preach? Did she not enter his monastery? Did the Buddha act towards Visakha in the manner he directed Ananda to act towards women? What did the Bhikkhus present at the meeting do? Did they leave the meeting? The second instance that comes to one's mind is that of Amrapali of Vaisali. She went to see the Buddha and gave him and his monks an invitation for a meal at her house. She was courtesan. She was the most beautiful woman in Vaisali. Did the Buddha and the Bhikkhus avoid her? On the other hand they accepted her invitation-rejecting the invitation of the Licchavis who felt quite insulted on that account- and went to her home and partook of her food.⁴³

what are we to do ? Keep wide awake, Ananda." B.R. Ambedkar, "The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman," https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_17_02.pdf, 109

⁴²B.R. Ambedkar, "The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman," https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_17_02.pdf, 111.

⁴³Ibid., 109.

While acknowledging that the Buddha did indeed advise the monks to be careful around women, Ambedkar suggests that he did so because his primary concern was with guarding their commitment to celibacy, not with any sense of an inherent inferiority of women.⁴⁴ In an argument that perhaps holds less water, he reasons that the *bhikkhuni saṅgha* was made inferior to the *bhikkhu saṅgha* because of practical concerns regarding the need for the more experienced male monastics to teach the newer, less experienced women, not because they were considered less than the men.⁴⁵ He saves perhaps most of his energy, though, for contrasting the conditions of women in the Brahminical tradition as presented in the *Manusmṛiti*. He states:

It is important to understand the reason why the Brahmins debarred woman from taking Sannyas because it helps to understand the attitude of the Brahmins towards woman which was in sharp contrast with that of the Buddha. The reason is stated by Manu. It reads as follows: — IX. 18. Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskars (rites) are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda Mantras they are as untruth is. Although Manu was later than the Buddha, he has enunciated the old view propounded in the older Dhanna Sutras.⁴⁶

Ambedkar then argues that it is in this context, that of Brahminical oppression of women, that the Buddha's decision to admit women to the *saṅgha* should be viewed. He suggests the decision to subordinate women monastics to their male counterparts pales in comparison to the ways in which the Brahminical order subjugates them and that consequently, the Buddha's decisions should be viewed in light of his social context,

By admitting women to the life of Parivrajika, the Buddha, by one stroke... gave them the right to knowledge and the right to realize their spiritual potentialities along with man. It was both a revolution and liberation of women in India... This freedom which the Buddha gave to the women of India is a fact of far greater importance and out-weighs whatever stigma which is said to be involved in the subordination of the Bhikkhunis to the Bhikkhu Sangha.⁴⁷

This concern for the status and place of women in the *saṅgha* can be found in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* as well. Ambedkar dedicates a chapter to the "conversion

⁴⁴He notes, "It is also true that the Buddha was dreadfully keen in maintaining celibacy. He was painfully aware of the fact that, to use his own words, "Women doth stain life of celibacy". But what did he advise? Did he advise the Bhikkhus to shun all contact with women? Not at all. He never put any such interdict. Far from doing any such thing what he did was to tell the Bhikkhus that whenever they met any women, do ye call up the mother-mind, the sister-mind, or the daughtermind as the case may be i.e. regard a woman as you would your own mother, sister or daughter." Ibid., 114.

⁴⁵Ambedkar reasons, "By entrusting the work of training the Bhikkhunis to the Bhikkhus, their relationship became one of teacher and pupil. Now does not the relationship of teacher and pupil involve some authority for teacher over the pupil and some submission or subordination on the part of the pupil to the teacher? What more did the Buddha do?" B. R. Ambedkar, "The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman," https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_17_02.pdf

⁴⁶Ibid., 119.

⁴⁷Ibid., 119.

of women,” and narrates a version of the admission of the women in the *saṅgha* in direct terms. In his version, Ananda approaches the Buddha on behalf of the Buddha’s stepmother, Mahāprajāpatī, to advocate for their admission. The Buddha initially rejects his request, but Ananda repeatedly presses him,

Then the Venerable Ananda asked the Blessed One, ‘What can be the ground, Lord, for your refusal to allow women to take Parivraja?’ ‘The Lord knows that the Brahmins hold that the Shudras and women cannot reach moksha (Salvation) because they are unclean and inferior. They do therefore not allow Shudras and women to take Parivraja. Does the Blessed One hold the same view as the Brahmins? Has not the Blessed One allowed the Shudras to take Parivraja and join the Sangh in the same way he has done to the Brahmins?...’⁴⁸

The Buddha is quick and forceful in his reply, “Ananda! Do not misunderstand me. I hold that women are as much capable as men in the matter of reaching Nibbana. Ananda! Do not misunderstand me, I am not an upholder of the doctrine of sex inequality.”⁴⁹ The Buddha then, following Ambedkar’s logic in the “The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman,” goes on to explain that his previous refusals to admit women into the *saṅgha* were based on practical concerns and not because he felt women inferior.⁵⁰

Ambedkar’s presentation of Siddhartha’s wife, both in the time before his decision to take *parivrājā* where she is depicted as a supportive companion, and after his return, when she chastises him for his absence as well as the way in which his stepmother initially resists his decision to leave home but eventually gives her blessing all reflect Ambedkar’s commitment to humanizing the women of the life story. Siddhartha’s wife, Yaśodharā, responds to the news of her husband’s decision to leave not with tears and grief, but with strength,

With full control over her emotions, she replied, ‘What else could I have done if I were in your position? I certainly would not have been a party to a war on the Koliyas. Your decision is the right decision. You have my consent and my support. I too would have taken Parivraja with you. If I do not, it is only because I have Rahula to look after. I wish it had not come to this. But we must be bold and brave and face the situation...’ (Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 23)

Ambedkar depicts her not only accepting his decision, but granting her consent and blessing; a markedly progressive reversal of traditional gender roles not only for the fifth-century BCE but for contemporary South Asia as well.

Conclusion

Ambedkar accomplishes much of the work of establishing his new Buddhism through the construction of his re-conceptualization of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. The story of Buddhism in the West has often been told through the lens of the contemplative, filtered by the discourses of modernity and the biases toward individualism and meditation that come with them. The *saṅgha*, in this reading, is a support for the individual to achieve personal liberation through self-cultivation and is often ancillary

⁴⁸(Ambedkar et al., 2011, p. 108)

⁴⁹Ibid., 108.

⁵⁰Ibid., 108.

to that project. The reception of Buddhism could perhaps be as compellingly told through the lens of *saṅgha* as its monastic orientation has given incredibly detailed thought about how to function in intentional social settings via the *vinaya*, an exhaustive treatment of pragmatic ethics as applied in monastic communities. This is how Ambedkar is approaching the tradition, with the *saṅgha* at the center. His decision to favorably position the Dalit community in India within a long historical arc, that of the civilization struggle between a “religion of rules” called Brahminism and a morally-oriented, egalitarian Buddhism, supplies much-needed ground for his nascent pragmatic religious movement. He appeals to the early *saṅgha* to demonstrate that, as Buddhists, they were once dominant in India and commanded the respect and fear of the Brahminical religionists. In his reading, they articulated a universalizable ethic of care, that, thanks to the Buddha’s rationality and commitment to compassion, is as applicable today as it was 2500 years ago.

Ambedkar’s historical reconstruction project, which seeks to read a universalizable ethic back into ancient Indian history was not limited to his movement alone. Many of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian renaissance figures, such as Vivekananda and M. K. Gandhi, were engaged in similar reconstructive projects. Where their projects sought to ground their ethical frame in Vedāntin non-dual spirituality, Ambedkar appeals to a pragmatist-inspired universalizable morality grounded in the *śramaṇa* tradition’s critique of Brahminist religion. Ambedkar’s commitment to a meliorative new Buddhism places the *saṅgha* on a pedestal in an effort to model a community composed of individuals who are working toward egalitarianism and a just social order. As such, Ambedkar’s chief conversation partner is Marx, with whom he agrees about the end, the dissolution of private property, but not about the means.⁵¹ For Ambedkar, the means is the *Buddhadharma*, with its therapeutic project for the individual and its social program in the form of the *saṅgha* that can affect real change at the base. Ambedkar’s sense that religion, in the form of an enlightened religion of principles, is necessary for moral orientation marks the divergence of his thought from that of Marx.

Ambedkar displayed a surprising awareness and concern for the upliftment of women in India at the time. As Pawar and Moon note,⁵² Ambedkar’s advocacy for women’s rights predates his time in America, suggesting that his family background, his exposure to Phule’s work, and his personal disposition all played a role in his awareness in this regard. He portrays the Buddha in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* as also being explicitly concerned for the welfare of women and goes out of his way, as Fiske and Emmrich note,⁵³ to depict a Buddha who shows no patriarchal prejudice and a *saṅgha* with humanized women represented.

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⁵²(Pawar & Moon, 2008, pp. 157–158)

⁵³Adele Fiske and Christoph Emmrich, “The Use of Scriptures in B. R. Ambedkar’s *The Buddha and His Dhamma*,” in *(Reconstructing the World : B. R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India., n.d., p. 117, fn 107)*

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Reading Dalit Autobiographies in English: A Top Ten List

Christopher Queen¹

Abstract

Dalit autobiography has joined protest poetry as a leading genre of Dalit Literature since the nineteen seventies. Finding their inspiration in the social and political activism of B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), leader of the India's anti-caste movement and a founding father of the Republic, low caste men and women have documented their struggles and victories in the face of ongoing violence and deprivation. Surveying ten life narratives translated into English from Marathi, Hindi, and Kannada, the essay treats works by Ambedkar, Daya Pawar, Sharankumar Limbale, Baby Kamble, Laxman Gaikwad, Siddhalingaiah, Omprakash Valmiki, Urmila Pawar, Vasant Moon and Namdeo Nimgade. Tracing the origins of Dalit autobiography in the writings of Siddharth College and Milind College students in the 1950s, protest writers in the 1960s, and the Dalit Panthers and their followers in the 1970s, the survey identifies recurring themes of social exclusion, poverty, patriarchy, survival and assertion in the realms of politics, employment, education, and religion. These intimate testimonials share a radical vision of social transformation across caste, class, gender, linguistic and geographic boundaries and provide a needed corrective to mainstream portraits of modern Indian social history.

Keywords

Dalit Literature, Dalit autobiography, B. R. Ambedkar, anti-caste movement, Dalit Panthers, Dalit Sahitya

Introduction

In 1987 I slept on the sofa in Vasant and Meenakshi Moon's apartment in Government Colony, Bandra East, Mumbai. The Moons, both writers and activists in the anti-caste movement launched by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the 1920s, were

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kind to host a first-time visitor to India who was eager to learn about the movement and its leaders. In the apartment I saw a brass statue of the Buddha and a charcoal image of Ambedkar taped to the wall. Visiting that morning was a peaceful woman with a shaved head and the ochre robes of a nun. Mr. Moon told me later that she was a friend of Meenakshi's who had entered the Buddhist order after years of being beaten by her husband. I learned that movement members and people with problems dropped by the Moons' house all the time.

The next morning Moon took me on his daily commute on the city bus—an hour of deafening traffic and choking fumes—to Mantralaya, the state office building where he was editing the writings and speeches of Ambedkar. And the following weekend he took me to Nagpur, his hometown, to see the parade ground where Ambedkar led 380,000 of Maharashtra's poorest citizens into Buddhism on October 14, 1956. We visited the private library of books, periodicals, and papers of the Dalit freedom movement that Moon had built above the house he left to his daughter and her husband, a medical doctor, and their first child. The library had four divisions: "A" for Ambedkar, "B" for Buddhism, "C" for Caste, and "D" for Dalit.

Years later the memories of this and subsequent visits to Mumbai, Nagpur, and other centers of Dalit protest, religious conversion, and literary activity were still vivid in my mind as I read Vasant Moon's new memoir, *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* (2001)¹ and the book of reflections and interviews of female Dalit activists that Meenakshi Moon collected with Urmila Pawar, *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement* (2008).² Reading these volumes reminded me of the friendships I had made over the years in my deepening engagement with the movement. Moon's autobiography, originally titled *Vasti* (Neighborhood) in Marathi, was translated into English by Gail Omvedt, a renowned American scholar of caste studies who moved to India in the 1970s. It was introduced by Eleanor Zelliot, Carleton College historian, widely regarded as the leading authority on Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in Maharashtra. It was Professor Zelliot who first introduced me to the Moons and other leaders as she helped generations of scholars, students, and readers to understand the nature and importance of the movement. We traveled together in India and visited each other's classrooms in the States. In 2013, Gail Omvedt came to Harvard to lecture in my class and to meet university students and Ambedkarite activists living in the area.³

My first visit to India was cut short by an illness that arrived as I attended a massive wedding with Mr. Moon in Nagpur. The vice mayor of the city and his bride, both Dalit Buddhists, were taking vows before hundreds of dignitaries of all caste backgrounds. I returned to my hotel and then to Boston where I recovered. But I had missed interviews arranged by Moon with ex-untouchable teachers, social workers, and government officials who would still be village servants and scavengers were it not for the educational and employment opportunities guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, the Constitution drafted by India's first law minister, B. R. Ambedkar.

¹Vasant Moon. (2001). *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit autobiography*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

²Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon. (2008). *We also made history: Women in the Ambedkarite movement*. New Delhi: Zubaan.

³Dr. Gail Omvedt passed away on August 24, 2021. This article is dedicated to her memory.

When I returned home, I found an urgent message from Professor Zelliott. I must attend the wedding of Rekha Nimgade, niece of Meenakshi Moon, which was to happen the next week in Boston! But sadly, I was too weak to attend. Only later did I meet the entire Nimgade family in the U.S. and India and accept the honor of writing the foreword to the lively narrative of Dr. Namdeo Nimgade, father of the bride and husband of Hira, Meenakshi's older sister: *In the Tiger's Shadow: The Autobiography of an Ambedkarite* (2010).⁴

Given this background you will understand some of the seeds of my passion for reading Dalit autobiographies, life narratives, memoirs, *testimonia*—all of these terms have been used by scholars—and for trying to hear their message to readers of vastly different backgrounds. For *Dalit Sahitya* or Dalit literature purports to be a different kind of writing, not to be judged by standards of stylistic originality, beauty, or entertainment, but by its authenticity and truthfulness to the physical, social, psychological and spiritual realities of its narrators and their communities, and to the commitment to a radical vision of social transformation these authors share with one another across caste, class, gender, linguistic and geographic boundaries. I have pored over, marked the pages, and returned to re-read a dozen of these works. I have experienced anger and sadness imagining the grim settings and humiliations of these writers—and also joy when their indomitable spirit transcended the circumstances. Happily for international readers, as Dalit writers continue to record and publish their life narratives, the supply of English originals and translations do not appear to be slackening.

In this survey, we begin with a sketch of the origins of Dalit autobiography in the writing of Ambedkar and the stream of titles that followed the appearance of the Dalit Panthers and Dalit Sahitya in the 1970s. Then we turn to a sampling of this literature, calling your attention to ten titles I have found to be significant in revealing the experience of Dalits in India from before Independence up to the present—and earning, by their earnestness and literary quality, my allegiance to their cause. In these citations, I will try to illustrate themes that recur in these texts—exclusion, poverty, patriarchy, education, assertion, politics, and religion. My hope is that this article and its bibliography will serve as an invitation to those who wish to explore this territory more fully.

While there have been Indian autobiographies and novels depicting the life of low caste communities by upper caste writers dating back a hundred years—most notably *Untouchable* (English, 1935) by Mulk Raj Anand—no one from untouchable communities before the 1970s had the training, courage, and resources to describe their suffering and aspirations in longform writings and to have them published. In the nineteenth century, the Dalit reformer Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (1828–1890) wrote to an upper caste literary association asking how these writers “with their heads in the clouds” were capable of expressing the feelings and experiences of Dalits. In the 1920s the young B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) started fortnightly journals to host Dalit writing on issues of politics, education, and culture: *Mooknayak*, “Leader of the Voiceless” (1920) and *Bahishkrit Bharat*, “Untouchable India” (1927). Around 1935,

⁴Namdeo Nimgade. (2010). *In the tiger's shadow: The autobiography of an Ambedkarite*. New Delhi: Navayana.

when Ambedkar announced he would leave Hinduism for a religion offering human dignity and freedom, he penned a memoir of his early experiences as a Dalit which remained buried in his papers until after his death.

Inspired by Ambedkar's published writings and activism, students of Siddharth College, founded in Bombay by Ambedkar in 1945, started the literary society Siddharth Sahitya Sangh to explore how their lives and problems were different from those of the upper castes and whether these issues can be expressed in literature. In 1958 after Ambedkar's death, these writers and friends renamed their group the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh and organized the first public conference of Dalit writers in Bombay. They passed a resolution that "the literature written by Dalits and that written by others about the Dalits in Marathi be accepted as a separate entity known as 'Dalit literature,' and realizing its cultural importance the universities and literary organizations should give it its proper place."

The 1960s saw the appearance of the Little Magazine movement—a vehicle for poets like Baburao Bagul and other "angry young men" to publish protest poetry and stories directed at the injustices of the caste system. In 1968, Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane (1937–2018), a graduate of Milind College (founded by Ambedkar) and Marathwada University (renamed Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University after a long fight which Pantawane helped to lead) founded the pioneering literary journal *Asmitadarsh*, which published Dalit writings for five decades under his leadership.⁵

Yet none of these precursors attracted the flurry of interest and controversy that marked the founding of the Dalit Panthers in 1972. Taking their name and energy from the revolutionary Black Panther Party of Oakland, California, young Dalit writers Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, and J. V. Pawar, friends of the protest poet Bagul, recognized that the scattered utterances of Dalit discontent needed a more militant focus. These writer-activists saw themselves as public intellectuals whose mission must be political as well as literary. In their manifesto they attempted to establish their identity and concerns:

Who is a Dalit? Members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women, and all those who are being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion.

Who are our Friends? Revolutionary parties set to break down the caste system and class rule. Left parties that are left in a true sense. All other sections of society that are suffering due to the economic and political oppression.

Who are our Enemies? Power, wealth, price. Landlords, capitalists, moneylenders and their lackeys. Those parties who indulge in religious or casteist politics, and the government which depends on them.

Burning Questions before the Dalits Today. Food, clothing, shelter. Employment, land, (removal of) untouchability. Social and physical injustice.

⁵For a history of the rise of Dalit literature, see Gail Omvedt, 'Literature of Revolt,' and Arjun Dangle, 'Introduction: Dalit Literature Past, Present, and Future,' in Arjun Dangle, ed., *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, New Edition. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009.

The struggle for the emancipation of the Dalits needs a complete revolution. Partial change is impossible.⁶

In the years following the explosive debut of the Dalit Panthers, autobiography soon rivaled protest poetry and social commentary as the most effective vehicle of expression, empowerment, and outreach for the oppressed people of India.

Dalit literature would be impossible without the example and influence of Babasaheb (“respected father”) Ambedkar—father of the modern Dalit human rights movement and a founding father of the Indian republic, its first law minister and chair of the Constitution drafting committee. Born in a military camp as the youngest of fourteen children in the Mahar caste of lowly village servants, Ambedkar made history as the first untouchable to graduate from high school, college, and two of the most distinguished institutions of higher learning outside India, Columbia University in New York City and the University of London. Armed with doctoral degrees in economics and political science and credentialed as a barrister-at-law, Ambedkar returned to India in the 1920s and promptly launched a civil rights movement for untouchables. He fought the Hindu caste system on the streets and in classrooms, courtrooms, government chambers, and the pages of periodicals and scholarly books. Seldom did he take the time to write about himself, but after his death, among his papers was found a handwritten memoir that he likely penned in mid-career in 1935–36, that he titled *Waiting for Visa*.⁷

Ambedkar prefaces his account of six traumatic experiences in his childhood and early career with words we may take today as a fitting introduction to the genre of Dalit autobiography:

Foreigners of course know of the existence of untouchability. But not being next door to it, so to say, they are unable to realize how oppressive it is in its actuality. It is difficult for them to understand how it is possible for a few untouchables to live on the edge of a village consisting of a large number of Hindus; go through the village daily to free it from the most disagreeable of its filth and to carry the errands of all and sundry; collect food at the doors of the Hindus; buy spices and oil at the shops of the Hindu Bania from a distance; regard the village in every way as their home—and yet never touch or be touched by any one belonging to the village.

The problem is how best to give an idea of the way the untouchables are treated by the caste Hindus. A general description or a record of cases of the treatment accorded to them are the two methods by which this purpose could be achieved. I have felt that the latter would be more effective than the former. In choosing these illustrations I have drawn partly upon my experience and partly upon the experience of others. I begin with events that have happened to me in my own life.⁸

⁶‘Dalit Panthers Manifesto (Bombay, 1973)’ in Barbara Joshi, ed. *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*. London: Zed Books, 1986, pp. 145–146.

⁷B.R. Ambedkar. (1993). ‘Waiting for visa.’ *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: writings and speeches*. (Ed. V. Moon). Vol. 12, Part I (pp. 661–691). Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra. And Retrieved from http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_waiting.html

⁸Ibid.

Ambedkar writes of his nightmare as an untouchable child who is denied water and threatened with violence and robbery when traveling overnight to visit his father, and how as a young Ph.D. back from the West he was forcibly ejected from lodging and shunned by his own subordinates when his caste was discovered. He follows these accounts with four other incidents of physical abuse and humiliation resulting from the practice of caste exclusion wherever he went. The young Ambedkar did not suffer the grinding poverty that other memoirists describe, due to his father's employment and education, but the repeated discovery that his superior educational and professional achievements were inconsequential to upper caste Hindus produced in Ambedkar a lifelong sense of indignation and a determination to overcome these obstacles for himself and all Dalits. While most of his writings—now filling the fourteen volumes that Vasant Moon edited for the Maharashtra government—can be described as a “general description” of the caste system by a trained social scientist and historian, we are fortunate that Ambedkar left us this trenchant “record of cases” from his own experience.

How have Ambedkar's followers emulated this small beginning with works of sweeping scope and emotional impact?

In 1978, the first full-length Dalit autobiography appeared in Mumbai. The Marathi poet Daya Pawar published *Baluta*, using for his title the word for the meager payment of grains for the unrelenting slavery of village untouchables as a metaphor for his early life. His graphic presentation of the pervasiveness of deprivation and cruelty in rural village and urban slum life shocked readers at the time.

The Mahars lived in squalid homes, each the size of a henhouse, each hen house having two or three sub-tenants. Wooden boxes acted as partitions. But they were more than that: we stuffed our lives into these boxes. At night temporary walls would come up, made of rags hanging from ropes.

The Mahar men worked as [porters] or laborers. Some worked in the mills and factories. None of the women observed purdah. How could they? They worked harder than the men. They scavenged scraps of paper, rags, broken glass, and iron from the streets, sorted them out and then sold them each morning. And however much their drunkard husbands beat them, they continued to serve them hand and foot, and indulged their addictions.

Born in 1935, Pawar survived the humiliations of a village childhood before moving to the city, where he took a job in a science lab at twenty-one. By the time of his death in 1996, he had won awards for poetry and the autobiography, visited the U.S. on a Ford Foundation Fellowship, served on state educational boards and seen his work translated into many languages. But he refused to present himself as a paradigm for others. When his father died of alcoholism, Pawar destroyed his father's private still. But “deconstructing the entire concept of Mahar machismo which depends on the abuse of women,” writes his translator Jerry Pinto, Pawar presents his repeated failures in courtship and marriage and his inability to protect two of his aunts, who are beaten and sold into prostitution, as products of his intermittent lack of self-respect and courage as a man.⁹

⁹Two years after the appearance of *Baluta*, Pawar's publisher Granthali released *Upara*, by Laxman Mane. Described as “perhaps the most popular of the Dalit autobiographies” by literary critic G. N. Davy, the Marathi life narrative was published in English in 1997 as *Upara – the*

The themes of exclusion, poverty, and misogyny are echoed in different ways in *The Outcaste – Akkarmashi* by Sharankumar Limbale (Marathi, 1984; English, 2003). Limbale, who would later author the influential critical study, *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (Marathi, 1996; English, 2004) begins his story, as so many of these autobiographers do, with an unsparing look at his parents:

My mother is an untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes of India. Mother lives in a hut, father in a mansion. Father is a landlord; mother is landless. I am an *akkarmashi* (half-caste). I am condemned, branded illegitimate.¹⁰

Limbale describes himself as the “son of a whore”, “bastard”, and “rape-child”. And as so many of these autobiographers do, Limbale extends the central fact of his life to serve as a metaphor for his extended family, his neighborhood, his caste, and the masses of those who are likewise soiled and damaged by their heritage.

This is the story of my life, an expression of my mother’s agony and an autobiography of a community. Being fatherless is as much my fate as it is to be in a general ward [of a hospital] of suffering My autobiography holds in it the agony of such a life. My experiences are my words. What will remain there if you take experience away from a life? A living corpse.¹¹

Yet, as the critic G. N. Davy writes in the introduction to the English translation, “whereas the narrator should be boiling with anger, he is meditating on the very fundamental issues related to social relationships and ethics. It is this detachment, and the ability to turn away from the personal, that makes *Akkarmashi* a disturbing life narrative.”¹² Yet it also creates a sense of awe, perhaps akin to that of reading of the Stoic Epictetus’s imperturbability as his leg is broken by his sadistic master: “I have said it would break. Now it is broken.”

The first significant autobiography by a Dalit woman appeared two years after Limbale’s work. Babytai Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* (Marathi *Jina Amucha*, 1986; English, 2008, also translated *The Way We Live*) displays her power as a writer and as a survivor whose book “came out of the furnace of the suffering we underwent. Each word in it is a shoot of the truth that has sprouted in my heart.” We learn of her humble beginnings and struggles on each page of her work, but we must wait for two interviews she gave to fellow women activists after her book was out to grasp

outsider by Sahitya Akademi. Like *Baluta*, this autobiography was awarded for its depiction of the poverty and activism of marginalized people, particularly the nomadic tribes of Maharashtra, the author did not foreground the suffering of Dalit women as Pawar did. In 2013, Mane’s reputation was stained by his arrest for alleged sexual exploitation of women employees of the school he ran.

¹⁰Sharankumar Limbale. (2015). *The Outcaste – Akkarmashi*. Bhoomkar, S, Translator. Devy, G. N. Introduction. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. ix.

¹¹Ibid, p. xxiv. One can see why the honorific *Babasaheb*, ‘revered father,’ applied to one of their own, became so important to Dalits whose own fathers were perennially marginalized and discredited.

¹²Ibid, p. xxv.

her achievement. Maya Pandit, her translator, begins the interview offered in the second edition of *Prisons* with the surprising observation that Kamble has made very few references to her personal life in the book! “Can you tell us a little more about yourself?” The author replies, “I really find it very difficult to think of myself outside of my community,” and then turns immediately to the sacrifices other women made to send their children to school “because their Baba [Ambedkar] told them to do it.”

In spite of Kamble’s great humility and reticence, we learn of her success in business as she began early in life selling loose grapes recovered from the market and then expanded her inventory over the years to sell vegetables and other items within the Maharwada. Eventually she and her husband were running a successful neighborhood grocery store when Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar visited to interview her for their book, *We Also Made History*. She explains how, tending the store over twenty years, she would read the newspapers donated to wrap groceries and write her observations and reflections in secret notebooks she kept behind the counter. She eventually admitted to their existence when a visiting scholar, Maxine Berntson, questioned her closely. Encouraged to publish them, Kamble submitted them serially to the women’s magazine *Stree* and eventually assembled and published them as the autobiography we have now. Meanwhile, Baby Kamble gave birth to ten children, seven of whom survived to adulthood, and became active in Dalit politics. She joined the local Mahila Mandal, a woman’s service organization, and founded a government-accredited residential school for Dalit orphans—all while dodging her husband’s blows and keeping up the store.

The intricate but full-throated intersectionality of Babytai Kamble’s account of women’s simultaneous struggles with poverty (class), marginalization (caste), and misogyny (patriarchy) is surely a breakthrough for feminist writing in India. Yet Kamble would be the last to admit that she was a pioneer. Indeed, the most touching paradox of her achievement is the credit and devotion she bestows on Babasaheb Ambedkar for her inspiration and that of her generation of Mahar women. She concludes the preface of the first edition of her book with what may be considered a *bhajan* or devotional song to her savior:

I most humbly offer my eternal gratitude at the feet of that great man and bow my head at his feet. All I can manage to say is: O Bhim, you have been our great Mother, and we will never be able to repay the enormous debt we owe you. We are eternally grateful to you. I am just a small flower that has bloomed in some obscure outskirts of a village. I offer this humble gift, my book, a tiny flower, at your feet.

And toward the end of the book, breaking into verse:

What do I have, Bhima? What can I offer to you . . .
 Except for flowers? You gave voice to our suffering souls.
 Each flower that I offer is nothing but a burning grief
 With tears flowing from my eyes, I wash your feet.
 The fire raging in my heart has ignited this flame,
 Through the flickering of these flames, All I see is Buddha and Bhim.

Paradoxically, given Ambedkar's repudiation of Hindu devotionalism, one may hear its echo here. In Bhagavad Gita 9.26 Lord Krishna accepts "with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even water" from one who has little else. But this sentiment is not exclusive to Indian religion. One also hears Jesus' praise for the fallen woman who washed his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with costly oil: "Go in peace" (Luke 7.44–50). But lest her bhajan be seen as a capitulation to Vaishnavite spirituality or wider religious patriarchy, Kamble's heartfelt tribute is intoned to Ambedkar, *the great Mother* to all who struggle.

A new world of exclusion and pain was revealed to readers with the release of Laxman Gaikwad's *Uchalya* in 1987 (Marathi; English *The Branded*, 1998). Categorized as an autobiographical novel, the book is pathbreaking in its depiction of the lives of the involuntary criminals forced into lives of thieving by laws dating back to the British Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Members of the Uchalya ("pilferer") tribes, found throughout India, were "notified" under the law as "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences" and thus unworthy of any "settled contribution to society." The Criminal Tribes Act was repealed in 1949 only to be replaced by new laws requiring police to investigate a suspect's "criminal tendencies." The denotified tribes were reclassified by the Indian government as "habitual offenders" in 1959. Gaikwad's extraordinary career as a social worker, anti-caste activist and award-winning writer begins as his grade school education is constantly interrupted by close encounters with the violent civilian and uniformed guardians of upper caste society. In contrast to the harrowing school stories in other Dalit autobiographies, Gaikwad's description of the training of Uchalya children is disturbing:

Now Bhagwan-Anna and Samhu Bhau started accompanying Manik-Dada on thieving trips to take charge to stolen bundles. Anna and Bhau were, otherwise, quite capable of doing odd jobs. But so branded and distrusted was our community socially that . . . nobody employed Anna and Bhau. They had so far never indulged in thieving. Now, however, they started accompanying Dada on thieving trips. They were made tough with the usual session of beating.

In our community there are gangs who undertake the training of apprentices to develop their thieving skills. In every society, there are teachers who teach students in schools and parents who beat their offspring to make them learn. In our community, however, everything is topsy-turvy.

We have four kinds of thieving skills: *Khistand matne* – picking pockets. *Chappal, muthal aanane* – stealing footwear and bundles. *Paddu ghalane* – deception. And *Uthewaari* – deception by sleight of hand while engaging persons in conversation, e.g. substituting spurious gold for the genuine.¹³

The first successful Dalit autobiographies grew out of the Dalit Panther/Dalit Sahitya movement in Maharashtra, home of Ambedkar's Mahar caste and of the Marathi language. Thus, the texts we have surveyed so far were originally published in Marathi. Yet significant Dalit literary movements have emerged in other language

¹³Laxman Gaikwad. (1998). *The Branded: Uchalya*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, p. 10.

communities that produced remarkable autobiographies, some of which are now translated into English. First of this group is the Karnataka-based poet, playwright, public intellectual and elected official Siddalingaiah's immensely entertaining *A Word with You, World* (Kannada *Ooru Keri*, 1996; *Ooru Keri 2*, 2009; English 2013). It may seem insensitive to describe a work of protest literature as *entertaining*. But readers of Siddalingaiah will readily admit that even in the midst of harrowing events and cruel encounters, this author is capable of lightness and irony. "Siddalingaiah takes a Chaplinesque view of hunger and discrimination, and his humor and irreverence appeal to a wide readership," writes his translator S. R. Ramakrishna.

It is bittersweet to speak of Siddalingaiah now, as Covid-19 took his life just weeks ago (June 11, 2021), but it is perhaps all the more fitting to praise him for his gift to "the world." The combining of the three installments of the original narrative "Village Corner" (*Ooru Keri and Ooru Keri 2 and 3*) was the idea of S. Anand, the indefatigable founder-editor of Navayana Publishing, who suggested a line from Siddalingaiah's poem *Maatada Beku* for the English title:

I must have a word with you
 O cactuses and thorny plants;
 I must put a question to the moon who borrows his light;
 I should free the beautiful rose from thorns.

Wells are waterless and ministers speechless
 Constables move about like thorny bushes,
 O world, I must have a word with you.¹⁴

Again, in this kinetic sequence of intimate vignettes we encounter blinding hunger and disease, confinement and squalor in village and city slums, violent death by suicide and murder, stealing, pranks that go awry, and relationships that degrade and threaten. But here, perhaps more than in the books we have seen so far, we also meet kindly teachers, heartwarming camaraderie, enduring friendships, improbable benefactors, role models among elected officials, and the author's unsinkable curiosity and goodwill toward others. In his career, Siddalingaiah became the face of Kannada literature: leader of the Dalit Bandaya movement and founder of the Dalit Sangharsh Samithi. A Member of the Legislative Assembly in 1988 and 2006, he became chairman of the Kannada Development Authority. Through it all, his eulogizers of all recall him as "a warm and compassionate human being."

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life* was written and published in Hindi in 1997 and translated and published in English in 2003. Its translator, Arun Prabha Mukherjee, identifies Valmiki as one of the first Hindi writers to identify himself with the Dalit literature that first spoke in Marathi. Yet his may also be seen as a carrier of the spirit of this movement out to other language communities that share the fight against caste: speakers and writers in Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati, Punjabi and English. *Joothan* means the "table scraps—leftovers" at best, "garbage" and "compost" at worst—that untouchables line up at the back doors of

¹⁴Siddalingaiah. (2013). *A Word with you, world*. New Delhi: Navayana Publishing, p. 9.

upper caste homes to collect and take home to their hungry families. After weddings and holidays, the leftovers may retain some flavor of the savory or sweet cuisine of Hindu high tables; the children clamor for this holiday joothan. But more often the leftovers are the inedible parts of the meal that remained on the plates in the end, and hungry children must eat this as well. Like the terms *baluta*, *akkarmashi*, and *Uchalya*, which have been left untranslated in the titles of these works, joothan ushers us into the world of the Dalit experience, sometimes because the terms are untranslatable in English, but also perhaps because the author and translator hope that an unfamiliar word will help the visitors to acknowledge their distance from the common and troubling experiences of their hosts. In each case the foreign word serves as a symbol and a metaphor for that distance.

For Omprakash Valmiki the signaling of a name had specific importance. While Valmiki was the Brahmin poet of the *Ramayana*, the Valmikis of northern India are the caste of scavengers and sewer workers, lowest of the low, also known as Bhangis and Chuhras. Omprakash is constantly reminded by teachers and employers that, whatever his educational attainments, he will always be a Chuhra. When he enters the workforce and faces pressure from friends to change his name Valmiki, he wears it as a badge of honor. Engaged to be married, his wife informs him that she will keep her maiden name. The wedding invitations omit his surname, as does the publisher of his first poem and article in a liberal magazine. When an officer's wife asks his wife, "Brahmin?" as the two families socialize on the train, Valmiki interrupts, saying "Bhangi" to make no mistake. Summing up the challenge of assertion versus passing, Valmiki makes an ironic comparison:

Identity and recognition—these two words say a lot by themselves. Ambedkar was born in a Dalit family. But Ambedkar is a Brahmin caste name; it was a pseudonym given by a Brahmin teacher of his. When joined with Bhimrao, however, it became his identity, completely changing its meaning in the process. Today Bhimrao has no meaning without Ambedkar.¹⁵

When Ambedkarites greet one another with *Jai Bhim*, "victory to Ambedkar," they do not think "Brahmin" or "Bhima," the strongest of the Pandava warriors in the *Mahabharata*. They think only of Ambedkar, champion of the Dalits.

In *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*, Urmila Pawar offers another powerful testament to the emergence of women in the Ambedkar movement. During his first mass protest, the fight for access to drinking water at Mahad in 1927, Ambedkar invited Dalit women to become movement leaders in their own right. And Pawar and Meenakshi Moon tell the story of this evolution in the first half of their book *We Also Made History*. In her autobiography, titled *Aaydan!* in the Marathi original, Pawar, like her predecessors, uses a term drawn from the daily lives of village Dalits to symbolize both hardship and assertion. In the Konkan region of Maharashtra, *aayden* refers to the bamboo baskets that Dalit women wove for income. "My mother used to weave *aaydans*. I find that her act of weaving and my act of writing are organically linked.

¹⁵Omprakash Valmiki. (2003). *Joothan: An Untouchable's life*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 152.

The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering, and agony that links us.”¹⁶ Pawar also weaves together the lives of her extended family and the widening circle of friends and professional colleagues who join her in founding numerous women’s organizations for social work, political activism, and literary expression. Born in 1945, Urmila was introduced to Buddhism at the age of twelve as Mahar families followed Ambedkar into the new faith. Like Baby Kamble, Pawar grapples with the dominance and misogyny of men in the community and in the family, making clear to all that a woman has equal dignity and equal rights. She chooses and marries for love over her family’s objections, but later endures her husband’s drinking and jealousy of her success. Her ten published works and literary prizes have placed her in the forefront of Marathi authors.

In the weave of Urmila Pawar’s life we meet again our friends Vasant and Meenakshi Moon, Meenakshi’s sister Hira and her husband Namdeo Nimgade, Daya Pawar, Eleanor Zelliot, Baby Kamble, Maxine Berntson, and Dr. Balchandra Mungekar, the first Dalit vice chancellor of the University of Mumbai, a future member of the central planning committee in the Delhi government, and another generous host of mine in Mumbai. As a regular visitor to the landmarks of the new Dalit literary canon, I began to feel my way around, airfare to India no longer required.

The childhood narratives in Moon’s *Growing up Untouchable in India* and Nimgade’s *In the Tiger’s Shadow* take us back to the neighborhoods of Nagpur, where throngs of Dalits converged in 1956 for the great Buddhist conversion. Both authors tell of their life-changing encounters with Babasaheb Ambedkar, the “tiger” of the untouchables. For Moon, who trembled and stood mutely as a schoolboy, badgered by a Brahmin teacher (“Oh, speak, little man, speak!”) and ridiculed by his upper-caste classmates, Moon stood confidently before the visiting Ambedkar a few years later. Thumbing through the handwritten magazine Moon and his friends presented to the guest, Ambedkar questioned the young activists about their work. But Moon had his own questions about Buddhist philosophy and marriage rituals. The great man explained rebirth (“without being extinguished, the spark from the candle arises in another place”) and acknowledged the need for new marriage customs among the Buddhists. Suddenly he held up the magazine and asked, “Who has written this article?” “That is my article,” Moon declared, admitting in his memoir that “before such a great man as Babasaheb I had no fear.” Years later, the magazine was returned with Ambedkar’s comments: “Excellent. Well worthy of emulation.”¹⁷

Dr. Namdeo Nimgade’s *In the Tiger’s Shadow* (temporarily out of print) offers a fitting way to end our survey. Nimgade grew up in the same Mahar *vastis* as Moon, and like his future brother-in-law, was a fearless adventurer on the streets and a diligent student in class. Both were brilliant and vigorous converts to the new Dalit assertion, and both had dramatic encounters with Ambedkar. Nimgade, who would become the second Dalit after Ambedkar to earn a Ph.D. in the United States (University of

¹⁶Urmila Pawar. (2008). *The weave of my life: A Dalit woman’s memoirs*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. ix.

¹⁷Moon, pp. 147–148.

Wisconsin, Madison, 1962, in agronomy), was also the first Dalit to interact with Dr. Martin Luther King on the plight of the untouchables. In a speech on campus King reported his trip to India and Nehru's claim that untouchability had been eliminated. Nimgade, who had just passed his oral examinations, stood up during the question period and respectfully informed King and a very large audience of the continuing role of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his followers to achieve the result Nehru had claimed—and how far there still was to go. That night many African Americans called to thank the Indian student for his courage, and at graduation time, the *Wisconsin State Journal* ran the headline “‘Untouchable’ Gains Ph.D. – Indian’s Struggle Worth Effort.”

Nimgade was a one of Ambedkar's favorite young followers during his final years, and Nimgade devotes several chapters to their private conversations in New Delhi. In one exchange, Ambedkar strongly urged Namdeo to delay marriage until his education was complete. But Nimgade had visited that day expressly to announce his engagement and to seek Babasaheb's blessing. “Baba, will you please write a message of good will for my wedding.” Ambedkar demurred, saying that both of his hands were aching so much from constant writing that had been unable to use them for three days. Yet he had an idea. “Go to my study and there you will find a Marathi version of Emperor Ashoka's edicts concerning Buddhism. Please consider these my good wishes, which you can read out to everyone. Please give one to the bride's family and keep one for yourself. In the near future we will all embrace Buddhism. But we must prepare for that now.”

Namdeo was overjoyed. And the final words of Ambedkar's Marathi excerpt of Ashoka's edicts “carved on a rock some 2,200 years ago” were read at the wedding—and may serve as a proper benediction for our survey:

Emperor Ashoka desires that all the people in his empire live in happiness and interact with each other in peace and amity. Do not kill. All great religions should teach tolerance and purity of mind. Everyone should contribute to the common good according to their means. Even the poor, who do not have the means to donate, can also practice tolerance, good character, gratefulness, and faith. However, all good deeds are in vain if performed without faith and purity of mind. There is no greater gift than faith, abide by the Dhamma.¹⁸

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Ethnic Identity, Discrimination and the Shaping of Remittance Culture in Ghana

Joseph Kweku Assan¹

Abstract

This article examines birth-based structures and endogenous practices in the migration patterns of two ethnic groups in southern Ghana. The sampled ethnic groups for this study are the Akuapems from the Akan ethnic group located in the Akuapem North district and the Ada/Dangme's from the Ga-Adangme ethnic group located in the Shai-Osudoku District and the Ningo-Prampram District (formally known as Dangme West District). The article discusses how ethnic identity influences remittance patterns and the utilization of sampled migrants' home districts. Data from a questionnaire survey, interviews, and focus group meetings informed the study. The study results indicate a strong relationship between patterns, practices, and utilization of remittances and the respective norms and social values embedded within the migrants' ethnic identity. The research also shows that migrants from ethnic groups with strong internal cohesion and less assimilation remit more than those from more ethnically heterogeneous groups. The study found that migrants from matrilineal ethnicity remit more than those of the patrilineal group. Ethnic values also shape the type of investments that internal migrants and their families may pursue. The research contributes to the debate on agency and endogenous development within birth-based structured societies. It also advances the discourse on birth-based identities, marginalization, and informal poverty reductions mechanisms and strategies.

Keywords

Ghana, birth-based identity, ethnicity, social mobility, internal migration, youth, remittances

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Introduction

The intersection of birth-based structures, social vulnerability and inclusion, and livelihood options/opportunities of minority groups have gained importance in the development policy and social justice literature (Crossman, 2020; Contzen; and Müller-Böke, 2014). There is a belief that the sending and subsequent utilization of remittances could be shaped by the birth-based identity [like caste or ethnicity] and socio-cultural values of senders and recipients' families and communities (López-Anuarbe et al., 2016). López-Anuarbe et al. (2016) further argue that birth-based identity, informed by cultural norms, embodies the collectivism and familism that characterizes remitting behavior, as they do in shaping one's agency, social identity, and family dynamics. They guide social structures and traditions of care in certain ethnic identity groups. Migration and associated remittances have always been a vital livelihood strategy, a source of income for the marginalized poor and deprived ethnic minority households, especially within birth-based structural societies in Africa with no formal welfare systems (Assan and Kharisma, 2019). Reddy (2005) also highlights the intersectionality of ethnicity, caste, and race in social solidarity struggles/support systems.

Aware of this hypothesis, this article posits that migrant household members within the same geographical area but of different ethnicity may engage in different remittance strategies and maneuvers that could be considered endogenous to the development of such societies as a result of their birth-based identities and structures. The article, therefore, seeks to examine how ethnicity as a birth-based identity of migrants influences the nature and the use of remittances in their natal communities and their subsequent development. We argue that within the internal migration and remittances framework, remittance patterns and utilization could be shaped by migrants' ethnic identity: *clan norms, traditions, and cultural values and agency*. Sander (2003, p. 3) defines a migrants' remittance as: "monies sent from workers who left their home village or town to work elsewhere in their home country or abroad to an individual or household". Remittance flows to sub-Saharan Africa declined by 9 percent, to \$44 billion in 2020, and is projected to decrease further by another 5.8 percent, to \$41 billion, in 2021, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Usman, 2021; Brookings, 2021).

This article is organized as follows: section one presents an introduction and states the objectives of the study, while section two provides a conceptual review of ethnicity and remittances. Section three briefly introduces the study context and fieldwork strategy employed during the data collection process. Sections four and five share empirical results from both quantitative and qualitative data generated by the study and a discussion of the findings. Concluding remarks and recommendations are found in section six.

Conceptualising Ethnicity and Remittances

Reddy (2005) argues that "Caste" is frequently intertwined with that of "Race/Ethnicity", from Max Mueller's articulation of the Aryan theory of race/ethnicity and pan-Africanist expressions of racial/ethnic solidarity with the lower castes of India, caste has frequently been redefined by being drawn into broader discourses about race

and ethnicity. Informed by this complex history, Reddy asks how “race/ethnicity” and “caste” have come to serve as key metaphors of socio-political, and more recently, economic struggle, illuminating one another and emerging as powerful rhetorical strategies of social critique, in more global contexts.

The words race and ethnicity do not share a dictionary definition, and yet their meanings sometimes overlap, helping individuals define not just their skin tone and other physical characteristics but their ancestry and heritage as well (Dictionary.com, 2021). Ethnicity is defined by Mompoti and Prinsen (2000, p. 626) as a social phenomenon concerned with negative and or positive interaction between cultural-linguistic groups and generally refers to a person’s affiliation with a particular ethnic group, or to their sharing qualities, characteristics, or customs of that ethnic group. According to the Phoenix Library Resources on Ethnic Identity and Diversity (2008, p. 1), “ethnicity generally refers to a person’s affiliation with a particular group, or to their sharing qualities, characteristics or customs of that group”. It argues that ethnic identity, however, is rather personal and individualistic with many facets based on several socio-cultural factors, including geography, nationality, ancestry, family, culture, and subculture. Nevertheless, the concept of *ethnic group* defies easy categorization (St-Hilaire, 2010). In his examination of ethnicity, Riggs (1997a) explained ethnicity as involving a group of people sharing the same cultural norms, based on language, customs, and ancestry. Yinger (1994) describes an ethnic group as a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves or others, to have a common culture and who participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are important elements (Mazzucato, 2008).

Deeply embedded in ethnicity and identity in the context of sub-Saharan Africa is the *kin group*. This is defined by La Ferrara (2003, p. 1730) as a “network of unilineal families that share common cultural traditions, ethnic identity and often ancestors”. She argued that one is born with a given set of blood relations and cannot choose to join or leave it. La Ferrara described kin groups as an intermediate level of social organization between clans and ethnic groups. She argued that while a clan is a unilineal group of relatives living in one locality, a kin group is formed by various clans and comprises “socially recognized relationships based on supposed or actual genealogical ties” (Winick, 1956, p. 302). An ethnic group, on the other hand, “consists of several kin groups bound together by language and by common rules of social organization” (La Ferrara, 2003, p. 1732). She further explains that kinsmen are dynastically linked in such a way that status and stigma attached to parents can be transferred to their children. The motivation to remit could be described as a form of social reproduction which is embedded in the ethnic identity of the individual migrant as kin groups are expected to offer the needed support to protect the image and well-being of their members. In this article, ethnicity will refer to ethnic groups, their associated kin groups, and the values which shape their identity.

Linking ethnic identity, kin groups, and remittances

It can be argued that ethnicity and kin groups are rather contested concepts and are often misunderstood. However, it is evident that these concepts define social structure, shape actions, and influence human agency expression within many societies (Assan, 2008). Ethnic identity plays a vital role in determining social behavior and the generation of social capital, especially amongst migrants and their natal communities. Ethnic identity is also known to influence, define and govern the choices and decisions

made in the broader context of remittances and migration (Assan and Khrisma, 2019). Ethnic groups offer solidarity mechanisms in societies with high idiosyncratic risks and create an opportunity for mutual insurance (Levitt, 1998). While several debates have been presented for the success of such mutual insurance schemes within ethnic and kin groups, reciprocity and enforcement are two main reasons which seem to stand out. Kin groups often obey the principle of collective responsibility where members of the same clan are held jointly responsible for the actions of each other and, more importantly, personal needs. For most marginalized societies, especially in developing countries, informal socio-cultural institutions established in tradition and identity are essential for providing insurance, pensions, and facilitating economic exchange and social transformation within households and communities (Lassen and Lilleør, 2006).

Nevertheless, unlike most developed societies where formal institutions of support are well structured and functional, formal institutions are weak in Africa and individuals rather negotiate their economic relationships through social institutions (Miguel and Gugerty, 2005). Rural agrarian/fishery families are believed to invest in the education of their members with the belief that they could eventually migrate to urban centers and subsequently send in remittances (Bates, 2000). Using evidence from Zambia, Bates revealed that the benefits and income of rural dwellers derived from migrants in urban areas vary with family structure and ethnicity. Conversely, while families and ethnic/kin groups are proud and willing to devote scarce resources to the upbringing and training of younger members, the younger generation also takes pride in their ability to provide for their parents/older generation (Assan, 2008). Nevertheless, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, several ethnic minority migrant enterprises have been devastated. There are between 85 million to 95 million Micro, Small, and Medium Scale Enterprises in Africa who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 mitigation measures such as social distancing, stay home orders, etc., and 75 percent saw their revenue decline by over 30 percent as of May 2020 (Brookings, 2021).

Ethnicity as a social and economic tool for migrants and their communities

Ethnic identity is considered to offer valuable internal support for socially disadvantaged groups and could be used as a coping mechanism. It is described by St-Hilaire (2001) as able to generate solidarity for socially disadvantaged groups and thereby empower them to overcome social and economic hardships. Similarly, Marquette (2007) argues that identity generally, and ethnicity specifically, serves to facilitate beneficial economic interactions that would otherwise not have taken place. He also argues that it is precisely the ability of clans or ethnic groups to levy and uphold social sanctions that sometimes make ethnicity a creative force in sub-Saharan Africa (Black et al., 2005). Lassen and Lilleør (2006) revealed a strong positive relationship between the strength of an ethnic group and identity within a kin group and human capital investment decisions among its members. They also provided empirical evidence to show that such ethnic networks function better when rooted in more homogenous communities. Ethnic diversity can impinge on credit constraints, a recurring problem for most households in developing countries. Ethnicity generates and shapes the type and quality of social capital and bonding within a tribal group which may also influence risk sharing (Agarwal and Horowitz, 2002). Ethnic diversity at the village level influences the probability of gaining urban entry to the urban market as well as the enforcement of repayment of the

implicit loan provided to migrants (Winkels, 2002). Migrants' identity and ethnicity could, to some extent, determine individuals' inclination and direction of support towards members with similar identity (Goldscheider, 1987).

Internal differentiation between ethnic groups and propensity to remit

It is thought that although several kin groups in Africa may uphold values of reciprocity and remittance, some ethnic groups are more supportive of their members than others. The difference in internal cohesion within ethnic groups has been identified as a possible contributory factor to this variation (Miguel and Gugerty, 2005). The aforementioned authors provided evidence to show that the level of heterogeneity within the migrants' native community and the kin group could serve as an important determinant of a migrants' propensity to remit family members and participate in collective action. Lassen and Lileor (2006) also showed a significant positive relationship between the proportion of households receiving remittances from children within ethnic groups with low internal fragmentation compared to ethnic groups with high internal fragmentation. In most homogenous groups, such as those with fewer dialects or operating similar norms, the average proportion of households receiving remittances from their children is higher than most heterogeneous ethnic groups and villages.

Trust in family members, trust in a fellow clan, unity of village/town, the spirit of participation in the community, group functioning, group decision-making structure, and income inequality can shape the degree to which a migrant will remit the members of extended family (Tsegai, 2007; Lassen and Lileor, 2006). This suggests that ethnic groups with intense bonding and a greater degree of trust are likely to experience more remittance behavior and could receive more remittances from migrant members (Lamphere, 2007; Tsegai, 2007). The strength of ethnic identity and values at the village level is viewed as a proxy for the density of urban networks, which are important, both for gaining urban entry and for maintaining migrants' ties with their rural home, by providing information about the family as well as monitoring that wages are remitted (Tsegai, 2007). Internal differentiation can also influence the ability of the village to levy social sanctions and enforce tribal rules, norms, and social responsibility. Nevertheless, assimilation, which St-Hilaire defines as "a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more ethnic groups meet" can weaken migrants' commitment to social values and familial norms regarding remittances (St-Hilaire, 2010, p. 1000). He argues that migrants tend to take on the behavior and practices of mainstream culture at their respective destinations and conceded that migrants might preserve their ethnic values, norms, and tight group solidarity for the benefit of the group members and relatives back home or abandon such values, including sending of remittances for the culture of the dominant social group, possibly to the detriment of ethnic groups members (Lamphere, 2007; Portes and Manning, 1991; Zhou, 1997).

It is presently perceived that remittance receivers are often better-off and could diversify their income portfolio more quickly than their peers who do not have access to this source of finance. In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, remittances from rural-urban migrants are overtaking incomes from agriculture in sheer size and importance. Remittances from internal migration are considered to enhance household well-being and facilitate socio-economic transformation through higher incomes, improved

health, nutrition, better housing, and investment in production (Assan et al., 2018). As persistent socio-economic and structural problems continue to depress the levels of wages and availability of work, one of the key issues of concern for academics and policymakers in developing countries is how remittances are used and the local impact within different ethnic groups (van der Geest, 2003; Deshingkar and Anderson, 2004). Therefore, it is imperative to ascertain how birth-based structures, such as migrants' ethnicity, shape and inform the remittance and utilization pattern.

Study Context and Fieldwork Strategy

Ethnicity in Ghana

It is estimated that there are approximately 100 different ethnolinguistic groups to which Ghanaians belong. Ethnic groups in Ghana are generally categorized along tribal lines, with each composed of sub-ethnic and kin groups. Each ethnic group has its dialect, cultural identity, practices, and beliefs, which shape how members express their institutional and human agency (Giddens and Pierson, 1997; Henze 2005). The predominant ethnic groups are the Akans (49.1 percent), followed by the Mole Dagbani (16.5 percent), Eve (12.7 percent), and Ga-Adangme (8 percent) (GSS, 2000). Although geographically located next to each other, the sampled districts belong to two different ethnic groups, have different social, economic, and political traditions and norms, and have large rural farming communities (Agyepong, 1997; Middleton, 1979; Benneh, 1971, 1979). Communities in these districts are considered income poor (live on less than 1 dollar a day and are experiencing increasing out-migration). As a result, the major economic and socio-cultural activities undertaken by households in the study districts are perceived to be undergoing extensive transformation through the use of remittances from out-migrants.

The Akuapems (Akan) Ethnic Group

The origin of the Akan people of Ghana, although the subject of some controversy, has been traced to as far as the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia. It is thought that they migrated from the ancient Negro Kingdom of the medieval Ghana Empire before settling in modern Ghana (Meyerowitz, 1952; Ghana District Repository, 2008). Meyerowitz argues that the present Akan aristocracy were the descendants of the Dia and Za (originally from Abyssinia), the Libyan Berbers, and Gera (of the Kushite stock) who emigrated to the South when the Arabs conquered North Africa. The major tribal groups within the Akan ethnic group include the Fantes, Akuapems, Kwahus, Asante, Akyims, Denkyiras, and the Akwamus. Within these groupings, there are subdivisions, as in kin, clans, and families.

Social organization

Ghana District Repository explains that the most important of the social set of the Akans are in the identical exogamous matrilineal clans and patrilineal groupings. Every Akan group is divided into seven or eight patrilineal warrior groups. At birth, every Akan child belongs to the mother's clan (matrilineal), although in predominantly male institutions such as warrior groups, every male belongs to the fathers' warrior group. The Akan family consists of all those who trace their lineage from one maternal relative. Inheritance is, therefore, through the mothers' lineage with both

maternal and patrilineal relatives belonging to the external family and responsible for ensuring social and economic harmony in the family. The combination of matrilineal and patrilineal systems of inheritance as well as their aristocratic heritage gives the Akans a strong sense of social cohesion with tribal groups and responsibility towards both parents but support is more inclined towards the mother. "Wherever they may live, they regard their towns/villages as the hometown and return whenever they can, ultimately at their death to be buried with as elaborate a funeral as can be afforded" (Middleton, 1979, p. 248).

The Dangmes (Ga-Adangme) Ethnic Group

According to the Ghana District Repository, the residents of Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram Districts (formally Dangme West) traditionally belong to the ethnic Ga-Adangme group in Ghana. They are believed to have migrated from the eastern part of West Africa, which often refers to areas around the present Yoruba territory in present-day the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Ga-Adangbe people inhabit the Accra Plains (Dickson and Benneh, 1988). Although European academic records suggest that the Gá-Adangme has occupied their present homeland for about five hundred years or some seventeen generations, oral tradition indicates that they have occupied the land much longer. The Adangbe group is found to the east, the Ga groups, to the west of the Accra plains and coastlands (British Library of Congress, 1994). The modern Adangbe include the people of Ada/Dangme, Shai, La, Ningo, Kpone, Osudoku, Krobo, and Gbugble, who speak different dialects and are believed to have been culturally influenced by their neighboring Guan and Ewe groups in south-eastern Ghana and have therefore experienced significant cultural assimilation which is evident by internal heterogeneity compared to the Akuapems.

Social organization

The nucleus of the Ga-Adangbe social set-up is the family. The family plays a vital role in both social and economic engagements; for example, members are obliged to contribute towards the burial of dead members. The Ga-Adangmes operate a patrilineal system of inheritance and inheritance is through the fathers' family line. Fathers, therefore, play an important role in the nucleus and extended family. Puberty rites feature prominently in the culture of this ethnic group and these are obligatory for girls. They are taken through the *Dipo* puberty rites during which they are expected to dance half-naked in public. Puberty rites initiate adolescent girls into adulthood. As this is obligatory, girls who do not undergo such initiation before getting pregnant could be banished from the community. To avoid such puberty rites, individuals and families may migrate to urban locations. Also, males are expected to pay dowry to their brides. This is also considered as an important reason for migration among young males.

Field Work Strategy

In each of the study districts, fifty heads of households (twenty-three males and twenty-seven females in Akuapem North; and thirty-three males and seventeen females in Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram Districts) whose members have out-migrated in the last five years were interviewed from eight communities using an exploratory and evaluative multi-stage research strategy and the respective district economic baseline

studies and district profiles (de Haan and Zoomers, 2005; Kitchen and Tate, 2000). The study subsequently interviewed a further 170 young migrants from the sampled households in Akuapem North and Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram Districts working at various commercial centers in Accra (the administrative capital of Ghana) and Tema (the industrial capital of Ghana) using survey and snowing-balling methods. Thus, the study interviewed one hundred household heads from sixteen communities from the selected districts. The out-migrated members of the sampled households were followed to the destinations and interviewed while some of the interviews took place in the respective communities, as these individuals visited families. Focus group discussion meetings on each of the selected communities with household heads and visiting out-migrants complemented the interviews. Figure 1 shows the locations of Accra, Tema, Akuapem North District, and the Dangme West District (recently redistricted as Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram Districts) and the locations of communities that were sampled for the study. The research did not report on historical movement patterns due to the unavailability of data and adopted a socio-economic transformation approach rather than a demographic approach. The empirical findings generated from the survey, interviews, and focus group discussions with members of sampled households are discussed in section four of the article. The fieldwork was carried out over three months.

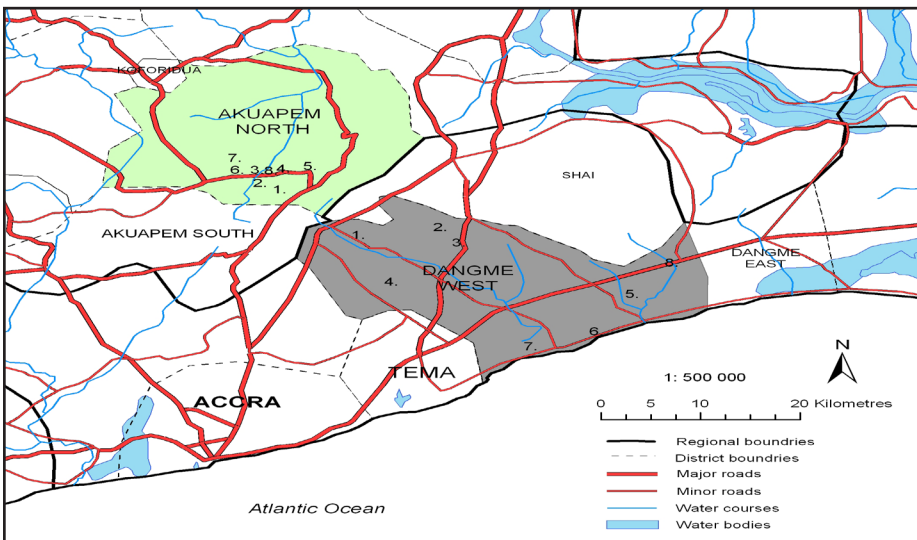


Figure 1: Map of Study Districts and Sampled Communities

Source: Author, 2021. Edited by the Author from www.esri.com

Characteristics of out-migrants

The household survey shows that ninety-three households out of the total one hundred samples indicated that one or more of its members have out-migrated. The seven households without out-migrants were all located in Akuapem North District.

The migration of household members was observed in both districts (see Table 1) of the study. A 30-year-old female migrant working in Accra but from Akuapem North attempted to identify the key reasons for the rise in out-migration in the study areas by saying:

...as a consequence of policy reforms in the agricultural sector and the harsh land-tenure systems currently in force, the need to obtain employment in the non-farm sector has driven most households members to migrate, since the prospects of working in the food-production sector and raising sufficient funds to service households needs through income from farming activities continue to appear increasingly bleak.

Table 1: Age and gender of juvenile and adult out-migrated members

Age in years	Gender of juvenile & adult migrant members (%)						Grand Total	
	Akuapem North			Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram				
	Male	Female	Total %	Male	Female	Total %	N	%
<15 years	2.1	4.3	6.4	0	17.1	17.1	19	11.1
15 - 24	14.9	19.1	34.0	27.6	39.5	67.1	83	48.8
25 - 34	43.6	12.8	56.4	10.5	2.6	13.2	63	37.0
34+	3.2	0	3.2	2.6	0	2.6	5	2.9
Total (%)	63.8	36.2	100.0	40.8	59.2	100.0		
Total (N)	60	34	94	31	45	76	170	100.0

Source: Author, 2021.

The results show that out-migration within the sampled household is not gender-restricted (see Table 1). A comparison of the two districts shows that the percentage of adult-juvenile male out-migrants (63.8 percent) is higher than females (36.2 percent) in Akuapem North. It was explained that traditionally, young males from the district are given preferential formal education than females and subsequently tend to out-migrate to seek employment or further studies. On the other hand, out-migration amongst young females is more frequent (59.2 percent) than males (40.8 percent) in Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram Districts (see Table 2). According to the interviews in Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram Districts, cultural values in the Dangme traditional area encourage young females to engage in trading activities at a very early age which subsequently exposes them to migration. Again, migration also allows young females to escape or postpone mandatory *puberty rites* of passage ceremonies which can be costly and stressful.

Ethnicity and socio-cultural differentiation

The focus group meetings held in sampled communities in the two districts revealed contrasting ethnic and cultural practices that tend to influence migrants’ patterns of remittances and their utilization. Middleton (1979) argued that Ghana’s traditional system of inheritance influences migrants’ social behavior and practices.

Table 2: Ethnicity and Socio-cultural Values and Practices

Ethics Values	Akuapems	Dangmes
Language	These are Akans and speak the Twi dialect	These are Ga-Adangmes and speak the Ga, Krobo, and Ada dialects
System of inheritance	The Akuapems operate a matrilineal social system where the children would normally belong to the mothers family and are more inclined to see to the welfare of the mother	Children belong to the fathers family and also the grandchildren are sometimes referred to as the responsibility of the grandfather
Morality	Considered to have high moral and religious values relating to marriage and sexuality	Considered to have lesser moral values relating to marriage and often have more than one spouse
Social support networks	The matrilineal system fosters stronger social networks around the mother figure who is considered vulnerable and requires closer support and thereby draws children together as a family	There is a weaker support network as a father is often considered a strong figure and capable of managing the affairs of the family. High incidence of polygamy also means children may have different mothers and may not be inclined towards contributing to the household budget and rather cater for themselves
Social organization, housing, and habitation	Husbands may normally live separately from the wife in their respective family houses. More affluent families couples may live together	Husbands may live together in the same compound house with the different spouses and their children
Social status	Individuals with good educational backgrounds are highly regarded in society	Social status is often linked to economic wealth, type of housing, and or appearance
Rite of passage rituals	Conduct naming ceremonies for newborn babies but may not insist on right of passage ceremonies to adulthood	Conduct naming ceremonies for newborn babies, insist and practice elaborate and expensive right of passage ceremonies for teenage members, particularly for ushering females family members into adulthood (womanhood)

Source: Author, 2021.

A household head from Akuapem North explained that “unlike the patrilineal ethnic groups, mothers tend to be social figures that draw children together and foster stronger socio-economic ties within our ethnic group”. This makes migrant children from matrilineal families more interested in and compelled by their ethnic values to support their mothers. However, in the case of Ga-Adangmes, a male household head argued that “in our traditional areas children are not obliged to support the father and are sometimes not particularly sympathetic to their cause especially in the context of polygamous households and may choose not to remit him”.

There is a marked distinction in social organization between the two groups. According to a 50-year-old household head, “the permissive moral culture amongst the Dangmes means that most children grow up with step-siblings or step-parents, which tend to reduce the social cohesion and the sense of responsibility towards their

father or other members of the household”. The study also found that whereas Dangme couples traditionally reside in the same household, in the case of Akuapems, the man and woman may live separately in their respective family homes even after marriage. The woman’s family and adult children eventually assume the responsibility of caring for their mother. Again, the Akuapems are traditionally expected to pay regular weekend or monthly visits to their hometown. This is consistent with the findings of Middleton (1979), as he reported on the social values of the Akuapems. This could, therefore, influence the pattern of remittances as those who are not able to make such regular visits have to send their remittances through friends and acquaintances.

It also emerged from the focus group meetings and household interviews that although physical assets and the number of children are used as indicators of wealth in both districts, the Akuapems rank individuals and households with good educational attainment highly within the society. On the contrary, the Dangmes generally identify status by contributing to social gatherings, appearance, and the number of children. The elaborate rite of passage ceremonies for children and teenagers with their attendant cost was cited as the reason why younger members migrate. A female household head from Ga-Adangme ethnic group retorted “those who are not able to meet these traditional demands and social contributions would often migrate and stay away from the family”. This view is corroborated by Agyepong et al. (1997). The study was informed that these cultural norms serve as the drive or motivation for current patterns of migration and the use of remittances.

Migrants Destination and Employment

A comparison of the two districts identified a significant variation in the migration and employment activities undertaken by the two groups at their respective destinations. The household interviews revealed that the availability of jobs and laborers networks, low-cost transportation, links with relatives and friends, and the ability to speak the local dialect influenced migrants’ choice of destination (for internal migration). The study observed that although some of the individual migrants traveled to other rural destinations (6.4 percent from Akuapem North and 1.3 percent from Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram Districts), the majority of the sampled migrants traveled to urban destinations in Accra and Tema. Both locations are within 60 kilometers of the two districts. While those from Akuapem North preferred to move to Accra, migrants from Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram Districts mainly traveled to Tema. These movement patterns were attributed to the traditional ethnic networks that have been built up over several years. The migrants confirmed that they rely on ethnic associations and kinsmen residents in Tema and Accra to gain employment since employment tends to be very competitive.

Half (50.6 percent) of the sampled adult and juvenile out-migrants identified by the survey are engaged in non-farm laborers and artisanship. The majority of them originate from Akuapem North (54.3 percent). Hawking, trading and lorry driving are indicated as the preferred common employment in both districts (see Table 3). Most rural-urban migrants travel to urban destinations where there are large food factories, markets, and construction sites and find work as food traders, shop assistants, food hawkers, head-loaders,¹ and labourers. Tema Port and its warehouse operations also offer waged employment and short-term contracts for labourers and porters, especially for the Ga-Adangme migrants. International migration is mainly reported in the Shai-

¹These are bearers who carry their loads on their heads instead of on their backs, or on a cart.

Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram districts (26.3 percent), where youths and children travel to neighbouring countries of Ghana to join their relatives and friends who work as fishermen and fish traders, which are occupations associated with this ethnic group (see Table 3). Agyepong et al. (1997) findings on the migration of Dangme fishing households support these observations.

Table 3: Type of migration and associated employment of adult and juvenile

Type of employment	Akuapem North					Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram					Grand Total	
	Type of migration household members (adults and juveniles) %											
	Rural - Rural	Rural-Urban	International	Total (%)	Total (N)	Rural - Rural	Rural - Urban	International	Total (%)	Total (N)	N %	
Farm-wage labor	5.3	1.1	0.0	6.4	6	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.3	1	7	4.1
Artisans Non-farm manual labor	1.1	54.3	2.1	57.4	54	1.3	36.8	3.9	42.1	32	86	50.6
Hawking Trading Lorry driving	0.0	26.6	0.0	26.6	25	0.0	27.6	21.1	48.7	37	62	36.6
Clerical work Technician	0.0	9.6	0.0	9.6	9	0.0	7.9	0.0	7.9	6	15	8.8
Total	6.4	91.5	2.1	100.0		1.3	72.4	26.3	100.0			
Total (N)	6	86	2		94	1	55	20		76	170	100
P = 0.000					P = 0.013							

Source: Author, 2021.

Remittance Flows into Peasant Households and Communities

All the households with migrants indicated that they receive remittances. A comparison of the cash remittances received by the two ethnic groups shows that remittances to households in Akuapem North district are a lot more (¢9000.10)² than the amount received in Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram districts (¢5000.15). Besides, the average amount of money sent to the households in Akuapem North (¢210.16) is more than in Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram districts (¢150.15) (see Table 4). However, the larger standard deviation (¢580.51) for Akuapem North compared to Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram districts (430.49) implies that the distribution is more dispersed in the Akuapem North district and could introduce disparity in income. Hence the possibility of internal differentiation is more likely in Akuapem North (see Table 4).

²\$1 (US Dollar) = ¢6.11 (Ghana Cedi).

Table 4: Amount of remittances received per annum

Period	Akuapem North		Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram		Total frequency	Total %
	frequency	%	frequency	%		
2 - 4 yrs	22	51.2	24	70.6	46	59.7
> 4 years	21	48.8	10	29.4	31	40.3
Total	43	100.0	34	100.0	77	100.0
P = 0.023						

Source: Author, 2021.

The high remittance rate in Akuapem North was explained by the strong tribal bonds associated with the matrilineal cultural identity and the emerging competition amongst Akuapem migrants regarding support for their mothers and kin as expected in a matrilineal society. The study also informed that the presence of several ethnic/tribal associations facilitates the sending of remittances to the Akuapem area compared to the Ga-Adangmes, making it easier for migrants to send money back home. The Dangmes were, however, described as generally less patriotic and individualistic, which can be linked to their patrilineal heritage.

Table 5: Amount of remittance received per annum in cedis (GHS ₵)³

Remittances	Akuapem North (₵)	Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram (₵)
Minimum	100	100
Maximum	350	300
Sum	9000.10	5000.15
Mean	210.163	150.15
Std. Deviation	580.51	430.49
Total (N)	430	340

Source: Author, 2021.

Most of the sampled households (59.7 percent) have been receiving remittances for a period of two to four years with 40.3 percent receiving remittances for more than four years (see Table 5). However, it is noted that more Akuapem households (48.8 percent) have benefited from remittances over a longer period compared to their Ga-Adangme counterparts (29.4 percent). This was attributed to traditions that require members of the matrilineal group to assist in the education and care of their siblings, nephews, and nieces. This view is consistent with the observation by Middleton (1979) on social support practices amongst the Akuapems and Sanders (2003) view on the dependence on remittances by rural farm households in Africa. Also, the study revealed that most households (60.5 percent) in Akuapem North receive monthly remittances compared to quarterly remittances (61.7 percent) in Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram districts (see Table 5). This is consistent with the matrilineal norms that require migrants to visit or remit their kin regularly to indicate their care and

³There is a possibility that these numbers have been under reported due to fear of taxation or poor financial record keeping.

support. The patrilineal ethnic identity portrayed by a weaker commitment to socio-cultural and economic ties among the Ga-Adangme was mentioned as the possible explanation for this pattern (Assan, 2008).

Ethnicity and the shaping of Options and Utilisation of Remittances

It was identified that remittances are used for the following purposes: consumption, investment, purchase of land, savings, dowries, and loans (see Table 5). Over half (51.9 percent) of the recipients of remittances in the sample indicated that they use a greater part of all the remittances on household consumption. Such consumption needs include the purchase of food items, paying school fees, medical bills, utility bills, purchasing of clothing. Most of the recipients of remittances in Akuapem North (67.4 percent) use them in meeting their consumption needs. On the contrary, most of the Ga-Adangme households (64.7 percent) indicated that they use their remittance for investment followed by consumption (see Table 6).

Table 6: Use of remittance income

Use of remittances	Akuapem North		Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram		Total frequency	Total %
	frequency	%	frequency	%		
Mainly Consumption	29	67.4	11	32.4	40	51.9
Investment, Consumption & Loans	12	27.9	22	64.7	34	44.2
Savings & Dowry	2	4.7	1	2.9	3	3.9
Total	43	100.0	34	100.0	77	100.0
P = 0.002						

Source: Author, 2021.

The Akan culture of children meeting the consumption needs of parents was considered to be the basis for this pattern. The sample in Akuapem North narrated a pattern of increasing supply of essential food, medicine, and clothing by migrants to their respective households. Auntie Ama, a 54-year-old household head in Akuapem North with a migrant son and daughter, cited her own experience and said:

It is considered [the] children’s responsibility to ensure we have good health and not hungry by our Akan culture, so they send us food and medicine which are not available in the shops in this community. We receive food items like milk, corned beef, cornflakes, and rice, etc. Well, I will say we eat better than our neighbours who are not that fortunate.

The investment in housing development particularly among the Ga-Adangmes was cited as an attempt by migrants to improve their social status and that of their families as a result of cultural demands. Housing quality as well as the type of materials used in the construction of the building, are vital indicators of wealth and status in both ethnic groups but particularly among the Ga-Adangmes. According to Mr. Adjette, a 58-year Ga-Adangme household head with a migrant son, the culture in Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram districts encourages the acquisition of physical assets, which is an indicator of social status. He explained that:

...the type of dwelling of a household is a significant subject of status in our ethnic group, and most households and migrants try to improve their housing conditions through remittances. I have therefore used most of the remittance income to repair my present abode and have constructed two bathrooms and a toilet for my family. Also, the type of roof over a house is used as a measure of wealth, so I replaced the thatch roof of my house with aluminum sheets which is very impressive.

The household interviews revealed that the outward appearance of individuals is traditionally used as a measure of wealth in both study districts but more especially among the Ga-Adangmes. As a result, remitting the rural household through the supply of clothing enhances its member's appearance, presentation, and status and is consistent with Bates views (2000).

Although remittances are mostly transfers between individuals and their households, some migrants, especially the Akuapems in Accra were reported to have formed ethnic associations and community development groups to raise money for development projects in their home communities (Anarfi et al. 2003). A typical example is the renovation and construction of a community primary school in Akuapem North and a community toilet in Shai-Osudoku and Ningo-Prampram districts. The study was informed that leaders of such associations tend to be elected to the Community Development Council to serve as advisors to the chief of their hometowns. This reflects observations of Lassen and Lileor (2006) in East Africa.

In both the districts, remittances received by households are used to pay the dowries for sons and nephews (3.9 percent), as demanded by the tradition in both study areas. It is customary to pay dowry before the bride joins the husband. The Dangmes have elaborate marriage ceremonies, which compels migrants and their families to engage in silent competitions. According to a female youth leader, marriage has become a financially motivated activity rather than a socio-cultural activity. She said, "we see an increase in the number of single female youths of a marriageable age because the men cannot afford the amounts demanded by the in-laws". This pattern is believed to have led to the rising incidence of cohabitation, which is traditionally considered a cultural taboo in both the study districts. These views suggest that the receiving of money from migrants could have diverse impacts on existing social and cultural values which define the identity of the particular ethnic groups. The respondents in Akuapem North emphasized the social expectation of migrants helping their siblings and kins to join them in their respective urban destinations. Although this pattern is common in both ethnic groups, it is more prevalent amongst the Akuapems, given their matrilineal customs.

Discussion

This article has provided evidence to demonstrate the effect of migration and remittances as adaptations within peasant-based economies, which could vary with ethnicity and cohesion within structural socio-cultural groups. The empirical results presented here suggest that ethnicity, and more broadly birth-based identity, such as caste, can help create and support important economic transactions and shape the

distribution and utilization of resources (remittances) in ways that would otherwise not be realized. The patterns of sending and the utilization of remittances are shaped by the ethnic backgrounds of migrants and remitted households.

Social and economic policy frameworks on endogenous development strategies could look beyond migration and remittances and incorporate migrants' ethnicity/identity. Such an effort will be endogenous to specific groups and contribute to their development (Mazzucato, 2008; Thieme, 2006). An important theoretical implication of this study is that like many forms of birth-based social constructs and structures such as ethnic identity and caste, lower groups have often been portrayed in a very negative connotation, and their status within that classification is used as a tool of oppression. Such patterns especially tend to be the case for those in more deprived groups.

However, evidence from our study shows that different birth-based identity groups can employ their human capital and social agency to develop coping and survival methodologies and adaptation systems that enable them to overcome the very structures that seem to prevent their social mobility, development, and assimilation. It is therefore imperative to develop a systematic understanding of how such an agency could be enhanced deprived of birth-based groups, such as ethnic, cultural, and caste systems. This will ensure that beyond formal policies and regulations, identity and birth-based marginalized groups could also be socially and economically empowered. For this to occur sustainably, there is also the need to nurture and advance informal strategies that have and continue to allow marginalized birth-based groups to thrive, enhance social capital and overturn imposed social, economic, as well as religious structures.

Nevertheless, the use of digital money transfers through phones, mobile banking, and bus delivery services by the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) are areas where continued policy improvements could bring about much-needed change for many migrants. Further, simplified bank transfers that allow migrants to set up savings accounts and send remittances will make a significant impact. It is also essential for the policy officials of the Ghana Ministry of Women, Gender and Social Protection to provide informal livelihood training programs and hostel facilities to young migrants. This will enable young female migrants from marginalized ethnic groups particularly, to have more improved welfare, livelihood, and human security, especially during times like the Covid-19 pandemic.

Using case studies from Suriname, in the Caribbean, St-Hilaire (2010) argues the importance of groups' identity and assimilation in the development of a nation's economic and demographic strength. Supporting minority ethnically deprived young migrants has the potential to enhance the social mobility and economic development of both local and regional social economies and livelihoods. Achieving this across Africa and other regions of the world will also require the dismantling of historically entrenched and structural ethnic divisions which underline economic activities and institutional structures in many countries. Sustainable restructuring and assimilation will also require formal financial assistance for marginalized migrant-ethnic groups operating informal sector livelihoods and economic activities.

Policymakers in Africa and those working with the international and multilateral sector must also not lose sight of the over 40 percent of the population in Africa that lives in extreme poverty and depends on an informal economy with 84 percent of its MSMEs unregistered and uninsured (Ratha, 2021). The findings of this study

support empirical evidence from Mexico (Taylor and Mora, 2006; Lassen and Lileor, 2006), East Africa, South Africa, and Lesotho (Waddington, 2003), which suggests the progressive reduction of relative poverty and changes in social structure and patterns between households and communities over time due to remittances.

It is also critical to address issues of intersectional discrimination that are often experienced by individuals from minority ethnic groups (Amnesty International, 2021). Several young migrants, including those from our study, are paid less due to their ethnicity, gender, and educational level compared to individuals with the same demographic characteristics from other ethnic groups. Addressing such patterns of intersectional discrimination will significantly enhance the income potential and abilities of young migrants as well as people from discriminated ethnic, caste, and other marginalized groups. This would help them to support themselves and their dependents. They will also be able to obtain assets and further invest in their livelihoods and household/personal well-being.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the debate on birth-based identity resource allocation and endogenous development through internal migration and how the associated remittances are utilized for welfare and livelihood development. The Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated economic hardships and may push up to 40 million Africans into extreme poverty (Brookings, 2021). The necessity of obtaining remittances in a stagnant economy, coupled with underemployment and unemployment, facilitates socio-cultural transformation in two traditional ethnic societies in southern Ghana.

The study shows how different ethnic groups adopt diverse patterns of movement and remittances based on ethnic values and birth-based cultural identities, which are endogenous to these groups. It is evident that having the agency to formulate, associate, and adapt, individuals and groups from marginalized ethnic, birth-based, and refugee groups could develop systems and assimilation processes that would facilitate their social and economic integration and advancement (Makovsky, 2019).

Woo et al. (2019) argue that racial and ethnic identity does not provide universal protection nor exacerbate the degree of psychological exposure and the effects of discrimination an individual may experience. However, they posit that whether it lessens or deepens the mental stress of discrimination may be contingent on its level and ethnicity. This suggests that the effects of birth-based identities may not be uniform. Policy officials, therefore, need to take this into account when designing interventions and protocols to address such patterns in our societies. There is the need to further examine the extent to which ethnicity, caste, and the broader forms of birth-based discrimination cause young people to experience the diverse mental health, economic and social burdens within such structured and discriminated migrant groups.

Discrimination based on work and descent is, unfortunately, a global phenomenon and affects millions of people in several societies in Africa, Asia, and the diaspora (Krishnaswami & Krishnamurthi, 2021). Examining and addressing its impacts will therefore transform and expedite social and economic equity globally and improve the well-being of individual migrants from minority ethnic and caste-based societies.

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A Critique of Sanskritization from Dalit/Caste-Subaltern Perspective

Ishita Roy¹

Abstract

Students and social scientists concerned with caste studies will agree to a socio-cultural phenomenon called Sanskritization among people of caste communities that are not recognized as belonging to castes primarily affiliated to either of the three varnas of Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya. What is Sanskritization? Following M. N. Srinivas, who put forward the concept of Sanskritization in *Religion and Society among the Coorges of South India* (1952) to explain upward social movement (?) among Hindu tribal groups or 'lower' caste groups imitating and gradually incorporating 'upper' caste people's social, cultural behaviour, rituals, customs, and religious practices, there exist an array of works deliberating upon this collective behavioural instance called Sanskritization (Beteille, 1969; Gould, 1961; Patwardhan, 1973; Sachchidananda, 1977; Lynch, 1974). These studies have generally accepted Sanskritization as an effective tool for cultural integration between different caste groups by ensuring movements of people across caste barriers; in other words, Sanskritization spells a common idiom of social mobility (Beteille, 1969, p. 116).

This paper does not support the view that Sanskritization has been an effective socio-cultural instrument in moving towards a society that does not swear by caste-principles. Rather, Sanskritization, a concrete social fact among the 'lower' castes people, seems to obliquely prove the productive logic of caste through the imitation of the Brahmin. Following Gramsci's conceptualisation of the necessity of a subaltern initiative in any counter-hegemony project, the paper further argues that Sanskritization is regressive to the extent that it is antithetical to any such subaltern political initiative against caste.

Keywords

Sanskritization, Dalit, Caste-Subaltern, Gramsci, Ambedkar, Brahminhood

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Introduction

Students and social scientists concerned with caste studies will agree to a socio-cultural phenomenon called Sanskritization prevalent among people of caste communities that are not recognized as belonging to castes primarily affiliated to either of the three varnas of Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya. What is Sanskritization? Following M. N. Srinivas, who put forward the concept of Sanskritization in *Religion and Society among the Coorges of South India* (1952) to explain upward social movement (?) among Hindu tribal groups or caste groups (that are, by Hindu social convention/universal common sense considered as 'lower') imitating and gradually incorporating (the conventionally regarded) 'upper' caste people's social, cultural behaviour, rituals, customs, and religious practices, there exist an array of works deliberating upon this collective behavioural instance called Sanskritization (Beteille, 1969; Gould, 1961; Patwardhan, 1973; Sachchidananda, 1977; Lynch, 1974).

These studies have generally accepted Sanskritization as an effective tool for cultural integration between different caste groups ensuring movements of people across caste barriers; in other words, Sanskritization spells a common idiom of social mobility. With reference to social mobility, M. N. Srinivas in *Caste and Social Change in Modern India* (2005), a work, the first publication of which was in 1966 (a compilation of a series of invited lectures delivered by Srinivas as part of The Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lectureship administered by the Association for Asian Studies in May 1963 at University of California, Berkeley), defines Sanskritization as the process by which a 'low' caste Hindu group or a tribal group changes its customs, rituals or ideology in the direction of the 'high' castes, and that it is accompanied by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than the position traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community.

Therefore, for Srinivas, Sanskritization as a process results more than often in an upward mobility for the caste in question. And that this upward mobility is visible at the local experiential level of everyday reality, Srinivas cites evidences by drawing from many such examples from Mysore. For instance, he cites the example of peasant castes (*Okkaligas*) and shepherd castes (*kurubas*) in Mysore not accepting cooked food and water from *Marka* Brahmins despite the latter being included among Brahmins. While remaining conscious of the fact that changes, developments, advancements, whichever way it is put, brought about by the socio-cultural process of Sanskritization do not result in any structural change in the system of castes rather brings about only a positional change, Srinivas largely infers that contrary to the varna model where the position of each varna is fixed, the position of the castes in the hierarchy as it actually exists is liable to change. Srinivas observes, "The ordering of different varnas is clearly intended to support the theory of Brahminical supremacy and only partially overlaps with the actualities of caste ranking in different parts of the country" (2005, p. 4). Srinivas holds that owing to the popularity of the varna model among 'urban and educated Indians' to provide a more or less true picture of caste as an ongoing system, we tend to read caste squarely in terms of immobility and fixity when in reality there exists a gap between the varna model and the realities of the existing local hierarchy.

To this extent Srinivas cites the absurdity that Shudra as a varna status has come to attain. While Shudra as a category has been a fertile source for the recruitment of local Kshatriya and Vaishya caste, it spans such a wide cultural arch that now the varna status of Shudra has become meaningless. Therefore effectively, the varna model in a way distorts our understanding of caste in traditional society, and precludes the reading that traditional societies (read caste) did allow a certain amount of mobility. The effective argument made by Srinivas on Sanskritization is that it functions to bridge the gap between secular and ritual ranks of caste and that Sanskritization has been a major process of cultural change in Indian history and greatly facilitated by a variety of forces: technological and institutional.

This article argues a different reading of Sanskritization. Instead of looking at Sanskritization as an effective socio-cultural instrument in moving towards a society that does not swear by caste-principles, it argues that, Sanskritization, on close observation appears to foster those very basic principles on which caste perpetuates; immobility and exclusivity being its primary conditions. It takes its clue from Ambedkar's thesis on the genesis and mechanism of caste in his seminar presentation at Columbia University, New York, 1916, "Castes in India: Their Genesis, Mechanism and Development", to attempt to demonstrate this character of Sanskritization. Ambedkar points in the essay, that the emulative model of the Brahmin partly explains the origin and development of caste(s). Ambedkar argues in the paper that the three customs of 'sati', 'enforced widowhood' and 'girl marriage'—customs that according to Ambedkar were primarily intended to maintain endogamy—a characteristic feature of caste type stratification, were first raised by the Brahmin class— "A Caste is an Enclosed Class" (Ambedkar, 1989, p. 15) and that which marks one caste different from other in its early stages of development is the extent of imitation of these customs after the Brahmin class. In Ambedkar's conclusion, the existence of the said customs in other classes except the Brahmin were derivative in nature for it is the former classes' imitation of the customs, in other words imitation of the Brahmin, that led to the creation of distinct castes—different castes forming out of different or imperfect imitations (Ambedkar, 1989, p. 20). Ambedkar writes:

After what I have said regarding the role of imitation in the spread of these customs among the non-Brahmin castes, as means or as ideals, though the imitators have not been aware of it, they exist among them as derivatives; and if they are derived, there must have been prevalent one original caste that was high enough to have served as a pattern for the rest (p. 20).

Ambedkar's imitation of the ideal Brahmin theory in the mechanism of caste(s) formation— "the whole process of caste-formation in India is a process of imitation of the higher by the lower" (p. 20)—can be seen as being substantiated to some extent by M. N. Srinivas's concept of Sanskritization as a social fact indeed. Sanskritization seems to obliquely prove the productive logic of caste through the imitation of the Brahmin; as an aside, it may be mentioned here, that M. N. Srinivas referring to Polish-American anthropologist Milton Borah Singer, makes note of the fact that there isn't just one model but at least four models of Sanskritization that could be seen to exist.

Whatever may be the case, Srinivas's Sanskritization is not a non-existent reality, it is indeed a socio-cultural process (the very process that Ambedkar had observed, decades before Srinivas, to a factor in the production of empirical castes in the first place).

The article is therefore not in denial of M. N. Srinivas's sociological brilliance in giving us the concept of Sanskritization. What it argues instead is, the political efficacy of the process (of Sanskritization) in keeping the ideological order of caste alive—a central point being the essence of Brahminhood and its seductive power. Problems that are attendant upon it as far as a critique of caste, or anti-caste political commitment is concerned are brought in here. Consequently, it is argued that there is an inherent paradox in Sanskritization as a concept of social mobility; while it appears to stand for upward ascendancy, the very substance of it exposes the falsity of the concept of advancement as understood therein, and even justifies the principle of caste, a principle that Ambedkar held as informing forms of inequality.

Caste and Varna: Ambedkar and Srinivas

M. N. Srinivas' separation of the varna model from that of caste-system on grounds of empirical socio-economic reality of interactions among various castes is common to anthropological studies on caste that also insist on a separation of varna (the philosophy of *chaturvarna*) from caste—which the anthropologist understands most faithfully as a socio-economic system having little in common with the varna framework. Morton Klass in his work *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System* (1993) categorically leaves out varna from denoting the same meaning as that of caste. Varnas are not castes because they are not endogamous bodies, they are not occupationally distinct, they lack organisational structure and there is not even present any mutually acceptable definition of varna. In other words, varnas do not represent any formal structure or organisation, neither do they show any unity or leadership or control over its members (Klass, 1993, p. 89). Varna is therefore not of any practical use. Even caste for Klass who terms it as “human aggregations” isn't held as the smallest indivisible endogamous unit. Following Adrian Mayer, Klass arrives at the conclusion that caste is not an undifferentiated indivisible endogamous body or group unlike the common man or an outsider's perception to be so. “Caste is nothing but a category of sub-caste, rather than a group in its own right” (Mayer, 1970, p. 5, qtd in Klass, 1993, p. 91). Morton Klass quotes Mayer at length:

For though caste is endogamous, the smallest endogamous units are the subcastes. Again, the caste as a whole has no mechanism for settling disputes, adjusting the status of members etc. Only in relation with other castes the caste is a significant unit. For people of other castes do not, as a rule, regard caste as sum of the constituent sub-castes but all of it as an undifferentiated group. (Mayer, 1970, p. 5; qtd in Klass, 1993, p. 91)

Both 'varna' and 'caste' are terms that do not represent faithfully the empirical existence of groups who are the smallest endogamous units. Even though Mayer following G.S Ghurye for whom sub-castes formed the real sociological component otherwise called

caste, calls this smallest endogamous unit sub-caste; Klass vies for a more discreet term instead of sub-caste, for according to Klass, it is not sub- anything but rather it is the unit of endogamy, organisation, and political control. Klass terms this basic socio-political unit in the South Asian social system as ‘marriage circle’.

In structural terms, at the empirical level while this is an attempt to clarify the system of caste and how it plays out in everyday form—that is, it is in practical essence, a system of different sub-castes with their own occupational specifications and marital rules, the analysis also somewhat reveals what it argues against: that this is not how people generally think of caste. They do not regard it in terms of subcastes but rather see it as an undifferentiated whole. This tells us a lot about what human perception has to do with maintaining and distributing castes in terms of an hierarchical arrangement with some occupying ritually, socially and politically ‘low’ positions and some ritually, socially and politically ‘high’ positions.

While Morton Klass’s analysis about the smallest endogamous unit of ‘marriage-circle’ in explaining the origin of caste-system in India may be anthropologically correct, it fails to or does not choose to engage with the implications of a common man’s perception of caste as undifferentiated group that goes a long way in lending to caste system in India an overall notion of naturalness that is difficult to dispel. If we were to address notions of inequality that caste by principle and practice gives rise to among people, we cannot overlook or choose to theoretically disengage ourselves with the implication of the conclusive part of Mayer’s observation. It is to this notion or the common man’s perception of caste, besides its structural elements, whether observable at the empirical level as “sub-caste” (G.S. Ghurye, 1950; Adrian Mayer, 1970) or “marriage circle” (Morton Klass, 1993) that it is argued here the final inefficacy of a varna-caste separation (M. N. Srinivas, 2005) in (an Ambedkarite-Gramscian) critique of caste. It is argued here that Sanskritization has been, among many other strategies, a soft appropriation strategy by caste dominant classes to maintain a power structure whereby sanctioning authority of the social shall always remain with these classes. Sanskritization is regressive to the extent that it is antithetical to any subaltern political initiative against caste (Gramsci, 1996).

If we go back to Srinivas’s thesis, we will see that one of the primary methodological assumptions that Srinivas makes with regard to his formulation of Sanskritization and its relation to mobility depends on his separation between the varna model and the empirical plurality of caste. This distinguishment is logically inconsistent and flawed. It seems, in Srinivasian mobility, caste is understood as merely materialistic and that the expression of caste has to do only with its material expression; that caste is what an occupation is. And therefore, with positional change (read occupation and other customs/habits) there follows a mobility. This is slightly problematic since it fails to see how caste is inseparably linked with the concept of varna. It is the varna model that enables caste to become symbolic. Had caste only been a material phenomenon, movement in terms of advancement, a more equal standing would have been possible. On the contrary, in a Sanskritized movement, one caste moves from one position to another but the previous place does not wither away in terms of its notional existence; as a consequence of advancement, the previous position does not suffer any natural

death. The conceptual/notional facticity of caste remains. This notional facticity of caste is at the core of the varna model. Srinivas's separation of varna from caste does not logically stand as it is varna that has rendered the materiality of caste into a symbolic phenomenon in the first place, hence there is a continuous unfolding of different castes or desires.

In fact, caste is born to give expression to the symbolic. Every time a new caste is born it validates the idea of the varna model, it sustains the varna theory. On the complex question of caste's relation to varna, Ambedkar offers an insightful, logically sustainable argument. Ambedkar would argue in "Annihilation of Caste" that caste and varna are inseparable; and it is precisely the logical untenability of a varna model in practical world, that we see the birth of caste. Although the two theories posit a difference, varna being a theory of worth, and caste, a theory of birth, Ambedkar asserts that in the practical domain it is logically impossible to sustain this difference other than having the system of castes operative. Reorganization of Hindu society, according to Ambedkar, on the basis of *chaturvarna* is philosophically problematic as well as logically untenable. In "Annihilation of Caste", Ambedkar argues the fact that the principle underlying *chaturvarna* is the principle of worth instead of birth as it is the case for caste, it becomes a matter of practical difficulty to classify people according to the demands of *chaturvarna*.

Ambedkar says in "Annihilation of Caste", "How are you going to compel people who have acquired higher status based on birth, without reference to their worth, to vacate their status?" (1989, p. 59) For this would mean to reduce the numerous different castes, based on birth, to the four varnas, based on worth, which is no doubt a difficult proposition. Another reason *chaturvarna* is problematic is its method of presupposing classification of people into four different classes, for this would mean a forced 'lumping of individuals into a few sharply marked off classes' (ibid., p. 60) completely obliterating the recognition that homo-sapiens are beings of infinite possibilities. The fact that the original ideal of four divisions of classes of people according to their distinct calling has already evolved into thousands of castes shows that *chaturvarna* has no other way except for denigrating into caste system.

From this analysis it follows, that caste needs to be conceptualised in terms of both the singular and the plural. Singular caste explains the symbolic/ the ideological and plural castes explains the materiality of various different castes, all interacting within a single system of castes that is varna. That is the reason that with positional change, a former caste doesn't wither away in the onslaught of the new, rather the former becomes a newly vacant space for someone 'lower' to occupy and the system of place change continues to a never-ending infinite regress.

Sanskritized Dalit contra Political Dalit

One of the most original contributions to the understanding of the complexity of caste is Ambedkar's recognition of caste as not merely an isolated unit but as that which is part of a larger system or concept. His analysis of the genesis and development of caste shows that at the heart of caste is a model that is pre-determined, pre-destined,

held on to its place by various ways—at the heart of which lies the Brahmin in its glorifying essence of Brahminhood. The Sanskritized Hindu proceeds towards becoming, or at least trying to become Brahmin and in the process inculcates the values of Brahminhood. Therefore, Srinivas's Sanskritised Hindu instead of being a manifest proof of the caste-transcended existence becomes rather a repository of the ideological body of caste/varna. This invests with the Sanskritised Hindu a political power/agency necessary to maintain the larger socio-cultural hegemony of the caste-dominant. The Sanskritized Hindu is a requisite for a stable socio-political order that ultimately believes in the perfection of the Brahmin. The Sanskritized Hindu is therefore a political resolution to the problem of lower castes' growing political struggle and their claim to a greater share of autonomous political representation/participation, for the Sanskritized Hindu offers itself as a direct antithesis to the radically polemical Ambedkarite Other. Both the process of governmentalization as well as Sanskritization of the 'low caste' contribute to a corresponding thinning out of a minimum political consciousness required to question caste in society (Guru, 2010).

A Sanskritized scheduled caste is less a political threat, is more the appropriated Other and not the radical Other who confronts caste. It is a more comfortable proposition as far as the liberal template of Hinduism is concerned. The liberal template of Hinduism is sustained to neutralize any political initiative/articulation by the non-upper caste or caste subaltern. I would like to refer to Antonio Gramsci here, his note in Notebook 25, "...the history of subaltern classes is necessarily fragmented and episodic; in the activity of these classes there is, undoubtedly, a tendency towards unification, albeit in provisional stages. This tendency, however, is continuously broken up by the actions of the dominant groups... . Subaltern groups [read Dalit¹] are always subject to the initiative of the dominant groups, even when they rise up and rebel." (qtd in Buttigieg, 2013, p. 36).

Gopal Guru in his essay "Social Justice" in *Oxford Companion to Politics* argues that Sanskritisation maintains the hierarchical social precisely because it does not strive to alter what Guru explains as the hierarchical arrangement of worth. The essential question, according to Guru, that one may raise here is whether Sanskritization allows for any ethical capacity for equal recognition. It is argued following Guru that Sanskritisation implies for the truth of caste, which otherwise, in the least, is an arbitrary concept, and at best, a socio-cultural model that in the final instance cultivates an essentialised Brahminhood.

There is another way in which Sanskritization effectively neutralizes even residual political impulses among the caste subalterns, this way is more deceptive than the way Guru discusses. This may be referred to as the principle of dissemination, whereby the dominant (read caste dominant here) has for itself "a formidable array of institutional

¹Dalit as a term is understood here as a consolidated formation of political consciousness of the 'lower-castes'/ caste subalterns against the ideology of caste; It has emerged from caste radicals' active critique of the irrational form of social organisation that is caste (Rao 2010). Therefore, Dalit is a politico-ethical result of centuries of protest, resistance, movement and cultural expression against the caste-system in the Indian subcontinent (Omvedt 1994; Zelliott 2001). Dalit is how politically conscious caste subalterns like/choose to identify themselves as/with (Tharu and Satyanarayana, 2013).

and cultural mechanisms that enable it directly and indirectly to disseminate its worldview, inculcates its values, and mould public opinion” (Buttigieg, 2013, p. 38). Sanskritization is one such cultural mechanism that inculcates in the caste subaltern a consent in the ideology of caste, so that the condition of caste subalternity is hardly recognised and the process to overcome the same gets delayed or never appears important. It is not that the excluded (caste subaltern) is absolutely excluded. Rather it is the principle of exclusion that is given to be cherished by all. So, by sanskritizing themselves, the subject becomes ‘an excluded who intends to exclude the other’. In other words, the twin principles of Brahminhood as an essentialised value, and the seductive power of the principle of exclusion itself. The apolitical is kept apolitical by consensus (a mutually agreed principle of caste/ brahminism), consent, and never by repression, coercion or control. The Gramscian method for a subaltern politics would emphasize on the need for recognition of such ideological fronts, say Sanskritization, and advocate a ‘war of position’ instead of a frontal attack against the (caste) power of the dominant (Buttigieg, 2013, p. 38).

What is proposed here is that a Sanskritized Dalit hurts the political Dalit. If Sanskritization, following Srinivas, is a cultural factor that helps bridge the gap between secular and ritual rank legitimising the role of Brahmin, it is equally true that in no way does Sanskritization cause the ritual rank of the Brahmin to disappear altogether. The castes who are “pushing and jostling in the attempt to get ahead” (Srinivas, 2005: 4), it is not merely an economic position that one is talking about but a social position, social identity, identity of the Brahmin. This in itself speaks volumes about the association of a social identity with that of the highest/ the best/ the supreme/ the divine and it goes on. Interestingly all castes are found jostling together to finally occupy the position of the Brahmin. If this be the implication, is it not so that in the process we end up privileging Brahminhood?

Sanskritization in its philosophic core can be seen as that which ultimately sustains the ritual power of the Brahmin. A radical critique of Sanskritization will therefore involve a critique against the ritual power of Brahmin: the ritual power of Brahmin is sustained/ made sustainable at the cost of ‘ritual disability of the Dalit’. The ritual-temporal power of the Brahmin enables her as “pure Untouchable” (Sarrukkai, 2012) who becomes an object of desire/aspiration exuding seductive power. The “pure Untouchable” is in contrast with the impure Untouchable (Dalit)—the object to be maintained at a distance from the pure Untouchable thereby making it an object of derision or repulsion; simultaneously instilling in them the tendency to escape caste identity, and advance in the caste social by adopting a self-imposed distancing from one’s own caste identity.

This is problematic because it works on the principle of negation, vulnerability, susceptibility—rendering it a taboo with the caste subaltern’s own identity becoming awkward, unaddressed, that which cannot be talked about in fear of identification. One’s own identity becomes a phenomenon that continues to haunt. The more a member of the oppressed caste community renders her identity invisible, the more socially acceptable she becomes, the more she can move with comfort. In a caste social therefore, a ‘low’ caste individual’s comfort is contingent upon hiding her caste

identity. Gopal Guru terms this as “compulsive Sanskritization”. With reference to the problem of Scheduled Castes’ accommodation in upper caste localities like Nipani in Karnataka and Kohlapur in Maharashtra, Gopal Guru in “Reservations and the Sanskritization of Scheduled Castes: Some Theoretical Aspects” says,

In these towns there are instances where the Scheduled Caste persons have tried to avoid identification of their castes or to hide it altogether or falsify it... the falsification of caste helps them to overcome the psychological problem of identifying themselves as Scheduled Caste. (Guru, 2014, p. 160)

The ‘compulsive Sanskritization’ comes at a political cost for the Dalit: it robs the latter of any impulse to revolt or form a collective identity of protest or aspire to political power, interfering permanently with the Gramscian political: that any revolutionary impulse belongs to the socially, culturally dominant even for causes of subaltern interests.

Sanskritization therefore effectively neutralizes the opposition which otherwise could have been engineered towards effective political difference of the caste subaltern from the caste dominant, an articulation of which would be leading to a more balanced state of affairs. An ensuing dialectic would at least bring the oppositional parties into a space of negotiation, exchange, inter-dependence. However, with Sanskritization, it is ensured that the principle of caste be dispersed and distributed among its carriers and the value hierarchised. And because the principle is distributed among all that it resists a catastrophe of any kind, which would otherwise be inevitable for the emergence of changed order, the birth of the new: casteless society/ “annihilation of caste”. On the one end of the spectrum of this hierarchical arrangement of values, you have Brahminhood/ the terrestrial version of which is a ‘true Brahmin’, and on the other end, you have the Untouchable/ removed from Brahminhood. Sanskritization is adopted so as to move towards one end from another. And in its process, effectively ruins every revolutionary potential of the dialectical.

Conclusion: Sanskritization, a caste concept

It is in this context therefore that one argues for an understanding of the process of Sanskritization in terms of a conceptual birth. Srinivas posits Sanskritization as a social fact, which it undeniably is, but here I am stretching it further to argue about Sanskritization as a conceptual fact. As a concept, Sanskritization helps sustain and in the final instance project the totality of caste. This can be understood by another point; despite caste’s practical unevenness, despite its hierarchical difference, despite what Ambedkar terms as graded inequality of caste, there is never produced a dialectical situation whereby instead of accepting to the principles of caste one would be naturally revolting. Thus, despite every condition available for a dialectical to emerge, with respect to caste, this falls flat. Rather what we find instead is Sanskritization, a constant movement towards the essence/ core of caste; formerly explained as Brahminhood: cult of exclusivity (for what else justifies the sacred thread of the male brahmin other than a claim to exclusivity?).

Sanskritization precisely because it renders the concept of dialectic ineffectual, resists the dialectic, exposes a situation which is perfectly independent of dialectic, that it is a concept, more precisely, a caste concept. By concept I mean here, the organising principle of our everyday particular chaotic perceptions as well as perceptive selves. Caste, as a matter of fact, is so complex dissipated a phenomenon (for lack of a better word) that too with marked gradations, changes, adjustments; and following Srinivas, an uneven development, is, at the same time a phenomenon that is grasped as an undying, eternal as it were, total fact held together by such enabling concepts like Sanskritization.

If Marx's principle of dialectic as a necessary means to change/ revolution were to be believed, it can be said that Sanskritization blunts every possibility of a dialectic to take shape from the given inequalities of caste. Without dialectic of any sort, there can be no hope for a politics to emerge. Let alone a radical anti-caste politics. Conversely, if Ambedkar's efforts to ameliorating the inequalities produced by caste are considered, it will be seen, that Ambedkar resists every form of Sanskritization (anachronistic use of term here, but to refute Hinduism in every possible way, to the final effort of converting into another religion may be said as his attempt at de-Sanskritization), and that his resistance was geared towards paving a society based on equality and reached through difference.

What is insisted here, is the necessity for a political reading of Sanskritization; Sanskritization is suggested here as one of the potent techniques of cultural power (this is obviously inspired by Foucault 's phrasing 'techniques of power') to maintaining an apparently neutral political stance over the question of unequal sharing of worth and resources deployed not by any one source of power centre but dissipated as a collective living (cultural) principle among those claiming membership to the Hindu community. It is very naturally desired for. And naturally adopted too. It is seductive in its own way. This brings it closer to the kernel point of caste system that Ambedkar gave a glimpse of in "Castes in India": namely, Brahminhood. Ambedkar observed,

The Brahmin is a semi-god and very nearly a demi-god. He sets up a mode and moulds the rest. His prestige is unquestionable and is the fountain head of bliss and good. Can such a being, idolised by scriptures and venerated by the priest-ridden multitude, fail to project his personality on the suppliant humanity? Why, if the story be true, he is believed to be the very end of creation. Such a creature is worthy of more than mere imitation, but *at least* of imitation; and if he lives in an endogamous enclosure, should not the rest follow his example? (Ambedkar, 1989, p. 19, emphasis mine)

Soumyabrata Chaudhury in his essay "Dalit: Elements of a Sentence-to-Come" makes a further exposition of Ambedkar's theory and subsequently points to the rhetorical line of inflection as part of this cult making of Brahminhood. Following Chaudhury's analysis, it is further contended that Sanskritization is a rhetorical instrument through which the idea of Brahmin prevails and gets consummated by others. Some of the popular memes making rounds in the manner of slogan posters as an instance of the ideological power

of the idea of a Brahmin may be considered: “Brahmin is Not a Caste, It is a Brand” or “Hell Yeah I am a Brahmin and We keep Calm!!!” (keepcalm.com)

This is what may be called the cultural politics to maintaining a caste(-ist) ideology in a society. The more culturally pervasive a dominant powerful concept will be, the less politically aware the subalterns will become, and an increasing marginalisation of the subaltern bordering the farthest will take place. Sanskritization may be read as having a productivity in terms of upholding Caste. In the words of Foucault, an instrument of the power of Caste Ideology, a viable social productive apparatus (Foucault, 2002); which determines or constitutes individuals as subjects of Caste, by fashioning them into a set of behavioural codes, everyday rituals, cultural modes/ways of legitimizing interpersonal relations like marriages, rice-eating ceremony of the child, a paraphernalia of ritualistic ordeals.

Therefore, an entire system through which caste gets foregrounded on an everyday basis. A way to mould, shape, fashion, acclimatize, normalize and finally to naturalize in an irreversible manner. It is therefore not so much, in fact not at all, that M. N. Srinivas's powerful account of the sociological phenomenon that is Sanskritization is disagreed with, but rather it is to the implications that such a process has for a caste-based society in furthering the exclusivity of different ideological signposts of caste, one being Brahminism, and the theory that Sanskritization results in integration and mobility in an otherwise divided society, that it becomes imperative to critique the process from a political subaltern's (Dalit point of view) and analyse it as another trope in the dominant's theoretical/ philosophical front (Gramsci, *PN2*: 52) and, consequently hold it as an object of (caste) subaltern criticism. For the implications, as often taken to be, are nowhere near mobility, fluidity, movement, or the extended idea of equality. The implications are rather these former categories' clear opposites. Sanskritization ensures the conditions (one being the Sanskritization of the political Dalit) for the continuity, sustenance, maintenance, legitimacy and common sensical truth of the caste system.

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Exclusion of Tribal Women from Property Inheritance Rights: A Study of Tripuri Women of India

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Abstract

The Tripuri tribe from the state of Tripura constitutes around 50 percent of the total tribal population and can be found in all eight districts of the state. The tribe follows its own culture and tradition in terms of marriage and other customary practices. This study investigates the role of gender in inheritance of property among the Tripuri tribe and how Tripuri women are excluded from ownership of property. It also attempts to discover how property ownership affects their income and position in the household. The study has been conducted in the districts of West Tripura and Dhalai. Focus Group Discussion and interview schedules are employed as methods for collection of data.

Results show that while 20 out of 54 married women from rural areas of West Tripura have inherited property, only 2 out of 13 married women have inherited property in the urban area. In comparison with West Tripura, Dhalai features a low ratio among women in inheriting property (only 4 out of 38 married women). A few causes include low level of literacy, slow urbanization and less inter-community marriages. The reasons for not inheriting property include: a woman failing to live up to the concept of a 'good sister' in the brother's eyes, son needs property to care for parents, cost of marriage is borne by brother or parents so no right to claim, and to avoid unnecessary conflict in the family. In this manner, societal perceptions prevent women from claiming the legitimate share of their ancestral property.

Keywords

Tripuri tribe, Property rights, Exclusion and Social perception

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Introduction

Tripura has a plural society consisting of a population belonging to diverse religious communities. The social structure is the result of cultural assimilation between tribal and non-tribal communities. The Tripuri community is the largest ethnic group among the nineteen tribes residing in Tripura. They are scattered amongst the eight districts and constitute 50.76 percent (Census of India, 2011) of the total tribal population of Tripura. The participation of tribal women in agriculture is a longstanding surviving practice or tradition in Tripura. The Tripuri community follows their own traditions, customary laws, and practices in marriages, childbirth ceremonies, death rituals, and cultivation rituals. But interestingly they do not have any specific custom for property inheritance.

This tribal community adopted settled cultivation and in the context of government policies to abolish the practice of *jhum* or shifting cultivation, land rights emerged as crucial. In recent times, Forest Right Act (FRA) has become a significant tool to confer land rights to tribal forest dwellers. Land ownership documents are often mandatory to access the benefits of different government schemes based on land, credit from the bank, etc. Both land ownership and adequate housing are necessary for the full realization of human potential. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 17, states: "Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others; No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property."

In this context, it becomes relevant to identify the pattern of land ownership and how Tripuri women are excluded from inheritance of land ownership.

Patterns of Property Ownership among Tripuri Community

There are various accounts of intergenerational property transfers and gender plays a significant role in this process. This section deals with the role of gender in accessing inheritance of property rights among women in general and Tripuri women in particular. This section also explores the contrasts in access to property rights and related issues. Inheritance among Tripuris devolves from father to son and the eldest son generally gets the major share (Deb Barman, 1983; Bhowmik, 2003; Barooah, 2009). According to Tripuri customary laws and practices, the male is the absolute owner of family property, whether self-acquired or inherited and he holds the right to dispose any such property (Barooah, 2009). The father distributes his property between the sons in his old age to avoid possible disputes after his demise. Sometimes, the father is pressurized by the adult sons to distribute the property. On occasion, the incapability of the father to look after his property forces him to divide the property among his adult sons. But in many cases, the property is partitioned after the death of the father. In some instances, it has been found that after the death of the father, his sons inherit two-thirds of the property and the remaining one-third is distributed equally between the mother and daughters. If the mother's property is registered, then the daughter becomes the legal inheritor of her mother's property. If a Tripuri man has more than one wife, sons of the second wife also get an equal share of their father's property. The adopted son of a person also has the right to inherit his foster father's property (Bhowmik, 2003).

The Human Rights Resolution 2005/25 aspires for women's equal ownership, access and control over land. It also advocates that the equal right to own property and adequate housing are necessary for the full realization of human potential. The right to property, especially the right to inheritance of property is one of the most debatable rights because of its association with the political, economic, cultural and religious belief of a nation. In rural India, less than 2 percent of women inherit landed property (Lahoti & Swaminathan, 2016).

It has been argued by Agarwal (2003) that though the legitimate share of land property is a significant entry point to the empowerment of women, in reality the gender-based constraints on society influence the accessibility of women to their legitimate share of property rights. Often, the community and customary practices also discourage women from accessing their right to landed property, especially among the tribal women. Tribal women across geographical boundaries are usually governed by customary laws and practices and continue to be deprived of ownership of property especially through inheritance rights. Sometimes, these customary laws are in contradiction with the constitutional laws and court interventions uphold gender equality in access to property ownership of women. The argument for ownership of land or property by women rests on the premises that (a) it is her right to inherit parental or husband's property (b) ownership of property acts as a security for women (c) property ownership also improves her position in the household and improves her entitlement to income.

Social Exclusion

The concept of Social Exclusion emerged in academic discourse recently and it correlates with poverty, inequality and socio-economic injustice (Kabeer, 2000). Silver (2011) opined that "social exclusion is nothing but an active relationship between two group i.e. excluders and excluded", the former use specific mechanism(s) to push the latter out and deny them equal access to resources. Thorat (2013) defined social exclusion as the denial of equal opportunities. He says, "it is an unfair practice that being imposed by a social group upon another which leads to inability among latter group to participate in the political, economic and social aspects of the society". Therefore, social exclusion can be explained as a process through which one group excludes another from equal access to social, economic and political resources on the basis of their group identity. And in turn, it leads to poverty, loss of status in society, lack of recognition and also humiliation of the excluded group.

There is a need to understand the concept of social exclusion from the perspective of tribe and gender. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to deal with the issue of social exclusion from the perspective of tribal women of Tripura. Though there exist several studies on issues faced by the tribes of Tripura, there is hardly any discussion on the property rights of tribal women. Thus, this article attempts to trace the exclusion of property ownership among the Tripuri women and the role of gender in this context.

Research Methodology

A field survey was conducted in the West Tripura district and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted in Dhalai district of Tripura. The survey area was selected purposefully to include urban and rural areas, so that a suitable sample of Tripuri urban

and rural households maybe obtained. Survey and FGDs are used as methodological tools to assess the circumstances of Tripuri women with respect to property rights. The population of West Tripura district is predominantly non-tribal and intermixing between the two communities is commonplace. Tribals could follow and speak in Bangla, Hindi or English. Individual interviews of 78 selected Tripuri women from Takarjala, Mohanpur, Champaknagar and Agartala were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule.

However, individual interviews could not be conducted in Gandachara in Dhalai district as the tribal women were unwilling to communicate with outsiders. Gandachara is one of the most remote places where the population is predominantly tribal, speaking only in local Kokborok. Communication with the women individually proved to be difficult even in the presence of interpreters from their community. However in a group, they were found to be communicating well. In this circumstance in Gandachara, we have conducted FGDs in four villages; these are Taraban, Pakhi Tripura Para, Bhagaban Tilla and Ratha Para where 38 women participated in the FGDs.

The article consists of three sections. The Introductory Section I states the objectives and describes the methodology followed. Section II describes the pattern of property ownership among Tripuri community and the contemporary debates on gender-based constraints in access to the rights of property ownership. Section III presents the findings of the field survey and makes concluding observations.

Result

Of the 78 Tripuri women surveyed from selected rural and urban households of West Tripura district, 38 women, i.e. 48 percent are found to have property of their own.

As noted in NFHS (2015–16), in Tripura, 57.3 percent women from all communities own houses or land individually or jointly with others (NFHS-4). A reason for the high percentage of land-ownership among women might be attributed to the Amended Hindu Succession Act (2005). Even Amaral (2017) identified the causal effect of improved inheritance rights on women's wellbeing by utilising an exogenous change in inheritance legislation that impacted India's Hindu society: the Hindu Succession Act (HSA). Our field survey discovered three types of landowners: women with inherited property, purchased land in their names and joint *pattas* on land.

Among the 54 married women of the sample from rural areas of West Tripura district, 20 women (37 percent) have inherited property. One of the four widows in the sample inherited parental and conjugal property. Two deserted women received support from their parents in terms of share in property. In contrast, urban areas of West Tripura district only have two (2) out of thirteen (13) married Tripuri women with inherited property.

However, we discovered a different picture in Dhalai district. From the 38 Tripuri women who participated in the FGDs, only four (10 percent) women have inherited property. Twenty-five women accrued property through *patta* (deed) under land distribution programme of the government or FRA, 2006. These 25 women (65 percent) have received the joint *pattas* of forestland. The remaining 9 women (23 percent) stay in the Khash land. None of the women have purchased land.

Table 1: Sample distribution on marital status, income and education in West Tripura district

S. No.	West Tripura District					
			Gram Panchayat	ADC Village	Corporation	Total
1	Marital Status	Married	24	30	13	67
		Unmarried	2	0	1	3
		Deserted	2	0	0	2
		Widow	2	2	2	6
2	Source of Income	Agriculture/Animal husbandry	6	17	0	23
		Daily wage labourers	7	2	0	9
		Government job	10	0	5	15
		Private job	2	0	0	2
		Other	1	6	3	10
		Housewife	4	7	8	19
3	Educational qualification	Post graduate	3	0	1	4
		Graduate	3	0	2	5
		Higher secondary	5	1	3	9
		Secondary	6	4	6	16
		Primary	12	20	4	36
		Adult literacy	1	7	0	8

Source: Authors, based on fieldwork, 2019

According to our data, in Dhalai district a reason for low inheritance is that the concept of inherited property has not developed among the Tripuri community as it has in West Tripura district where literacy, urbanization and inter community exchanges are prevalent. In our study area at Dhalai, the Tripuri communities for generations inhabit forestland, so they do not have any individual property as such. One woman (55 years of age) expressed her views in FGD:

I got married under the *Dafa Rang* custom where my husband gave ₹600 as bride price to marry me. I along with my two sisters did not get any property through inheritance. The reason behind not getting inheritance of property was the mindset that after marriage women are not entitled to inherit property. I did not get any patta land for survival. I have no children and I am staying with one of my sisters. I maintain her expenses through the amount I am getting on social security pension and MGNREGA. I am unaware of the legislation of equal rights of women to inherit parental property. But my perception is that if such law is there then it reduces the tension between family members and everybody can be happy.

Ownership of property is expected to ensure a better life to the women by providing security of income and food safety and also enabling them to participate in household

decision-making. The types of landed property that women inherit also reflect gendered practices. Usually women receive inferior land as their share in parental property (Agarwal, 1994).

However, as shown in the Table 2, Tripuri women received productive land or property through inheritance. Yet none of them are found to use the property because those happened to be located at a distance far from their residence.

A woman may have the legal right to inherit property, but if the law is not enforced or the claim is not socially accepted, it may remain merely on paper. It is commonly observed that the patriarchal family structure puts pressure on women to give up their share in order to benefit the male counterpart.

Table 2: Types of inherited property of Tripuri women in West Tripura district

Types of land	Number of owner(s)
A part of house	4
A plot of in commercial area	2
A plot of plain land	6
Agricultural land	7
Rubber plantation	1
Tilla and Jungle	5
Total persons	25

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Reasons for not inheriting property

As mentioned in the discussion on West Tripura district, inheritance is the main method of property ownership for women. Further investigations revealed additional reasons why many women did not inherit property. See Figure 1.

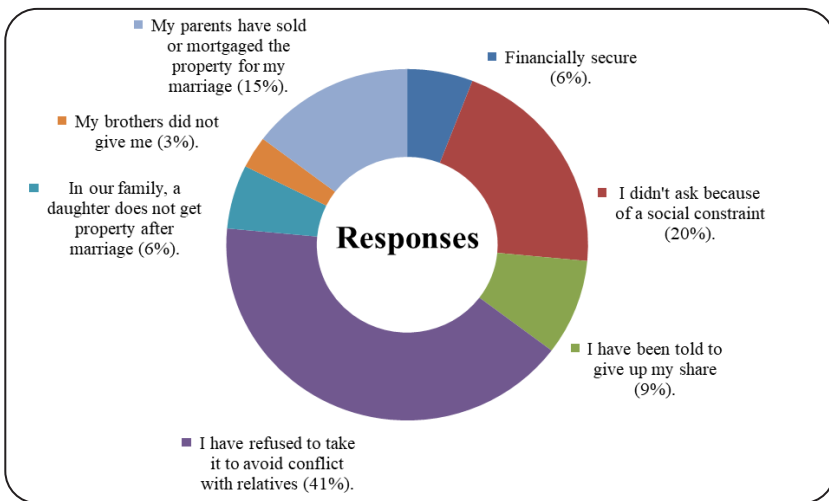


Figure 1: Reasons for women not inheriting property

Source: Field Survey, 2019

These reflect the deeply entrenched social taboos against women claiming a share in parental property. In this study, we found that 41 percent women of the Tripuri community did not claim or gave up their claim to inherit their ancestral property. A primary reason for doing so in favour of their brothers was to be a 'good sister'. Another reason is that in a society like the Tripuri community, when a bride moves to her in-law's house after marriage, then it is assumed that the sons will live with the parents and take care of them. Therefore, the property would go to the sons as a means of financial support for their elderly parent's care. Sometimes the lack of social security for women compels them to see brothers as the source of security, especially in case of a marital dispute. In effect, indicating that legal rights in the inheritance of property do not guarantee the actual rights on it. Another reason for not demanding the ancestral property is the cost of marriage. In Tripuri society, dowry is generally not practised but it is a common social practice to give gold and jewellery, furniture and other gifts to the newly-wedded couple. They also incur huge costs to arrange food and wedding expenses towards relatives and community members. The family of the bride often has to sell or mortgage their land property to meet the expenditure given social expectation. Thus, at the time of property distribution, the marriage cost is counted as the cost of property the daughter or sister was supposed to get. Our study indicated that 15 percent of the women surveyed had given up their share in parental property on the pretext of the expenditure incurred during their marriage.

Property Rights and Economic Well-being of Tripuri Women

Apart from inheritance, another way to acquire property is through purchase. It is interesting to note that both in urban and rural areas about 19 percent of Tripuri women are found to be owners of land which has been purchased. In urban areas, only 3 out of 16 women (18 percent) have purchased land. In rural areas, 12 out of 62 (19 percent) women are owners of purchased land. However, they do not have de facto rights on the property as the land was purchased by their husbands in their names. They are owners in name only. Our field survey revealed interesting facts in both the rural and urban contexts.

Several tribal women became land owners through government programmes. In West Tripura district, 13 out of 52 women, i.e. 24 percent married women, have received patta of forestland in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) areas jointly with their husbands. Conferring user rights to forestland by issuing joint pattas to the households by the government is likely to exclude single women who are widowed or deserted or are unmarried and living alone. A 65-year-old widow narrated her story as below:

I have five siblings including three sisters. I also got married under the *Dafa Rang* custom where my husband gave Rs 500 as bride price to marry. I, along with other siblings, did not receive any property through inheritance as my father has no property. We used to stay in the forest land and jhum cultivation was our main source of survival. So, the concept of inheritance does not arise to us.

This widow received 3.5 acre of patta land from the government. However, this land is about 8–10 km. from her place of residence. For that reason, her land is cultivated by her daughter who is a deserted woman. Jhuming on that patta land is the main

source of survival for her and her daughter. Her daughter ploughs the patta land, shares the crops and grains such as rice, chilli and til (sesame seeds) with her widowed mother. She also shares the amount that she earns by selling other jhum products and ensures monetary support for her mother. A woman with land in her name does not only aid the landholder, but it also gives financial support to other women in a similar crisis situation.

In Dhalai district, where about 65 percent women have received joint patta, only 18.18 percent women are involved with productive activities like rubber, betel nut plantation, etc., and are earning a sum of around Rs 20,000–25,000 per annum. Amongst the patta holders, 41 percent are unable to perform any productive activity due to lack of funds. Very few respondents applied for loan against patta.

It is also found that those who have received the loan spent the amount to purchase motorcycles, make payments for the marriage of a daughter or for other purposes. Most of them are reluctant to take loans as they are apprehensive of the banking system and are afraid that would not be able to repay the loan. Our survey indicated that they have limited level of understanding on the banking system and they do not want to entertain the complications of administrative process. They said, “If we take a loan, then how will we repay the loan? And also we do not have much understanding about the banking system.” If they are unable to repay the loan, then they will have to deal with the police or bankers. Except jhuming or daily wage work they have few alternative sources of earning.

Property Inheritance Right and Marital Choice

In communities where daughters are allowed to marry within the close kin or cross cousins, there is a greater possibility of land remaining in the hands of the natal family. Therefore, in such communities it is seen that the property inheritance by daughters is less or they are given the responsibility to work on the field (Agarwal, 1994).

Table 3: Inheritance of ancestral property and marital choice

Category	Own	Not Own
Married within the community	24	47
Married with in a different community	1	4
Unmarried	0	2
Total	25	53

Source: Field Survey, 2019

In many communities, including the Tripuris, marriage between different communities is not very common. If a woman gets married to someone from a different community, then there is a chance that she will forfeit her right to inheritance. Of the five Tripuri women marrying outside the community, only one got a share of parental property.

Female Literacy and Property Ownership

Literacy is one of the factors that affect a woman’s ability to claim and manage land in several ways. For example, it can be one of the perimeters in women’s knowledge of

laws and legal rights, their capability to deal with official procedures in relation to land claims. Education also enhances their knowledge on new agricultural technologies and practices, self-confidence and bargaining power. Table 4 shows how the education levels of Tripuri women result in the inherited property registration in their names.

Table 4: Property registered and level of education

Education level of the respondents	Inherited property registered	Inherited property not registered	Total
Post graduate and above	1	3	4
Graduate	1	1	2
Higher secondary	2	2	4
Secondary	1	2	3
Upper primary	2	5	7
Lower primary	3	0	3
Illiterate	2	0	2
Total women	12	13	25

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 4 shows a dichotomy in relation to the level of education and property registration. It shows that highly educated, i.e. only 1 out of 4 postgraduate women registered the inherited property in their name. Their reluctance to register their property is comparable to women with lesser level of education because either they are economically well off, or they are single daughter or they are staying at their parental home.

Property ownership and household decision-making power of women is also interlinked. There is a common perception that if women have much land then they can make more independent decisions on household issues or may act as the head of the household. In our study, out of 38 Tripuri women who are property owners, only six have the role of head of the household. It is interesting to note that all of them are either widowed or deserted. In the case of married women, the husband is the head of the household and it is the husband who makes all major decisions. Tripuri men have direct and indirect control and decision-making power in the family, even when women own property.

Property Ownership and Domestic Violence

Feminist scholars who have studied the Property Rights of Women have shown the correlation between violence, especially domestic violence, and women’s property ownership. Amaral (2017) has expressed that the chances of inheriting property by women reduce conditions such as dowry payments, spousal violence, etc. A research study (Panda and Agarwal, 2005) indicates the correlation between ownership of property and violence against women. It is evident that 29 percent non-propertyed women had experienced some form of physical violence and 49 percent women had experienced some form of psychological violence. The study also exposed that only 3 percent propertyed women faced dowry-related violence. These two studies reflect that

if women have property ownership, then the violence against them can be less than that faced by non-propertied women.

There is different information found in the *National Family and Health Survey, 2015–16* where women have higher ownership of property, but spousal violence is also higher than in other states.

Table 5: Land ownership and domestic violence against women in India

State	Land owned by women (%)	Domestic violence (%)
Manipur	69.9	53.1
Andhra Pradesh	44.7	43.2
Bihar	58.8	43.2
Jharkhand	49.7	34.0
Telangana	50.5	43.0
Odisha	63.5	35.2
Madhya Pradesh	43.5	33.0

Source: National Family and Health Survey, 2015–16

Table 5 indicates that in Manipur where women own the highest percentage of property, is also recorded the highest percentage of spousal violence. In Madhya Pradesh, domestic violence against women is lower than other states while property ownership of women is also low.

Two pertinent issues in this regard arise with Panda and Agrawal’s claim. Panda and Agrawal (2005) look at violence as a dependent variable and study specific cases where both dependent and independent variables, i.e. property ownership and domestic violence are exclusive of each other. However, the NFHS 2015–16 data does not show any exclusive correlation about whether they are the same set of people or how many non-property owners are the victims. Our study shows related evidence discussed in Table 6.

Table 6: Property ownership and violence against Tripuri women

Violence done by	Propertied	Non-propertied
In-laws	4	0
Husband	3	0
Both	2	1
Total	9	01

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Out of seventy-eight Tripuri women, we found that ten women faced domestic violence by the husband or in-laws. The data indicates that women (9 out of 10) have property in their name but incidents of domestic violence are not reduced. The question emerges on the actual control of women on land property. In reality we have seen that the purchase of land in the name of women normally depends on the initiative of men. Sometimes, to avoid the deed registration fee and government tax, women became the namesake-owners of the land. Figure 1 shows several gendered factors for women not inheriting property. Alcoholism, adultery, sexual dissatisfaction in married life may

also increase the percentage of spousal violence against women. In contrast, we must remember that the fear of reporting to the police, fear of being made an 'outcast' from family and society, restrictions on women's movement, fear of marital breakdown and alternative shelter, lack of support from local administrations, lack of transportation, and the economic independence of women from other economic resources also reduces the percentage of reports of spousal violence against women.

Discussion

Rights are defined as claims that are legally and socially recognized and enforceable by an external legitimized authority. However, when the laws and legitimate authority are prejudiced by traditional gender roles and norms it is very difficult to enjoy those rights that have been confirmed for women. There are several ways in which women have the 'rights' in land property but stereotypically are denied access to the land. Inequality in access to land rises from social and cultural constructions of gender which affects women's rights especially in land. Rights in landed property are also positional and regional features. In many societies, cultivation is not women's work. It is predominately done by men. In several states in India, additional land is allowed to be cultivated only by adult sons but not by adult daughters (Agarwal, 1994). A woman may have the legal right to inherit property but this may simply be on paper if the law is not enforced or if the claim is not socially accepted. It is often observed that the patriarchal family structure puts pressure on women to forfeit her share in favour of the male counterpart.

It is commonly observed that when the husband dies, the widowed woman is given a lower position than the children. She is considered as 'beneficiary' and can be 'willed out' from her deceased husband's property (Agnes, 2009). This gender-based disparity in access to inheritance property of widowed women is not only restricted to the Santhal women, it is true for widowed women in general. The deep-rooted patriarchal notions of Indian society do not allow women to have landed property. Such norms however are by no means limited to India. The traditional gender performance and social customs have been preserved in modern laws in many countries. For example, Chinese law specifies that after a woman marries into another village, she should forego her share of land to the parental village and in return she would receive a share in the village or household she marries into (Kelkar, 2014). This patriarchal worldview that underwrites the property rights of women has been a subject of Bengali women's writings in British India. In the writings of Anurupa Devi (1949), the author argues that as men are the main bearers of a lineage, property should accumulate to them because women after their marriage move into different lineages, this property is best protected if it remains under male control. But in contrast, Saralabala Sarkar argued that the lack of property rights to women gives rise to a "slave mentality" amongst women. She also described women without property rights as "meek", "dependent" and "needy". Unless they are given property rights, they will not get the scope to learn the mastery over property (Majumdar, 2003).

Another area of gender constraint that Nityo Rao points out is the pathetic situation of a Santhal woman of Dumka district of Jharkhand where she faced exceptional occurrences of gender-based barriers in relation to customs, marriage and property rights. A 32-year-old widowed woman faced social obstruction to plough her deceased husband's land by members of her marital house. The reason behind the social obstruction was that she had no son and she had no option to get married again because of the fear of losing her deceased husband's property (Rao, 2005).

Having legitimate guarantee on property rights generally means that the person has actual rights over landed property. However, in the case of women, it always follows the existing societal norms and values and ironically discourages women from asserting their right to inherit property. For example, the Maluki Ain community in Nepal only favours inheritance of property by the daughters if they are unmarried and above 35- years of age. Scholars like Bina Agarwal critically analyses these issues in her writings. According to her, from the lens of gender it is incorrect to assume that legal ownership carries the actual control of women on land. Many women let down their shares in paternal land in favour of their brothers to be a 'good sister'. It is common social practice that married women need the husband's consent to alienate her landed property and some communities like the Jaffna Tamils in Sri Lanka under the Sawalami Legal Code have made it a part of their customary code (Agarwal, 1994). Sometimes the lack of social security of a woman compels her to look to the brother as the source of security, especially in cases of marital dispute (Agarwal, 1994). The position of women in a family also indicates that the economic status of a woman cannot be judged by the economic status of her family. Without women's independent income sources, a woman cannot be independent in her rich parental or marital homes in case of widowhood and marital dispute (Agarwal, 1994). The household work, child and elderly care are still a woman's responsibility. The sexual mores and women's freedom of movement in Indian society indicates that the legal rights in inheritance of property do not guarantee the actual rights of women in inheritance of property in deed.

There is a correlation between female possession of property and violence against women. Data suggests that the violence against women in relation to access to their property rights is on the increase. A study (Panda and Agarwal, 2005) which looked at a sample of 502 women, found that only 34 percent women have owned immovable property, 29 percent non-propertyed women had experienced some form of physical violence and 49 percent had experienced some form of psychological violence. The same study also exposed that only 3 percent propertyed women faced dowry-related beating by her husband or in-laws, paralleled with 44 percent of the property-less. During a personal conversation with the Chairperson of Tripura Commission for Women on 21 January 2016 at her office, it came to be known that there are several cases of witch-hunting in Tripura that have been rooted in the desire to grab the landed property of women.

But surprisingly the Annual Report of Tripura Commission for Women (Annual Report, April 2013-March 2014) reported that not a single complaint of witch-hunting was registered under the Commission. The report also shows that in terms of

'Overview', the registered complaints (district-wise) in the Commission, the highest, i.e. twenty-two cases of property-related issues were registered from West Tripura district, while cases of domestic violence, matrimonial disputes or maintenance are also highest in West Tripura district (Annual Report, 2013–2014, pp. 18–19).

Conclusion

The present-day Tripuris, particularly those staying in urban or semi-urban areas are commonly influenced by the Hindu Succession Act. As an outcome, the womenfolk are also entitled to inherit an equal share with their counterparts. But in rural areas, family members sit together and distribute the land among the offspring. In our study, we observed that most rural women consider the provision of equal share on ancestral property to be in favour of women, but at the same time they also said that traditional thinking continues to prevail such that women should not have property or they cannot be a property owner. This societal perception prevents women from demanding their legitimate share of their ancestral property.

In conclusion, the affirmative action by the state has enabled the Tripuri women to become owners of land or property, particularly in areas which are economically backward and remote. In the advanced areas, age-old tribal practices are on the wane in the wake of modernization. Gradually, Tripuri women are becoming aware of their constitutional rights. However, deeply-entrenched prejudices against giving rightful share to the women in parental property continue to be evident in the Tripuri community.

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On the Margins of Healthcare: Role of Social Capital in Health of Migrants in India

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Abstract

Social capital is a widely studied concept in sociology, philosophy and development economics since the late nineteenth century. In India, the various dogmas of the theory of social capital have not been studied to their potential, especially in the domain of public health. This study was conducted to determine healthcare access among migrants and their social capital, in order to explore the association between social capital and healthcare access. A mixed-method approach was adopted for the study. A survey (n=61) was conducted in a residential area in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh state, using Shortened Adapted Social Capital Assessment Tool (SASCAT). The qualitative component of the study will be published separately. It was found that 78.6 percent of migrants have a 'low' social capital and 21.3 percent have a 'high' social capital. Fischer's exact test showed that there is no significant association between the economic status and social capital of individuals ($p=0.06$). The research study concluded that there is a linkage between social capital and healthcare access. High social capital resulted in better healthcare access, especially among vulnerable groups (women, disabled and elderly people). The findings of the study helped in charting out the pathways of healthcare access within the framework of Bourdieu's theory of social capital. It can be said that the concept of social capital has remained unexplored by academia and policymakers alike. In order to improve the healthcare access of migrants, health systems must delve into the complex nuances around tenets of social capital in healthcare.

Keywords

Social Exclusion, Caste, Health system, Health equity, Universal Health Coverage, Urban health

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Literature Review

Migration is an important demographic event that receives significant attention in the field of public health. According to the Census of India (2011), a movement will be termed as 'migration' if it involves a change of residence from one village/town to another village /town. In the latest Census of 2011, two different types of migration were recorded. These were based on Place of Birth and Place of the Last Residence. In case of internal migration, there are three major components that contribute to the growth of urban population in India, namely, natural population growth, rural-urban migration, and reclassification of rural areas as urban during the course of time. Census 2011 showed that the growth of the rural-urban population has increased. It further reported that in the growth of the total urban population of the country, the contribution of rural-to-urban migration is higher than urban-to-urban (Census of India, 2011) (Lone & Rather, 2012). People migrate for work/employment, business, education, marriage, etc. There are numerous types of internal migration that take place in India, including permanent, semi-permanent and circular migration. Internal migrants (those engaged in semi-permanent and circular migration) that move for employment work mostly end up working in precarious conditions (Abbas & Varma, 2014). Women make up 70.7 percent of internal migrants as per Census 2001, and 80 percent of total internal migrants percent as per NSSO (2007-08). Marriage emerges as the most common reason for migration such that 91.3 percent of women in rural areas and 60.8 percent of women in urban areas stated that they migrated due to marriage. Notably, there are variations among caste groups when it comes to patterns of migration, such that circular migration is commonly seen among the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) which has been associated with poor access to resources in host areas (Faetanini et al. 2013). In urban areas, internal migrants lack social security to sustain themselves and their families. Health and healthcare, which can be seen as an extension of social security, also remains a challenge. From a healthcare point of view, migration is not an inherently precarious phenomenon but working class migrants are put in such situations due to lack of a strong public healthcare system. Socio-economic issues faced by internal migrants aren't merely a result of policy failures, it rather reflects upon the structural inequalities embedded in our system. In 2008, World Health Organization released the Commission for Social Determinants of Health report wherein, Social Determinants of Health (SDH) were defined as 'the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age including the health system'. It can be said that migration governs the access and utilization of healthcare services by people. Migration along with other social determinants of health, i.e. housing conditions, modes of livelihood, gender, religion, caste, etc., influences healthcare access for people (Dodd et al. 2017).

Chhattisgarh is one of the Empowered Action Group (EAG) states with a fifth schedule status. The state has witnessed intra-state and inter-state migration since its bifurcation from Madhya Pradesh in 2000. The migration rate of Chhattisgarh is higher than the migration rate of India (Lone & Rather, 2012). According to Census 2011, about 16 percent of intra-state migrants in India belong to the Scheduled Caste (SC) and 8 percent to the Scheduled Tribes (ST). Similarly, in Chhattisgarh, an

undisputed link between migration and caste can be observed. The state is largely inhabited by Scheduled Tribes including the Gond, Baiga, Korba, Bison Horn Maria, Halba, among others. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) comprise 12.8 percent and 20.8 percent respectively. The percentage of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) is expected to be high but the exact figures remain unknown. In Chhattisgarh, ST population living in rural areas has reduced over time (37.6 percent in 2001, 36.8 in 2011), which is in contrast with data of states like Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar where the percentage of ST population living in rural area has increased from 2001 to 2011 (Office of Census Commissioner, 2011). Caste also plays a critical role in shaping the labourers market, such that upper caste and upper class migrant workers end up in high-paying jobs owing to the historical advantage they enjoy as against their SC/ST/OBC counterparts. Most migrant workers (inter-state and intra-state) from SC/ST/OBC communities in Chhattisgarh are engaged in the informal sector ('A Brief Profile of Raipur City', 2000). Our study was carried out in Bilaspur district situated in the north-east region of Chhattisgarh. Bilaspur is the headquarters of South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL), a subsidiary of Public Sector Unit, Coal India Limited (CIL). It lies on the bauxite, limestone belt of Chhattisgarh. Bilaspur has a flourishing fertilizer and power generation industry which employs workers (migrants and non-migrants) in large numbers ('The Movement and Creation of Chhattisgarh', 2000). Despite observing labourers migration for years, successive governments have failed to provide district-wise (and state level) data on human development indices including health status and healthcare access of migrants in the state. One way to understand the healthcare challenges faced by migrants in the discourse on Social Determinants of Health, is by exploring the role of social capital in healthcare. Social capital is an evolving concept that has a strong bearing on the health of the subaltern population. This study was conducted in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh state in order to assess the healthcare access of migrants living there. The aim of the study was to further understand the role of social capital in shaping the healthcare access of these migrants.

In this study, we adopted the Commission for Social Determinants of Health framework (2007) to assess the healthcare access of migrant communities. It is one of the latest and the most comprehensive frameworks developed by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2018). In order to map the role of social capital in access to healthcare, Bourdieu's theory of social capital (1986) was also used. Bourdieu, in his theory of social capital, explains how long-term efforts and sociability of a group is a prerequisite to the acquisition of collective social capital, which is of utmost relevance to the migrant groups owing to the socio-political factors affecting their lives. Further, gender, caste, and class determine individual holding of social capital amongst the migrant groups. In the Indian subcontinent, the extent of social capital accrued by people over the period of their lives or at various stages of their lives, depends upon their caste location (Bourdieu, 1986). For the purpose of this study, we built upon Bourdieu's understanding of social capital and aligned it with the Comprehensive Social Determinants of Health framework. In order to convert social capital into a quantifiable parameter, it is broken down into two components, i.e. cognitive social capital (trust, social cohesion) and structural social capital (citizenship, social participation). This was done in line with the Shortened Adapted Social Capital Assessment Tool (SASCAT) used in the study (Kaplan et al. 2016).

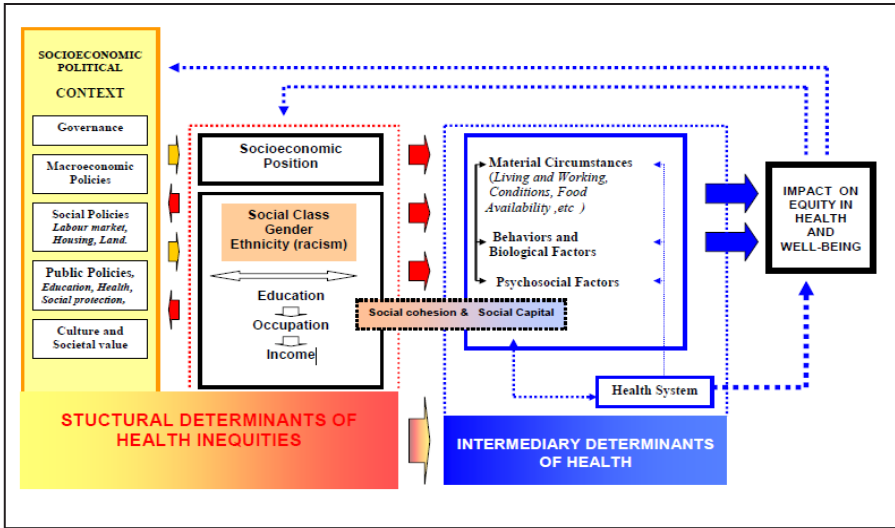


Figure 1: Comprehensive Social Determinants of Health framework (World Health Organization, 2018)

Methods

A mixed-method approach was used to conduct the research. Commission for Social Determinants of Health framework and Bourdieu’s social capital theory (1986) was used for the conceptualization of the study. The purpose was to examine healthcare access by studying the structural and intermediary determinants to health, with social capital as a cross-cutting determinant (World Health Organization, 2018). The idea was to navigate the pathways of marginalization vis-à-vis social location (migrant status, occupation, gender, caste, etc.) in line with Bourdieu’s social capital theory (1986). Bourdieu’s theory provided a unique understanding to social determinants of health; a shift from traditional ways in which an individual’s social location is determined. His theory was adopted for the study because Bourdieu argues that inequality in material terms is considered in policy planning but the inherent factors that lead to inequality are often masked. He also explains the dynamic relationship between social capital and other forms of capital (economic and cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1986). Further, social capital was studied to map healthcare access by determining complex ways in which social capital influences a community’s health and well-being.

Study settings

The study was conducted in Atal Awaas, a residential project built under Integrated Housing and Slum Development Program (IHSDP) in various parts of Bilaspur including in the city council of Sakri, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. Currently, Atal Awaas has been allocated to families that previously lived in slum areas of Bilaspur. It was chosen for our study as it houses a heterogeneous group of migrants, who have migrated from within the state and from other states in India.

Sampling, sample size and data collection

The study broadly comprises two population groups, migrant individuals and local stakeholders. Local stakeholders are a people who are responsible for governance/healthcare governance, and frontline workers like *mitanins* (ASHAs) in the area. There are a total of 650 households that live in 26 blocks (each residential building is delineated as a block) of Atal Awaas. Households in the residential blocks were considered the primary unit of sampling. A sampling frame of all the households in Atal Awaas was not available with the Bilaspur Municipal Corporation at the time of the study. Hence, for the survey, convenience sampling was used to select the blocks (block A, B, C). Out of the sampling frame of 72 households with enumeration of all the adult members of the household, 61 individuals from 61 households, i.e. one member/individual from each household was recruited. Simple random sampling method was used to select 61 households. Individuals were selected based on their availability at the time of the survey. A sample size was calculated using Open Epi Version 3 with the formula $n = [DEFF * Np(1-p)] / [(d^2 / Z_{1-\alpha/2}^2 * (N-1) + p(1-p)]$; population (N) = 2500, anticipated frequency of 'low' social capital (in percentage) = 80 (based on previous studies) absolute precision = 10. Purposive and quota sampling method was used in to recruit participants for focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Shortened Adapted Social Capital Assessment Tool (SASCAT) is a validated questionnaire, first developed by the Young Lives project based on the World Bank Social Capital assessment tool (Kaplan et al., 2016). SASCAT has also been adapted to Indian settings. It has previously been used in Andhra Pradesh and Nagaland (Kaplan et al., 2016; Wilson & McCoy, 2006). SASCAT was translated to the local language, Hindi. The tool consists of 11 items with a maximum score of 11 (for each item) and the minimum score of 0. Social capital has been categorized into two groups, 'high' and 'low' based on the cutoff used in previous studies done in India (Kaplan et al., 2016). 'Low' social capital is categorized by 0-4, while 5-11 is categorized as 'high' social capital. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and in-depth interview guides were also translated to the local language. Purposive sampling and quota sampling was carried out to recruit participants for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in order to utilize the principle of maximum variation. Three respondents were included for each quota. For the focus group discussion, participants were recruited with the help of a community member. It was ensured that the group was representative of the heterogeneous study population in terms of age, gender, religion, caste and health conditions. Twelve members participated in the focus group discussion. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion were carried out in Hindi.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were cleaned and sorted in Excel 2010, analyzed in Stata 13.0 (Stata Corp, USA). Descriptive statistics were performed to report frequency and percentages. The relationship between key variables were studied by conducting statistical tests of association. Qualitative data was collected by means of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. It was recorded, transcribed and later, translated from the local language, Hindi with the consent of the participants. Qualitative data is analyzed using

thematic analysis method. Apriori codes have been developed based on research tools. Emerging codes were developed as the data was interrogated during the analysis.

Table 1: Socio-demographic details of the participants

Characteristic	Frequency (%)
Total no. of participants (n)	61 (100)
Sex distribution	
Male	14 (22.9)
Female	47 (77.0)
Caste distribution	
Scheduled Caste	13 (21.3)
Scheduled Tribes	24 (39.9)
Other Backward Caste	18 (29.5)
Others	6 (9.8)
Employment status	
Employed	44 (72.1)
Unemployed	17 (27.8)

Table 2: Migration characteristics of the study population

Migration characteristics	Frequency (%)
By place of birth	57 (93.4)
By the last place of residence	53 (86.8)
Both by place of birth & by the last place of residence	49 (80.0)
Exclusively by place of birth	8 (13.1)
Exclusively by last place of residence	4 (6.5)

Migration stream		Frequency (%)
Sub-state level	Rural to urban	25 (41.0)
	Urban to Urban	36 (59.0)
State-level	Intra-state migration	52 (85.2)
	Inter-state migration	11 (18.0)
Total participants (n)		61 (100)

Social capital

Two forms of social capital have been reported, cognitive social capital and structural social capital. Overall, 48 participants (78.6 percent) reported ‘low’ social capital, i.e. their social capital score ranged between 0 to 4. Thirteen participants (21.3 percent) reported a ‘high’ social capital, i.e. their social capital score ranged between 5 to 11. Sixteen (26.2 percent) participants who were unemployed reported a ‘low’ social

capital and one (1.6 percent) reported a ‘high’ social capital. Migrants belonging to the Gond/Koitur tribe had the lowest social capital 17 (27.9 percent) followed by Scheduled Castes at 12 (19.3 percent). We applied Fischer’s exact test to assess the association between the employment status of participants and their social capital and it was reported to be statistically insignificant ($p > 0.05$).

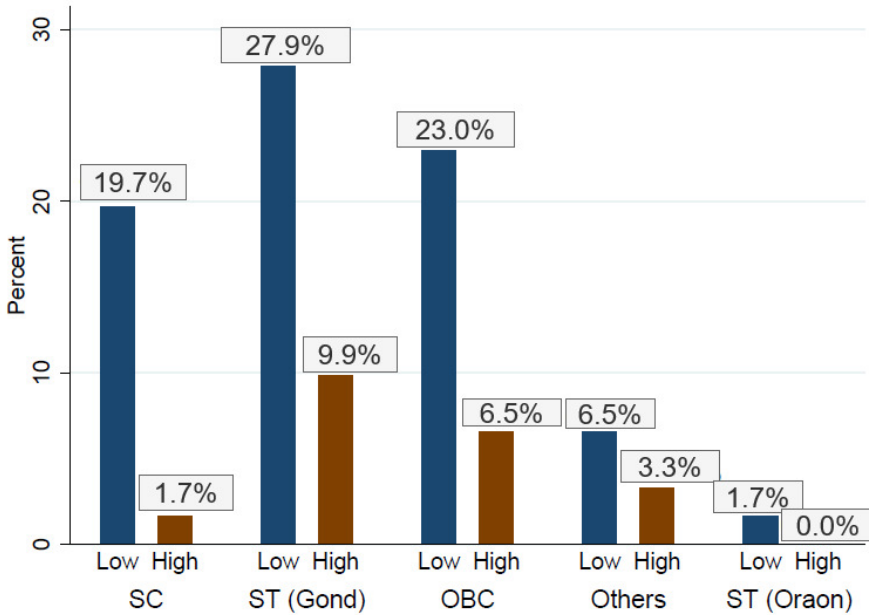


Figure 2: Distribution of social capital among the caste groups

Table 3: Distribution of social capital based on employment status

Employment status	Social capital		Total
	Low social capital	High social capital	
Unemployed	16 (94.1)	1 (5.8)	17 (100.0)
Employed	32 (72.7)	12 (27.2)	44 (100.0)
Total	48 (78.6)	13 (21.3)	61 (100.0)

Cognitive social capital

Cognitive social capital was measured in the form of ‘trust’ and ‘social cohesion’ among the participants. Most people, 36 individuals (59 percent) reported that they trusted their neighbors but 54 people (88.5 percent) did not trust their local leaders and strangers 57 (93.4 percent) in the area. Twenty-five people (40.5 percent) reported that they do not trust their neighbours, 7 people (11.4 percent) trust the local leaders and 4 people (6.5 percent) trust strangers in their area. Social cohesion is the degree to which people have managed to assimilate into the community. Thirty-four people (55.7 percent) felt that those living in the community get along with each other, while

27 persons (44.3 percent) said that people do not get along with each other. Thirty-nine people (64 percent) said that they feel like a part of the community, while 22 people (36 percent) did not experience a sense of belonging with the community.

Structural social capital

Structural social capital was measured in the form ‘citizenship’ and ‘social participation’. Citizenship was measured by asking people whether or not they voted in the last elections of electoral and enquiring about the degree of involvement people had with the issues pertaining to the residential area (Atal Awaas). Thirty-nine people (63 percent) voted in the last local/general elections, while 22 persons (36 percent) did not vote in the last elections. Thirty-three people (54.1 percent) did engage in the process of finding a solution for an issue related to the residential area. A majority of persons, i.e. 50 people (81.9 percent) alone or collectively, did not report any issue to local authorities.

Social participation refers to the degree of involvement, social activeness displayed by the people living in the housing society. The presence or absence of this trait was determined by the support they received from groups and individuals. Forty-five people (73.7 percent) were not a member of any group in the last twelve months (March 2018-February 2019). Only 16 participants (26.2 percent) reported to have been a part of at least one social/political/cultural group in the last twelve months. Out of which 10 (62.5 percent) received emotional/economic or other sort of support. 33 persons (54.1 percent) reported having received emotional/economic or another sort of support from individuals. People received support of various kinds of individual support, 26 people received support from their family members, 13 persons received support from their neighbors, 9 persons received support from their friends (who were not neighbors), 7 persons received support from their employers. All of those who received support from a group, received it from a single group. Figure 3 depicts the type of group participation among sixteen participants who reported to be a part of one group.

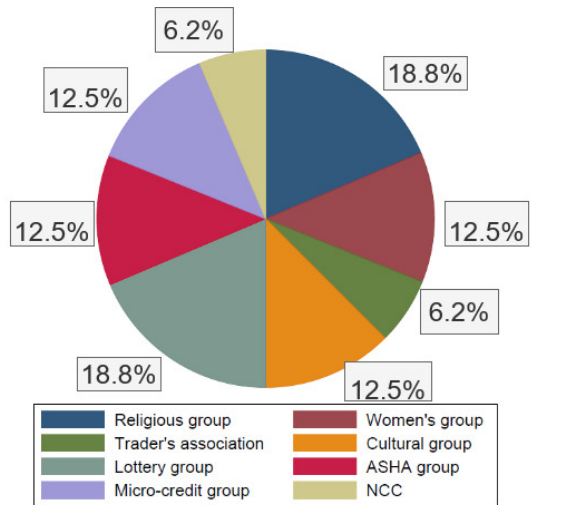


Figure 3: Type of group participation for people who were a part of a group.

Forty-two persons (68.8% percent) owned an LPG stove, 40 persons (65.5% percent) owned a bike and 19 persons (31.5% percent) owned a TV. Fischer's exact test was conducted to determine the association of socioeconomic status with social capital. It was found that 9 people (100 percent) of people who did not own any durable good (TV, motorcycle) and LPG stove had a low social capital, 11 people (61.1 percent) of people who at least owned 1 durable good/LPG stove had a low social capital, 17 people (89.5 percent) people who owned at least 2 durable goods/LPG stove had a low social capital and 11 people (73.3 percent) people who owned all the two durable goods and an LPG stove had a low social capital. This difference was statistically insignificant ($p = 0.06$).

Healthcare access to the community

In this sub-study, some important findings from the qualitative component of the larger study will be reported in order to corroborate it with the quantitative data. Qualitative findings suggest that migrants have limited healthcare access. Public health facilities include only a Sub-Center (SC) that is geographically accessible, however, there human resources (Auxillary Nurse Midwife) and diagnostic services are lacking in the sub-center. People living in Atal Awaas felt that it was difficult to travel to the Primary Healthcare Center (PHC) of Sakri. Moreover, there is a lack of availability of doctors in the PHC. We noted that the PHC is located beyond a radius of 5 km. from Atal Awaas. People do not receive routine primary healthcare services including maternal and child health services (ante-natal care, immunization). Government-run secondary and tertiary care healthcare centers are inaccessible for most people. Home deliveries as against institutional deliveries are common in Atal Awaas as referrals to district hospital are made from the SC/PHC in most cases. Hence, women have no option but to deliver at home because of a shortage of transport facilities. There is no provision for emergency services for injury and trauma for people living in Atal Awaas in the nearby health centers and people have low awareness about the free ambulance services provided by the government, i.e. 102 Mahatari express and 108 ambulance services. In the absence of adequate public health facilities, the private sector has thrived in the area. In effect, there are inadequate affordable primary healthcare services for the residents of Atal Awaas. In our study, we found that those with better social capital had improved healthcare access (to private health services), especially among people who were active members of society, i.e. had better social participation. As a community, people experience a lack of political support in matters of welfare and health, which translates into a low cognitive social capital.

Table 4: Quotes from in-depth interviews and Focus-Group Discussion

Role of social capital in healthcare access	Quotes from IDIs and FGDs	Interpretation
Physical accessibility of healthcare services & social participation	'Whenever healthcare services are needed, we look for transport facility. If we have any friend, or neighbor who has [a] motorcycle or even bicycle, we take help. It is expensive to even take a private auto-rickshaw. Had there been any transport facility, it would have been better.' (26-year-old, female, FGD)	People have to rely on their friends, neighbors to seek healthcare services.
Affordability, physical accessibility of healthcare services, and social cohesion.	'No work gets done without spending money these days. If there was [a] hospital nearby we would tell that we will pay you tomorrow once we get some money (as we used to do earlier when we lived in the city). That's not possible since we have relocated here.' (58-year-old, female, FGD)	Although quantitative findings suggest that most people experience a sense of belonging with the place, some residents lacked a sense of belonging owing to the lack of familiarity with the surroundings.
Affordability, physical accessibility of healthcare services and trust	'We go to CIMS hospital (tertiary care public hospital) or district hospital; it is mostly the two but only when we have money otherwise it keeps hurting but it only gets healed if you have money or you manage to borrow money and get treatment.' (55-year-old, male, FGD)	Trust plays an important role when people have to lend money to others for treatment purposes. People have to pay out-of-pocket (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] defines out-of-pocket payments as expenditures borne directly by a patient where insurance does not cover the full cost of the health good or service) because of inadequate public health facilities nearby.
Physical accessibility of healthcare services, trust and citizenship	<p>'We go to the Anganwadi Center in Mangla Chowk (Bilaspur) as there is no Anganwadi Center nearby. Earlier there were two AWCs near our hut (in the slum area). Once, the the husband of the Ward Representative visited, I request him to do something about it but he doesn't seem to care.' (58-year-old, female, FGD)</p> <p>'There's no one here. They only vaccinate some children and go. We asked to start an AWC here but they said it is less likely to establish an AWC here.' (26-year-old, female, FGD)</p>	People with children younger than 6 years old and pregnant women were particularly concerned that there was no AWC nearby. They even registered their concerns to the local leader in whatever limited interaction they had.
Appropriateness of health services, trust and citizenship	'Healthcare services are not satisfactory (public and private health services). What improvement can be done when there aren't any services in the first place? I doubt if anybody (local leaders) care.' (38-year-old, male, FGD)	Most people did not trust their local leaders and did not believe that would do make any concrete changes to improve the state of healthcare services.

<p>Access to health-related information, social cohesion and citizenship</p>	<p>'Here, the thing is that <i>mitanins</i> (ASHA) don't give us any information. There are <i>mitanins</i> in our first block but they don't give us any information.' (26-year-old, female, FGD)</p>	<p><i>Mitanins</i> themselves were not a part of the community living in Atal Awaas and people did not share a sense of community with her. Pregnant women said they were never visited by the <i>mitanins</i>.</p>
<p>Affordability of healthcare services and social participation</p>	<p>'Our girl had fallen ill at midnight, we rushed to a private hospital. The hospital had a board which suggested that they accept smartcard but they refused to accept it. We had to give Rs. 3 lakh in cash at a private hospital. Then, why have they (private hospital) put up a board for smartcard services when you aren't offering to use it?' (39-year-old, female, FGD)</p>	<p>People who had better social participation were more likely to be aware of or utilize state-funded health insurance schemes like RSBY. However, private healthcare facilities empanelled under RSBY would frequently deny services.</p>

Discussion

In our study we found that 78.6 percent people had a 'low' social capital, whereas only 21.3 percent had a 'high' social capital. In terms of trust, people did not trust their local political leaders but placed relatively high trust in their neighbors. Social cohesion among people remains relatively low due to varied social backgrounds, and individual challenges (gender-based or other circumstantial factors). Most people worked more than 10 hours to make ends meet, which explains why many have limited social participation. Social capital also varied among different caste groups. Most people living in Atal Awaas belonged to marginalized caste groups (SC, ST, and OBC). A majority of migrants identified as a member of the Gond/Koitur tribe, which is the largest tribe in central India (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2014). Few upper caste people reside in Atal Awaas yet they have better social capital than their SC/ST/OBC counterpart—which speaks volumes about caste dynamics and its role in migrant health. The OBC community fared better than their ST/SC counterparts in terms of social capital, economic capital and healthcare access. Also, those who seek better political leadership, experience a sense of indifference from local leaders (e.g. a ward representative who belonged to an upper caste group) due to existing caste/class based hierarchy. It is important to underline that the lack of political representation also leads to a deficit in social capital over time, in turn restricting their healthcare access. (Bourdieu, 1986). It can also be argued that caste-based identities are relational and not absolute in this regard. Hence, overrepresentation of upper caste people (relative to their caste location and their corresponding percentage in the population) is a result of underrepresentation of marginalized caste groups (Mosse, 2018). Healthcare access was found to be improved for people who have better cognitive and structural social capital especially when it comes to women (and children). Women could rely upon their neighbors or family in times of need, whereas men (even elderly men) had improved access to healthcare owing to their social participation, which has been previously shown in studies conducted in Peru, Vietnam and India (Garlick et al. 2006). The elderly and disabled persons with 'low' social capital (mainly structural

social capital) had poor access to healthcare. Better social capital also meant better access to information related to healthcare. Women tend to discuss health issues with neighbors, family, and women who work with them, whereas the elderly had no such support. Elderly people also felt that the frontline workers do not cater to their needs due to their age and hence, they lacked trust in frontline workers when it comes to provisioning of primary healthcare services. The case was no different for disabled people. These patterns highlight an inextricable link between marginality and social capital which is in consonance with Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu, 1986). Migration also threatens the sustainability of social networks, which is again rooted in the concept of social capital accrued in the form of 'caste' capital. Unlike economic capital, social capital increases with use and offers greater protection against unforeseen social and economic challenges, including health events (Alha, 2018).

Sociologists and political philosophers in the West have commented on role of social capital in governance and economy in post-modern societies. Coleman viewed social capital as a form of resource (Coleman, 1988). Whereas, Putnam proposed that social capital expresses the sociological essence of communal vitality. He breaks down social capital into three components, i.e. trust, social norms/obligations and social networks, specially voluntary associations (Siisiäinen, 2000). Bourdieu, however, emphasized the plurality of social fields, and engaged in defining the role of social, cultural and economic capital in an individual's position in various social fields (Bourdieu, 1986). The present study adopted Bourdieu's theory to understand the relationship between healthcare access and social capital among migrants as he emphasizes on the structural factors behind existing disparity in ownership of various forms of capital. Apart from social capital, Bourdieu also talks about cultural and economic capital. He suggests that cultural capital exists in three forms, in the 'embodied state' or the way in which culture gets arranged in our mind and embedded in our lives, in the 'objectified state', i.e. in the form of cultural goods like books, pictures, etc., and in the 'institutionalized state', i.e. when cultural capital gains institutional recognition. Based on the findings of the qualitative component of the study, we found that the migrants living in Atal Awaas lacked cultural capital in its institutionalized state. Hence, they haven't received institutional recognition by the health system. Bourdieu contends that each form of capital can be converted into another form of capital under certain circumstances. According to Bourdieu, 'convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital'. However, he puts economic capital at the center of his argument, by claiming that economic capital is at the root of each type of capital. We argue that economic capital may not necessarily be at the heart of all capitals as evident from our findings. Proxy markers of economic capital, i.e. owning a house, mobile phones or two-wheelers were not found to improve healthcare access per se. In the context of migration, social capital accrued through caste-based networks can be highly exclusionary benefitting only the dominant section (upper-caste migrants). Caste barriers can prevent people from acquiring long-term economic as well as cultural capital as the process relies on identity-based networks. These networks are unequal in their origin itself. Hence, it cannot possibly promote economic and cultural growth for those on the lower rung of the social hierarchy.

Social capital and healthcare access

European experience suggests that in theory, the health benefits of social capital are received via three primary pathways. First, social capital helps in diffusion of information and hence, improves health/healthcare access. Second, social capital if accessed, is said to promote political organization, which helps in gaining access to healthcare resources. And third, social capital helps in individual and collective networking, which in turn result in better psychosocial support. Nordic countries like Norway, Finland and Sweden reported higher degrees of trust (a component of social capital) which was found to be correlated with better self-reported health status (Rocco & Suhrcke, 2012). In India, the idea of social capital has received great attention from experts in the development sector but it has not been incorporated into health policy research. In terms of health and well-being of population, social capital has been associated with improved quality of life, wherein the social capital comes from local solidarity and social communication (Hans, 2014). A study carried out in Nagaland shows the relationship between social capital (structural and cognitive social capital) and utilization of health services in Nagaland. The study indicated that ‘trust’ within the community is an important factor to overcome barriers to access to healthcare. Social participation was associated with the utilisation of public health services over private services (Kaplan et al., 2016). Some studies could not decipher the complex relationship between social capital and health status of individuals but they certainly show that there is a lot more to unravel (Garlick et al., 2006).

Researchers have proposed that equity in healthcare can be measured by assessing parameters like accessibility, availability, appropriateness, and affordability of healthcare services (Gulliford et al., 2002). The ultimate aim is to reckon whether the health system is designed to fulfill the needs of socially disadvantaged groups or remains skewed towards the privileged groups. In 2011, a High-Level Expert Group constituted by the Planning Commission of India, submitted a report pertaining to Universal Health Coverage for India by 2022. The report tackles the aforementioned issues of inequity on various fronts including health infrastructure, human resources in health, community participation and health financing, etc. It clarifies that the idea of universality is mainly aimed at including remote and migrant communities and/or communities that have been historically disadvantaged (Planning Commission of India, 2011).

World Health Organization (WHO) has been promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC) with Declaration of Astana to being endorsed to focus on primary healthcare by centering marginalized communities (Jasarevic, 2019). If India as a nation intends to provide Universal Health Coverage to its citizens, there is an increasing need to understand the importance of the concept of social capital in the discourse on equity in healthcare. WHO promotes publicly funded health insurance as one of the pathways to achieve equitable service coverage under UHC (Dye et al., 2013). On the contrary we found that insurance remains an ineffective method to improve better healthcare coverage as only in line with the current evidence from Chhattisgarh. A study conducted in the slum areas of the capital of Chhattisgarh indicated that 43 percent of people living in the slums were not enrolled under state-funded healthcare insurance called Mukhyamantri Swasthya Bima Yojana. It has been established that insurance enrollment is rarely universal (Nandi et al., 2018) (Nandi et al., 2016).

In South Asia, a prime way in which inequity manifests itself is in the form of caste. Caste, as a social system with economic and political bearings, is responsible for individual and structural discrimination against the marginalized caste groups. SC/ST and OBC communities comprise a majority of the population in Chhattisgarh compared to the percentage of upper caste living in the state (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2014). However, these communities have always had to assert their social, economic and political rights through various means in order to challenge the dominance of the ruling class. From the Bastar revolt of 1910 to the anti-caste movements in the nineteenth century, Chhattisgarh witnessed some prominent anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-caste and working class uprisings. In the early twentieth century, there was a boost in metal industry in Madhya Pradesh (now Chhattisgarh). There was a gradual shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy. This was followed by a strong wave of trade union movement under national and provincial trade unions in Chhattisgarh. Apart from the struggle for regularization of contract labourers, anti-mechanization and anti-departmentalization of workers, mine workers fought for better wages, health and safety of workers (including sanitation workers), allowances for housing repair, etc. Organizations like Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS) had over 30,000 workers affiliated to it, which extended up to Hirri mines in Bilaspur district. CMSS could provide medical facilities by setting up a hospital for contract labourers working in Dalli-Rajhara, peasants living in nearby villages. Around the 1990s, the identity of Chhattisgarhi people was taking final shape after years of social, cultural and political developments although the idea of statehood was promoted as early as the 1950s. Multiple factors were responsible for the bifurcation of Madhya Pradesh into Chhattisgarh. One of the key links between the trade union movement and struggle for statehood was the fact that cultural suppression of Chhattisgarhi people was further leading to exploitation of workers. The widespread need to promote regional consciousness provided the political thrust for the formation of state. However, unlike its neighboring states (e.g. Jharkhand), Chhattisgarh did not see any strong political mobilization or an organized statehood movement. (Ish, 2017; “Necessities and Challenges of Reservation in Chhattisgarh,” 1999; Tillin, 2014)

It is imperative to understand the challenges to healthcare access faced by migrants within the broader socio-political and cultural history of the state of Chhattisgarh. Hence, we have mapped the Commission for Social Determinants in Health framework to provide a better understanding of the multidimensional concept of health equity, and its significance with respect to healthcare access and social capital of migrants. The framework illustrates the role of structural and intermediary determinants of health on health equity. In our study, we discovered that structural determinants like the social-political context that the community lives in, namely, quality of governance, economic and social policies and implementation of public policies, is of great importance in improving healthcare access for people. It further showed that individual/collective socio-economic position (age, gender, caste/class, migration, and disability) and material circumstances, psychosocial, biological factors shape the way people approach and get approached by the health system of Chhattisgarh. For example, among the migrants, Christian women from a tribal community, disabled men did not receive appropriate health services in public hospitals, whereas able-bodied men had better physical access to health facilities. An elderly man who identified as a follower of Saint Kabir, worked as an activist, had better healthcare access owing to his social capital, whereas an elderly woman with a blinding condition of cataract, lacked familial

support and could not access health services. This indicates that social capital crosses across intermediary determinants of health. The effect of caste capital (in the form of social capital) is not confined to location (rural or urban). It takes shape by means of the dynamic inter-play between the intermediary (material circumstances, living conditions) and structural determinants of health (social structure, public policies). There is no way by which these networks can be transferred. In fact, unlike economic capital, social capital — increases with use and gets passed on to generations as a result of caste-based endogamy (Alha, 2018; Mosse, 2018). Eventually, it dictates individual/collective access to healthcare, thereby, perpetuating inequity in health outcomes. On an individual level, inequitable health outcome can manifest intra-generationally, whereas on a community level, it can have inter-generational consequences. Inequitable distribution of health outcome leads to skewed healthcare access and vice versa (World Health Organisation European Region, 2015). Within the intermediary determinants we have included ‘social cohesion’ as a component of social capital rather than viewing is as a separate entity. We have also emphasized the process of ‘access to healthcare’ prior to entry into the health system.

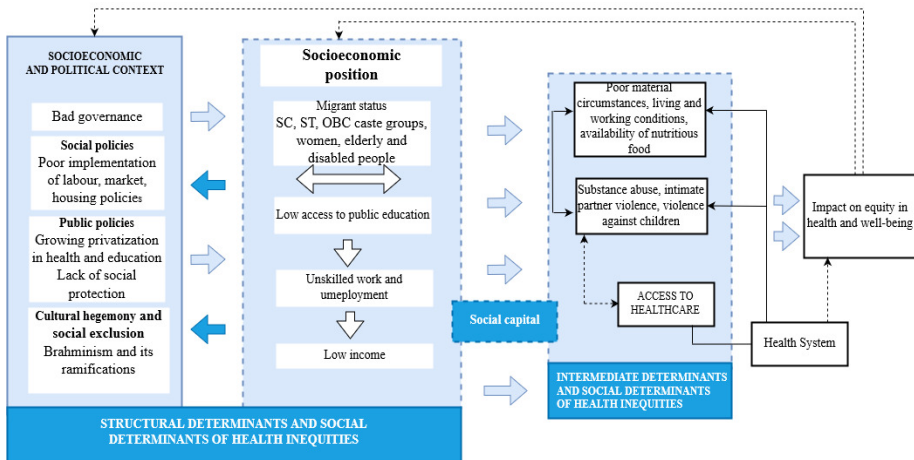


Figure 4: Mapping of Social Capital of study participants on CSDH framework

Conclusion

This study showed that access to public healthcare services is a challenge for internal migrants in Bilaspur. In this study we used the Commission of Social Determinants of Health framework (2007) and Bourdieu’s theory of social capital to conceptualize the role of social capital in access to healthcare. The conceptual and theoretical narrative that has emerged out of this study could be used to further assess the role of social capital in healthcare for marginalized communities. It could help us better understand the role of social capital in achieving equitable healthcare services in Indian settings. There were some limitations of the study, including a small size which makes it difficult to generalize the findings of the study.

A majority of migrants living in Atal Awaas have ‘low’ social capital. It can be said that ‘high’ social capital ensures better healthcare access. Traditionally, planning and resource allocation for healthcare are done on the basis of disaggregated data

(based on gender, age, class, caste, geographic location) but the way in which these identities, social and economic location play out remains unaccounted. Eventually, these factors impact healthcare access of individuals and communities and are left unaccounted. It is important to contextualize the concept of disenfranchisement on a micro-level (power dynamics between local and state governments, hegemonic structures vis-à-vis religion, caste, gender, etc.) and not just on a macro-level (macro-economic policies, social policies) with an aim to empower local communities. There are glaring gaps in provisioning of public health services, primarily healthcare related services that needs to be addressed with a decentralized approach towards healthcare services that are publicly funded and provided. Improved trust among the people of the community and better social cohesion would also improve healthcare access and utilization but not until the local stakeholders ensure appropriate adequate proper social and political representation of marginalized communities. This would in turn promote a sense of citizenship and facilitate social participation among the community. It is imperative that urban policies are framed and implemented in a manner that migrants are recognized as urban citizens and not just ‘migrant workers’ who are the backbone of the country’s economy. It is critical that migrants have the right to affirm their ‘right to city’ which includes provisioning of housing, healthcare, social protection (e.g. food security), civil and political rights.

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Declaration of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Tending Immanence, Transcending Sectarianism: Plane of Mixed Castes and Religions

Roshni Babu¹

Abstract

The attempt in this article is to extrapolate the notion of hybridity latent in B.R. Ambedkar's reflections on mixed castes, and outcastes, which subsequently leads to the causal link that he then derives gesticulating to social evils, namely, the origin of untouchability. Whether this embryonic notion of hybridity present in Ambedkar's work is amenable to the extrapolation of Dalit identity thought along the lines of Gilles Deleuze's notion of "immanent mixtures" is a thread that this study pursues. This certainly has broad implications for the prevalent notions of Dalit identity. This study ventures to read Ambedkar's work, *Riddles in Hinduism* (1987) alongside Deleuze, probing into the intuitive link between notions of hybridity and the plane of immanence.

Ideological distancing from predetermined categories of identity considered to be reductive in nature by the intellectuals of Indian philosophical thinking view such predetermined notions as facile conceptions that run short of representative qualities of complex and varied particularities of reasoned engagement with one's resources. Amartya Sen heralded this ideological position in his work titled, *The Argumentative Indian* (2006), in favor of heterodoxy and reasoned choice determining priorities between different identities. Lacunae regarding identification of resources prominent in Sen's work is pointed out by Jonardon Ganeri, who hails from the cluster of contemporary Sanskritists competent in philological and theoretical exegesis of "sastric" philosophical literature from the classical period of India.

This study is a close reading of Jonardon Ganeri's concept of 'resources within' which he develops in his work, *Identity as Reasoned Choice* (2012) to examine the potentiality of this concept to advance a theoretical framework that could counter a sectarian view of Indian tradition, as it is professed at

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the outset of his work. Sectarianism, which Ganeri opposes, identifies mysticism to be its chief trait which he shows to be selectively usurping only those resources grounded in Vedantic wisdom from India's past.

Keywords

Ambedkar, mixed-castes, half-castes, outcastes, Dalits, plane of immanence, Deleuze and Guattari, Ganeri, Indian philosophy, hybridity, post-colonialism

I

The attempt in this paper is to extrapolate the notion of hybridity latent in B.R. Ambedkar's reflections on mixed castes, and outcastes, which subsequently leads to the causal link that he then derives gesticulating to social evils, namely, the origin of untouchability. Whether this embryonic notion of hybridity present in Ambedkar's work is amenable to the extrapolation of Dalit identity thought along the lines of Gilles Deleuze's notion of "immanent mixtures" is a thread that this paper pursues. This certainly has broad implications for the prevalent notions of Dalit identity. Present paper ventures to read Ambedkar's work, *Riddles in Hinduism* (1987) alongside Deleuze probing into the intuitive link between notions of hybridity and the plane of immanence.

The notion of "hybridity" has a distinctive nexus to the advent of postcolonial reason in India. This article is an attempt to make the Deleuzian motif of "immanence" amenable to understanding postcolonial engagement with the notion of hybridity in general, and the idea of "Dalit" identity in particular in the background of Ambedkar's observations on the mixtures of castes and religious identities springing forth amidst the nominal Hindu identity. The task that calls for a new understanding of "hybridity" in the background of Dalit movements in postcolonial India is significantly different from its original locution as migratory form of selfhood in Homi Bhabha's work (Bhabha 1994). This study is an analysis of an argument that emerged into prominence in the post-independent Indian philosophical thinking which can be encapsulated in the phrase, 'one's identity is a work of reason' by which is meant that 'identity is something one actively and deliberately chooses' (Ganeri, 2012: viii). Emanating from the oeuvre of intellectuals of 'new reason' (Ganeri, 2011) this argument is developed in favor of 'multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-racial' societies. The anti-thesis of this argument is the notion of 'identity as something merely given by birth'. This article is a close reading of the interiors and exteriors of this "new reason". Signaling one's access to multiple sources of identity, the intellectuals of new reason resuscitate resources for the articulation of "new reason" from India. Jonardon Ganeri, prominent theorist of new reason, articulates 'identity as reasoned choice':

Using theory retrieved from India, my claim will be that identities are fashioned from exercises of reason as derivation from exemplary and paradigmatic cases, that it is procedures of adaptation and substitution from what I will call 'local norms' which is distinctive of the rational formation of an identity. (Ganeri, 2012: viii)

Ganeri identifies ‘adaptive model’ as a distinctive model popular among Indian rationalists (of classical Indian Philosophical tradition). Adaptive model of reason relies on ‘exemplary cases’ for its normative appeal. As exemplarity of such cases are context-specific, he designates these norms as “local”. One of the ostensible aims of intellectuals of new reason in developing Indian models of reasoning is to make it viable to platforms of ‘global governance and cosmopolitanism’ (Ganeri 2012: ix). Aakash Singh Rathore furnishes an incisive analysis of the agenda of ‘deparochialization’ that emerges within the framework of global justice debate that appears in the political theory developed by Amartya Sen in his work, *The Idea of Justice* (2009). However, Rathore’s study shows its inadequacy to address the quandaries of “social justice”, articulated as one among the key concerns by the Dalit Marxists (Rathore 2017; Cybil 2019). An idea of “overlapping consensus” for the peaceful resolution of conflicts is central to the theories of global justice (Ganeri 2012: ix). Conflict of interests observed to be occasioned by ‘diversity of religious affiliations in democratic secular governance’ is the theoretical premise of this global appeal for models of consensual reasoning disposed toward deparochializing global theoretical frameworks of reasoning.

Ideological distancing from predetermined categories of identity considered to be reductive in nature by the intellectuals of Indian philosophical thinking view such predetermined notions as facile conceptions that run short of representative qualities of complex and varied particularities of reasoned engagement with one’s resources. Amartya Sen heralded this ideological position in his work titled, *The Argumentative Indian*, in favor of heterodoxy and reasoned choice determining priorities between different identities (Sen, 2006). In particular, this position holds itself against the historical position that regards identity as a matter of discovery. As he explains, though choices are always made within certain constraints, the point at issue is whether ‘we have choices over alternative identities or combinations of identities’ (Sen, 2006: 351). In arguing for an inclusionary form of Indian identity, Sen’s deliberation is over the sectarian view of deriving an Indian identity from a Hindu identity (Sen, 2006: 352). Delving into the issue of congruence of Indian and Hindu identities tricks him into an evasive position forcing him to move in circles amidst traditions of heterodoxy latent to Hindu culture evidenced by the classical Sanskrit literature (Sen, 2006: 354). Tradition of heterodoxy is hailed for the sake of nurturing multiculturalism, and plurality of identities, features identified to foster cultures of secularism and democracy as opposed to the narrow sectarian imagination of a monocultural Hindu India. An effective challenge to the conferrals of identity as to “who you are” in contrast to “who you choose to be” can be discerned only when we identify the resources and methods of reasoning that could augment traditions of heterodoxy and modes of dissent from sediments of traditions (both orthodox and heterodox to invent newer forms of heterodoxies). Epistemological and ethical limitations concerning egalitarian notions of identity that would plague the notion of discovered identity would persist if we leave unattended varied modes of recognizing dissent that could support the future of heterodoxy. As we know, decisive choices involving adoption of newer definitions of identities are simultaneously departures or dissent from the conferred ones. Instances of dissent and argumentation with tradition such as we see in the works of B.R. Ambedkar whose decisive choices to depart from conferred identities undergo the agonizing process of inventing newer forms of egalitarian associations. A significant question is whether contemporary philosophical thinking in India could draw insights from the newly emergent identities such as “Dalits”, “Navayana-

Buddhists”, “Adi-Sudra”, or “Adi-Dravida” in such a manner as to radicalize ways of imagining egalitarian thought, its ethical underpinnings, and epistemological horizons? In particular, this article channels insights drawn from Ambedkar’s exposition of the “Riddles in Hinduism”, especially the one concerning “Origin of Mixed Castes” to advance prospective ways of envisioning “immanence”—as resourceful interjections into traditional resources—for the eradication of caste as a discriminative category which obstructs human potential to engage with oneself and others in meaningful and innovative modes of egalitarian associations (Ambedkar, 1987, Riddle No.18).

Lacunae regarding identification of resources prominent in Sen’s work is pointed out by Jonardon Ganeri, who hails from the cluster of contemporary Sanskritists competent in philological and theoretical exegesis of “sastric” philosophical literature from the classical period of India. Though Ganeri avowedly claims to be advancing the views of B.K. Matilal, his work can be counted among the group of post-independence Indian thinkers including Daya Krishna, and J.N. Mohanty (Ganeri, 2006: 12) who fight tooth and nail to revive logical, argumentative, and rational resources from the classical Sanskrit literature against the overshadowing impact of the image of mystical India propagated by the Indian intellectuals of the colonial period namely S. Radhakrishnan, Swami Vivekananda, Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, R.D. Ranade, A.C. Mukerji et al. (Bhushan & Garfield, 2011). Study of logic and grammar gains importance in the works of these intellectuals of “new reason”, from the period of post-independent India, who elevate these tools of reason to counter the devaluation of rational elements that arose as ‘a product of the colonized Indian intellectual struggle for an indigenous, non-European identity’ during the Indian nationalist movement (Ganeri, 2006: 2-3; 2016: 248-49). Their attempt to rediscover from India’s past resources counterpoising the spiritual mission of the nationalist period which is perceived to have selectively usurped from India’s past resources that confronted colonial intrusion, find them fashioning themselves as intellectuals of “new reason” or advocates who advance the argumentative tradition of “Navya-Nyaya” (Ganeri, 2006: 13). The argument for the promulgation of India’s logical and grammatical resources from the past implies a two-pronged reasoning. One that exposes the spiritual renaissance which took place during the colonial period as a selective assortment of resources from the past to suit the purpose at hand, or a non-authentic “return to the source”, and second that the rediscovery of native-culture by neo-Hindu movement was an imposition upon an emergent modernity that was underway thriving on the logical tradition of Navya-Nyaya (Ganeri, 2006: 13) from about the medieval period in India. According to Ganeri, the impact of colonialism and the nativist response it triggered as manifested in the nationalist period jeopardized the emergent modernity that was otherwise earning critical acclaim from European logicians such as H.T. Colebrooke, De Morgan, George Boole, and Sir William Hamilton, et al. prior to this (Ganeri, 2006: 3-4).

Marshalling his expertise in the logical and grammatical literature from the classical “sastric” or theoretically systematized schools of philosophy, Ganeri’s critical appropriation of Sen’s work makes a decisive shift from Sen’s focus on political figures to Ganeri’s emphasis on intellectual figures who are deemed ‘to have provided India with its theoretical resources’ (Ganeri, 2006: 3). Identifying Sen’s position to be upholding ‘liberal secularism’ invested in examining the ‘reach of reason’ as opposed to excavating the ‘resources of reason’, Ganeri turns his attention to the classical Sanskrit literature in Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism (Ganeri, 2006: 4-6).

This study is a close reading of Jonardon Ganeri's concept of 'resources within' which he develops in his work, *Identity as Reasoned Choice* (2012) to examine the potentiality of this concept so as to advance a theoretical framework that could counter a sectarian view of Indian tradition, as it is professed at the outset of his work. Sectarianism, which Ganeri opposes, identifies mysticism to be its chief trait which he shows to be selectively usurping only those resources grounded in Vedantic wisdom from India's past (Ganeri, 2016: 248–249). Counter-positioning himself on the side of reason, Ganeri's work undertakes the task of detailing resources of reason from the classical Indian philosophical theories. This argumentative position which apprehends 'reason as resources', draws out its boundaries as 'resources within', whose supportive axis is constituted by the idea of 'dissent within' Hinduism, within Islam, within Christianity, and so on, thus essentializing its bounds that define the confines of "within". One of the pivotal insights that spiraled into view through Ambedkar's radical readings of Hindu-Vedic scriptures overwrite the assumed integrity of Hindu beliefs and allied practices in sustaining a unity analogous to that of other major and minor religious beliefs surrounding Christianity, Sikhism, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, etc. His critical reading of Vedic and Puranic corpus, though was impelled by the plight of untouchable communities, was equally a compelling reading unveiling the genetic code of mystical beliefs and spiritual creeds assembled under the appellation of Hinduism as essentially inseparable from its "mixtural" compounds emanating from its susceptibility to blend with other religious beliefs and systems, thus assuming the guise of resultant spiritual practices of cults. The Hinduism which Ambedkar unveils here, though is not necessarily of parasitic nature, 'is a complex congeries of creeds and doctrines that has no definite creed' (Ambedkar, 1987: Riddle No. 1: 14–15). In the Introductory chapter of *Riddles in Hinduism* itself he proclaims the objective of this work to be one of challenging the "Sanatan" view of Hindu civilization, a static view of Hindu religion propagated by European scholars and Brahmanic theology (Ambedkar, 1987: Riddle No. 1: 5). Against such a monocultural and static view of Hindu society Ambedkar summons the ground level or bottom-up view of Hindu belief systems emanating out of "Pir cults" (Ambedkar, 1987: Riddle No.1: 5–15). Hence Ambedkar's incisive scrutiny of Hindu scriptures and religious creeds, while on the one hand becomes a scathing attack on Brahmanic theology, on the other hand, is a probing inquiry on the future of minor religiosities as the locus of Hindu civilization. What emerges as a result of this inquiry is certainly a cross-sectional view of Hindu civilization upheld, practiced and propagated by the non-Brahmanic Hindu masses, the untouchables, and the progenies of mixed castes and religions. Hindu customs and ceremonials unveiled by this cross-sectional plane of communities of mixed origin such as Malkanas, and Matia Kunbis, Gods and Goddesses of multivalent religious fusions such as Goddess Mant Mauli, Pirana Saint Imam Shah, and Sakhi Sarwar shows that 'the beliefs of persons who are by all admitted to be Hindus often differ more widely from each other than the perceived contrast from the communities of Christians and Muhammadans' (Ambedkar, 1987: Riddle No.1: 13-14). The much-celebrated secular view of diversity gets a new verve unparalleled in its liberal versions at the hands of Ambedkar. The argument of this article terms this cross-sectionality that is coming into view as an "immanent hybridity", which opens up the "plane of immanence" onto an anticipatory scale in futuristic frame which widens the scope of imagining an anterior-hybrid religiosity of outcastes of Hinduism as an ever expanding heterodox religion of mixtures, inviting newer egalitarian dimensions at every turn.

On a comparative axis, the present study pinpoints the loopholes lurking within the counter-sectarian approach expounded by Ganeri which fails to institute a “plane of immanence”. Institution of a plane of immanence is crucial to developing a counter-sectarian view, it is argued, since only a plane of immanence can enunciate a plane of ‘immersion’ in our contemporary debates, so as to anticipate an open-ended future of events that will populate this plane. In this respect, it is crucial to differentiate the conceptual plane defining the temporal plane of our present from the plane of immanence which lays out the plane of anticipation for the future. The fact that effective anchoring in one’s present defining its problematic elements of enunciation is crucial for articulating the reflective axis of philosophical thinking is overlooked in Ganeri’s formulation. Situated within the intricacies of constituting a plane of immanence cutting across the contentiously inebriated and politically friable terrain of Hindu canon and ethics, we will make an attempt to pitch the plane of immanence on the unproblematized terrain of mixed castes and half-castes in religious identities. The theoretical extrapolation of the concept of immanence inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s, *What is Philosophy?* (2003), coupled with insights from B.R. Ambedkar’s study, this article engages with the conceptual issues contained in conflating the paradoxical phrase ‘dissent within’, and apparently innocuous phrase ‘resources within’.

II

Plane of immanence and creation of concepts

Philosophical concepts are created, or rather constructed out of events that condition our pasts and presents. Nonetheless, ‘philosophical constructivism’, Deleuze and Guattari uphold, ‘has two qualitatively different complementary aspects: creation of concepts and laying out of a plane’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 36). Since concepts are conditioned by our present, and our past, the anticipation for the future that ought to be contained by the creative process can be laid out only by the constitution of a “plane of immanence”.

Concepts are events, but the plane is the horizon of events, the reservoir or reserve of purely conceptual events: not the relative horizon that functions as a limit, which changes with an observer and encloses observable states of affairs, but the absolute horizon, independent of any observer, which makes the event as concept independent of a visible state of affairs in which it is brought about. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 36)

In order for the plane of immanence to be independent of the creator (creator’s present) of the concept, in order to take on the form of anticipation, the plane ought to anticipate a future of events, wherein such anticipation is relatively free of determination emanating in the present. In this sense, ‘concepts and plane are strictly correlative’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 35). In Ganeri, the notion of ‘resources within’ constitutes the constructive plane of immanence for the creative construction of concepts from the classical works of Hindu-Vedic canon. For those concepts to be able to reinvigorate a future, they are to be reinvented on a new plane of immanence. The plane on which they were laid out in the Vedic period no longer makes sense to us, for which reason it demands a blind faith in tradition to be the only direction in which

its plane of immanence can be laid out. By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari underscore the significance of conceiving the plane of immanence as ‘prephilosophical’ as the ‘foundation on which philosophy creates its concepts’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 40–41). As a foundational plane, they enlist its features. While it is instituted in order to discern a direction in thinking, this plane in itself is not a concept. Rather the plane only has an ‘intuitive’ dimension, whereas concepts are created on this plane as ‘intensions’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 40–41). This intuitive plane is understood as ‘prephilosophical’ in the sense that its commitment towards ‘nonphilosophy’ is highlighted as that which sets up the internal conditions of its enunciation.

The nonphilosophical is perhaps closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself, and this means that philosophy cannot be content to be understood only philosophically or conceptually, but is addressed essentially to non-philosophers as well. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 41).

One of the inevitable features of ‘this constant relationship with nonphilosophy’, we contend, is that it is the institution of the plane of immanence that secures its anticipatory plane of openness to the other. In this respect, as Deleuze and Guattari caution, one cannot conceive the plane of immanence as immanent ‘to’ something because ‘whenever immanence is interpreted as immanent to Something, we can be sure that this Something reintroduces the transcendent’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 44–45). This is especially the case with respect to religious philosophy, or notions that have a ring of such an aura as is the case with ‘faith values’, ‘Vedic traditions’, ‘Hindu canon’, etc. The ideals prescribed by these notions will predetermine the direction of the discourse, in the form of *regulative ideals*. In order to arrest or at best escape the eruptions of transcendent onto the plane of immanence, this plane ought to be instituted on an ‘infinite movement’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 47–49). In philosophical terms this infinite can be marked only by ‘the nontought within thought’ as ‘that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003: 59–60). It is in this sense that the notion of “mixtures”, which in Ambedkar’s enunciation assume the form of mixed castes and half-castes of religions, ought to be pitched as the plane of immanence, whereby every new understanding of one’s identity in relation to Indian pasts conditioned by classical Vedic and non-Vedic scriptures, and classical and non-classical philosophical systems are pitched on a forward movement encompassing the mixtures that condition our presents and which in turn anticipates our future *becomings* (Deshpande 2013).² The newly emergent communities who firmly believe in their alienation from traditional Hindu caste structures, and those who no longer want to revert or resort to the foregone privileges of that system are stranded by a lack of vision that could propel this sense of loss or alienation into a ‘true

²In a way, a cue for imagining a “caste-universal” that rides on the spirit of “annihilation of caste” as an alibi for secularism is contained in the observation Deshpande makes marking the advent of newly emergent communities of ‘strangers’ who ‘begin to believe in their castelessness’.

This is the generation that is (generally speaking) distanced from the process of the conversion of traditional caste capital into secular modern casteless capital that previous generations effected. It is objectively true that in the life-experience of such individuals – who, it must not be forgotten, may still constitute a minority within their own caste-group – caste-qua-caste plays no direct role, or only a minor one... It is the double coincidence of the maturation of a sense of castelessness and the arrival of caste-marked strangers in hitherto uppercaste social milieu that confirms and amplifies this response. (Deshpande, 2013: 39)

universal'. It is pertinent that we give body and volume to this universal driven by the spirit of Dalit movements in order to add substance to the otherwise thin modular notion of secularism.

Only a plane of immanence conceptualized on the grounds of mixtures can anticipate a future population of multicultural India is evident from why a reappraisal of religious or caste-based identity has to undergo and map its own journey of "reformation" before it could properly rechristen itself as "modern" (Bairy 2010).³ Notwithstanding the fact that the "secular" domain houses those who are unmarked by their caste-identity as a matter of privilege, also accommodates those who take refuge under this category despite being trapped within the caste-structure, and those who choose to be under this category as a matter of defiance, or in disguise, or in denial of being marked by a caste-identity, thus masking a broad spectrum of sentiments. This category can be transformed into a conceptual universal anticipating a future population of mixtures only when it could potentially be populated by mixtures who distance themselves from privileges of caste structure. It is in this sense that Ambedkar's reading of *Manusmriti*, in *Riddle No.18*, discussing the 'origin of mixed castes' anticipates the emergence of Dalits as a mixture of broken caste subjectivities, thus opening up the resourcefulness of such radical readings of traditions. The fact that Ambedkar comes across this fragment in *Manusmriti*, where Manu struggles with his census-survey to concur, on the one hand, with what goes on at the ground level of religious customs and practices of his times, and on the other hand, struggles to defer the completion of this survey in fear of political censure that might ensue from speaking the truth, is in itself a remarkable vision opened up by the *plane of immanence* laid out on a plane of "dissent from" classical Hinduism re-discovered in the colonial period, through concomitant appraisals by the colonial historians, Indologists, Orientalists et al., at times in service of colonial administration and governance (Dirks, 2008). For, it imparts new meaning to these ancient texts as "resources", in such a way as to step aside onto its borderlines to mark his "dissent from" it. It is true that Ambedkar is rather paying obeisance to a living tradition of dissent, whose predecessors go back in time to the time of Buddha and Sangha, Kabir, Phule, and Periyar among others (Omvedt, 2008). In this sense, his dissent anticipates newer departures from the so-called Vedic and anti-Vedic traditions of Indian pasts by finding new possibilities within its elisions. The assent-worthiness of his resourceful reading is earmarked by his shrewd labelling of Manu's list as 'perfunctory' rather than "defunct".

Repositioning Ambedkar's critical reading of Vedic corpus as resources impinges on our understanding of sectarianism. How does one define sectarianism, and how does one counterpoise oneself as anti-sectarian is an intriguing question. Ganeri signals admission of dissenting voices into one's fold as a counter-measure by which

³Inventive work done by Ramesh Bairy in this regard illuminates the trajectories of self-fashioning the figure of Brahmin had to undergo in order to reinvent themselves as "modern". His point of departure is from the straw figure of Brahmin, pointing at the paucity of descriptive accounts of its 'presents'. The fact that a work that attempts to understand the real figure of Brahmin had to begin in bafflement, at its loss of resemblance in the available accounts, other than as a staple form of 'an evaluative principle overdetermined by its normativity', rather than 'as a reference to real people' (292) shows that the reappraisal of this 'absent figure of Brahmin from the present of caste' is invariably pitched on a plane of immanence, as an attempt to encompass its mediated presents and its ambivalent mixtures; see Ramesh Bairy T.S., *Being Brahmin, Being Modern*, 2010.

we could rein in sectarianism (Ganeri, 2012: 1). In this framework, sectarianism is deemed to carry some kind of kinship or family resemblance with the so-called “tradition” and values associated with “faith”, which is upheld in opposition to the idea of “dissent” which is perceived to be anchored on argument or reasoning. Juxtaposed to this, Ganeri’s project develops a framework of reasoning dispelling the dichotomy between faithfulness to tradition, and openness to admission of dissent which rides on secular values:

... it is a mistake to speak of a conflict between ‘secular values’ and ‘faith values’, as if a choice has to be made between the two, for the point is to see how any faith can sustain secular principles in activities of public reasoning, equipping its adherents the resources needed to participate in deliberative democratic procedures. (Ganeri, 2012: 7).

Ganeri’s anti-sectarian framework is pitched on two nodal points: (1) a project bent on appropriating ‘the texts of traditional Hinduism’ into the fold of resources for secular reasoning; (2) a project of ‘retrieval’ of Hindu religious resources, documenting its ‘hidden richness and flexibility in the resources they sustain’:

To be sure, the texts of traditional Hinduism are not without their well-documented share of sectarian hyperbole, but closer inspection reveals a hidden richness and flexibility in the resources of reason they sustain. This process of retrieval of a religious culture’s hidden resources is essential, I have argued, in confronting fundamentalist and dogmatic appropriations of the culture, and equally essential in countering the false claim that only with a repudiation of religious affiliation is one entitled to enter the public space of reasons of secular democratic dialogue. (Ganeri, 2012: 89)

Although theoretical and conceptual issues surrounding the notion of secular democracy peculiar to the Indian situation is not one among the issues this article takes up for discussion, in principle we would agree with Ganeri’s position regarding secular democratic dialogue. Of course, one need not repudiate one’s religious affiliation to enter this public space of reason, if by one’s religious affiliation one also implies a persistent re-evaluation of values accrued to its faith. In fact this view currently carries wider currency in the Indian scenario, though equally debated, propelling one to examine its theoretical pillars of strengths and weaknesses.⁴ This theoretical project of grounding secular discourse on rational resources of religion, assumes a procedure of ‘retrieval’ of Hindu religious resources, for the cause of securing secular rational discourse in Ganeri. Burdened by the task of eliminating the fundamentalist and dogmatic aspects of religious dust that fell upon the rational resources, he earmarks ‘accommodation of dissent’, to be one of the criteria that showcases a resource’s secular potential. How coherent is such an accommodation of dissent for his project of retrieval of ‘resources within’ is the question.

Ganeri’s discussion in this work is tailored as an inventory of resources from India’s past for the fashioning of identities in a multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-

⁴Discussing the contextual peculiarities of Indian secularism, Rajeev Bhargava introduces the concept of ‘principled distance’ to illuminate upon its contextual nature which distinguishes it from its Western counterparts (85–118); whereas Anand Teltumbde contends this very postulate which claims distinctness to Indian secularism (166–193); see *Secularism Under Siege* (2016).

cultural modern societies. Need for such an inventory is grounded on the justification that identity is no longer viewed in the secular discourse as ‘given by birth’, rather must be thought of as something which we ‘actively and deliberately choose’. Admittedly Ganeri appropriates Sen’s idea that ‘reason is before identity’, and hence, according to them, ‘neither religion, nor community, nor tradition imposes upon us an identity fixed in advance’ (Ganeri, 2012: 2). Needless to say, this notion of identity when juxtaposed with contemporary identity politics, propelled by the politicization of aspects accrued to your identity by birth, as exemplified by the Dalit movement and gender politics, appears thin and formalistic. The concept of identity even when conceived in terms of becoming, exercising one’s choice, ‘fashioned from exercises of reason’, from the available resources ‘retrieved from India’, presupposes freedom, which in other words mean “agency”. A formalistic notion of freedom is not equipped with the tools to engage meaningfully with historically contended forms of *becomings*. Whether one’s religious or communitarian affiliations are of significance or not cannot be determined in advance without taking into account historically acquired agency formations which directly impinge upon one’s literary, political, or intellectual commitments. Viewed from the vantage point of reform movements which channelized the Indian freedom struggle, one gets a more intricate understanding of channels of freedom. Exemplary in this regard is Ambedkar’s dilemma around “conversion” to Buddhism, or what may be better termed as invention of “Navayana Buddhism”—occasioned by his awareness that communitarian mobilization has a farther reach than what has been imagined by liberal humanism. Part and parcel of this political insight was also deliberations on ‘the historical moment of a decision unto a new name and the conditions that will make the name work’ which held him back from seeking emancipation through conversion until the very last (Choudhury, 2018: 87-113; Gokhale, 2021).

Assuming the role of intellectual who has expertise in the exegetical understanding of classical Sanskrit theoretical or “sastric” resources, Ganeri devises his task to be that of presenting choices from India’s classical past. Though admittedly one’s identity is not ‘something merely given by birth’, encumbering modalities of negotiations one engages with in order to shrug off birth-based markers of caste from impinging one’s freedom is a politically inebriated question around identity formations in India (Guru and Sarukkai, 2019). It follows then that it is this existentially accrued form of identities such as caste, race, ethnicity, gender, etc., that acts as a ground from which one swivels into a reflective stance. Hence, merely discounting these existential forms of identity given by birth from the corpus of creative deliberative choices will not suffice. The brunt of the caste system, and so does all the rest of social evils, is borne by those who reel beneath its hierarchical structures as differential minorities. Someone born into one of these castes will look for resources of reason that purges their suffering from the so-called Hindu canon.⁵

Ganeri’s account subtracts aspects of identity one biologically inherits by shedding its weight onto a dissociable division of identity that distinguishes between the subjective and objective aspects which division he borrows from Akeel Bilgrami (Ganeri, 2013: 2). This dissociable notion of identity allows him to bracket the objective (biological) aspect from consideration. As we know, Dalit voice, especially

⁵Such an introspective inquiry by Ambedkar is entitled, *Riddles in Hinduism*, and at best by the titles, “The Difficulty of Knowing why one is a Hindu?” and “Manu’s madness or the Brahmanic explanation of the origin of the mixed castes”; see *B.R. Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Volume 4* (1987).

in the works of Ambedkar, takes issue with the Vedic corpus as a site which undercuts objective identity. Needless to say, occlusion of objective aspects of identity from consideration has its obvious pitfalls—the resources for rational, democratic, secular discourse ostensibly extracted from the classical Indian past illusorily appear too secure and serviceable for the present.

III

Resources within?

The project intended on the expansion of the ‘internal’ resources of Indian theory for the sake of its development (Ganeri, 2012: ix), as expounded by Ganeri fails to define its contours of “internality” and that of “externality” of resources to be retrieved from India’s past. Ganeri’s project takes “internality” as a given, as transparent as the “generality” of privileged caste subjectivities, where one is at convenience to forget about the lens which enables one’s view.⁶ The other extreme is that of outcastes or mixed castes, as explicated by Ambedkar, whereby one is at a loss to locate one’s identity within the caste structure one is seemingly born into. Obtuse invisibility of one’s identity within the Vedic scriptures which are otherwise upheld as manuals registering genealogies of castes legitimizing its social organizational role, on the one hand, and finding oneself trapped within it on the other, makes it imperative for the outcastes to make use of rational resources at one’s disposal to articulate one’s sense of loss. Today democratic discourse is fraught with tensions concerning resources for an affirmation of identity than otherwise. Given this murky situation surrounding one’s claim on human rights, the identity one is born with appears to be disposable only to those who have negotiable terms within the processes of their advancement in rational discourse.⁷

While Ganeri places the creative element to be of central importance to philosophical thinking, he reigns in this aspect within the bounds of the notion of ‘resources within’, which forecloses its creative dimension to a limited set of resources, than opening it onto a limitless set of possibilities. Within such a framework, the creative aspect has to either ‘adapt’ itself to the requirement of past cultures (Ganeri, 2012: ix), or, ‘re-appropriate’ the ancient tradition (Ganeri, 2012: x), within the ‘permitted’ limits of the “sastric” canons of classical India (Ganeri, 2012: 11), thus, attenuating its creative process. Citing John Newman, Ganeri provides a criterion to ‘distinguish development and corruption within a tradition’.

⁶The question is, as Satish Deshpande quite insightfully asks, when does the identity into which one is born becomes irrelevant or invisible that we could dismiss it while discussing a matter such as identity formation grounded in resources of reason from India’s past (32)? And for those who identifies with the caste structure, being inexplicably at the lower rungs of it in a perennial structure, ‘caste appears to be the only available resource with which to try and improve the life-chances in a game where the playing field is far from level’ (32); see Satish Deshpande, “Caste and Castlessness”, 2013.

⁷This is partly because the rational discourse itself takes on the garb of ‘dominant common sense’ articulating the needs of ‘nation building’, or the task of ‘modernizing our great and ancient tradition’ (33). In this regard, the categories of identities that are purportedly ‘unmarked’ are disguised universals ‘invested with power, and their transparent invisibility is a sign of privilege’ (38); see Satish Deshpande, “Caste and Castelessness”, 2013.

Newman shows that the success of a tradition is related to its ability to assimilate new data, while conserving its past principles and achievements, and also to its ability to develop complex sequences of thought and practice while anticipating future developments. (Ganeri, 2012: 196).

Further, underscoring the features of genuine development, he remarks,

If the genuine development of a tradition consists in the ‘perfection’ of its underlying idea and its principles, and if the possibility of such a perfection has existed from the first, then we might well expect to find...anticipations of such later developments in the earlier strata of the tradition. On the other hand, of a shift in the tradition which is not a fulfilment of its underlying idea, there will be no antecedent anticipation. (Ganeri, 2012: 197).

This idea of ‘immersion’ in one’s past, as we can see, is unqualifiedly tilted or weighed down by the past, and hence, it falls short in weightage in its correlative notion of ‘anticipation of the new’. Immersing oneself in the past with a sole criterion of ‘perfection’ without a commitment towards one’s own present hollows out the criteria for recognition of newness, leaving the notion an easy prey to any dogmatic use, or remaining as mere rhetoric at its best. Reducing a ‘situated interpreter’s’ (Ganeri, 2012: 226) contemporaneity to a strawman figure of secular-democratic discourse without citing the particularities of this discourse, or particular situations encountered by this interpreter is foreboded by the removal of objective aspects of identity from discussion. Complicit to this strawman figure of contemporaneity is how this notion of immersion and situatedness dissolves the idea of dissent from informing interpreter’s present.

In this regard, a subtle distinction ought to be made between the ‘recovery of theory’ and generation of theory (Ganeri, 2012: 9). While Ganeri’s own work is a concrete example of generation of theory, his *plane of immanence* is strictly limited to ‘recovery’ from a pre-existent tradition from a remote past. Since his commitment whole-heartedly relies on the ‘recovery’ part, the *plane of immanence* is not constituted by detailing the present context of enunciation.

On what grounds can we exclude the efficacy of a mode of reasoning which is modelled on an “exit”, “dissent from” than “within”? Though Ganeri rightly discerns the significance of acts of dissent for the constitution of argumentative reasoning, he sidesteps his own postulate when he does not provide an adequate definition of dissent. Ambedkar’s dissent being one of the paradigmatic cases of dissent in recent history, an account that purportedly honors dissent cannot sidestep similar instances for whatsoever reason unless the plane of enunciation of resources is laid out as a “limited” one (Choudhury, 2019)⁸.

⁸Probing into the constructive plane that lays out the ‘common terrain’ of comparable events of politics, Soumyabrata Choudhury, argues that it should be pitched on the articulation of ‘historicity of the new’, on the horizon of ‘raw time of a new event of politics’, rather than upon the historical time of the old regime (47). The historicity of the new is not to be articulated as a predetermined programme unfolding the ‘analogical productivity of truth’, but rather ought to be conceived as differential thinking meant to enunciate the ‘imperative of an incomparable’ (54). This paper enunciates the incomparable event of Mahad Satyagraha that erupts onto the comparable plane of egalitarian politics; see Soumyabrata Choudhury, “Ambedkar and other immortals”, 2019.

As a model of ‘internal dissent’ Ganeri cites a skeptical statement from Nyaya-sutra which argues that ‘the Vedas are verifiably mistaken, internally inconsistent, and pointlessly repetitious’. The said example renders Vedic utterances as ‘speech acts resembling the ramblings of a drunkard which carry no epistemological authority’ (Ganeri, 2012:12). Ganeri cites this instance of dissent as exemplary of religious tolerance of Hinduism. However, the pertinent point is whether one should differentiate between the said statement found in the Nyaya-sutra from a similar statement made by Ambedkar, joining the voices of Carvaka, Brahaspati and a whole host of others whom he jointly addresses as ‘indigenous’ as opposed to Hindu (Ambedkar, 1987: 39).⁹

While there are several ways in which one discerns the generality of a concept which we may gradually render as universal, repetition is one of them. Advancing his concept of difference, distinguishing it from repeated instances, in his seminal work, *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze opens a register for recording the particularities of “difference”. According to Deleuze, “repetition” is often a misunderstood feature denied its own identity. Ganeri’s identification of “dissent” as a characteristic feature that adds assent-worthiness to the Hindu canon is an example which denies singularity to dissent. As a result his account cannot pay heed to the dissent embodied by Ambedkar’s work, *Riddles in Hinduism*. When we subsume repeated instances under generality, we deem those instances to be resembling each other, and hence, substitutable or exchangeable under a universal. Repetition assumes a character of its own without being dependent on generality in Deleuze’s conceptualization where ‘repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities’ (Deleuze, 1994:1; Patton, 2000).

The character of repetition that lends itself to singularity is earmarked by the non-repetitive aspects of festivals, celebrations, commemorations, lyrical repetition of words in a poem, etc. Within the schema of a canon or law, repetition is always recognized under two kinds of generality—perfection and integration (Deleuze, 1994: 5). In Ganeri we see the repeated instances of dissent being integrated into the notion of ‘resources within’ under the guise of ‘perfecting’ resources of reason immanent to the classical Vedic-Hindu canon.

IV

Dissent from the classical Hindu corpus, assent to the post post-colonial present

Ambedkar’s rejoinder to the voice of dissent augurs the post post-colonial milieu of Indian philosophical thinking with its poignant departure from the discourse centered on East-West binary. It is for this precise reason that Ambedkar’s departure is markedly post post-colonial in its double bind—first, it is not a retort to the European derision of Indian past, and thus departs from the milieu of East-West binary, the mode in which Indian philosophical dissent pivoted during the colonial period; and second, it reveals a cross-sectional view of a social phenomenon of “mixtures” which manifests itself as “the pre-philosophical plane of immanence”. In particular, it is this second point of departure that poises him as a visionary of post-colonial thinking pointing towards its future.

⁹See B.R. Ambedkar, “Riddle No.6”, *Writings and Speeches, Vol.4*, 1987.

Ambedkar's dissent from the Vedic-Hindu canon is not a negation of the Vedic pasts, rather it emerges from a sense of loss of meaning or relevance, which draws our attention to the fragmentary *Manusmriti* where Manu leaves the constitutive list of mixed-castes incomplete.¹⁰ Highlighting the incongruities in the list along with its incompleteness, Ambedkar insinuates how Manu's own account anticipates the looming threat of mixed-castes, whose formidable reality would make the ill-conceived Varna-system obsolete. Manu's effort to arrest the degeneration of Varna-system forebodes his step to schematize and discriminate between *anuloma* and *pratiloma* mixtures between castes, decrying the latter as degenerative (Chaudhuri, 2018).

By contrast, Ganeri's idea of 'dissent from within' is leveraged on the concept of immanence as a "limit", which is akin to Kantian idea of immanence whose lynchpin is the limit to understanding or knowledge (Smith, 2012). Kant disqualified the domain that goes outside the bounds of understanding as transcendent or dogmatic, thus reigning in the quest. Likewise, by limiting the bounds of dissent to Hindu corpus, Ganeri discounts a wide range of dialogues around argumentative dissent that ensues from the contemporary living traditions of religious practices. Among these there are practices which happen to be an offshoot of mixtures which has acquired a monstrous proportion when compared to the clean hierarchized division of caste system rediscovered by the colonial re-invention of Vedic India (Ramaswamy, 2014). In addition there are religious mixtures of Hindus with Muslims and Christians and a whole host of other religious faiths as manifest in their local variations in practices of faith.¹¹ These phenomenon of "mixtures" call for admission of discontinuities into the notion of 'within (Hindu-Vedic corpus)'. Mixed castes, half-castes, outcasts and untouchables have fallen apart from the classical Hindu canon in a moral and spiritual sense to the point of misrecognition (Manoj, 2021). The recognition of this cross-section of society, this transversal view that Ambedkar brings into focus is the distinctive post-colonial paradigm of dissent.

What we often fail to notice is the importance of milieu that is constituted by a confluence of contingent living conditions, be it political, cultural, social, scientific, etc. Ambedkar's dissent is a manifestation of a longer battle which has been brewing for centuries emerging as "Dalit milieu" commanding assent-worthiness whereby adjoining communities constituting the least privileged in the caste system, and emergent fragmented communities, communities of mixed castes and half-castes, and half-religious minorities, communities who have been looking for a more inclusive secular platform, all find themselves clamoring to mobilize this canon under various names, whereby one of the more encompassing canopies of becoming assumes the form of becoming "Dalit". In this respect, assent and dissent are relative terms, while Ganeri's own account is an articulation of assent worthiness of classical Vedic corpus, which avowedly dissents from the canon of Enlightenment reason earmarked as the canon of Western modernity, by contrast, the Dalit milieu dissents from the classical Vedic canon harboring faith in a thinner version of Enlightenment. What it calls for is certainly a heterodox view of resources of reason, but by redefining Indian pasts.

¹⁰See B.R. Ambedkar, "Riddle No.4", *Writings and Speeches, Vol.4*, 1987.

¹¹See B.R. Ambedkar, Riddle No.1, *Writings and Speeches, Vol.4*, 1987.

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Ari Varutada

Chandni Girija¹

Where did my idea originate?
I mentally knock my forehead

Hm,

Out wafts a faint memory

A childhood one

Me in *taravadu*

There's *kattanchaaya* in a steel glass
And there's it in a flat-edged steel bowl:
ari varutada!

We faced a rare situation

No snacks to nibble with tea

Not that it hadn't happened before

Having set personal records

In finishing great amounts of snacks

A 'justified' indulgence for my scholarly full-nighters

Often selfishly finishing whole packets

Not keeping a single bite for *Amma*

No, today with the fridge looking solemnly half-empty

And the dining table spick-and-span

Today held no possibility

Of heading to the local store

To stave off the insistent hankering

No, today held no such possibility

Today and tomorrow

And the coming few weeks

That is when I suggested to *Amma*,

“Let us fry raw rice”

She was pleasantly surprised

Taken aback simultaneously—

By the *grihanathan's* resourcefulness

And in the falling to humility in the resourcefulness

Maaman had called today

And asked to speak to me—

Another rare occurrence

His tone was unhindered today

Unhindered by time and concerns of time—

A rare occurrence third

I told we had had *ari varutada*

He laughed out loudly.

It's like a cracker bursting

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A single cracker bursting
 Bursting suddenly—
 This particular laugh of his
 Carrying through
 A thorough enjoyment of the subject of humour
 I remembered a photo from his wedding album
 Him in his white shirt
 His head thrown back in this same laughter.
 On the phone,
 I could imagine the glow on *Maaman's* face

Today's news froze me
 Numbing me for moments
 Not the rising Corona deaths
 But two reports, two images:
 Migrant labourers hosed with disinfectant
 And six *Musahar* children eating grass
 The children's image hit me harder
 But I did wonder—
 How did the photograph occur?
 At the very exact moment?
 Reports challenged the veracity of this one
 The grass in actuality argued to be *akhri daal*
 Another sensationalising report?
 At the unabashed cost of a community's dignity
 No other children but *Musahar*
 And nothing else but grass!!

But why did that image hit me harder?
 Yes, another memory wafted out
 Memory of a memory narrated
Acchan in his childhood
 A hungry day
 No one at home
 And nothing at home
 So forsaken by hunger
 That he marched to the *pinakku* sack
 And had a fistful

I do not doubt the veracity of this event
 For in this generational memory I hold
 I can feel *Acchan's* shame
 And see the jest in others' eyes
 As they came to know what the boy had done
 The jest in *Amma's* eyes as she narrated the memory to me

The jest in *Maaman's* voice as he heard of today's *ari varutadu*

This jest,
 I know its exact point of pleasure
 It is of crossing the line
 It is of making it across
 It is of forgetting the journey made
 It is of the safe vantage point
 That allows a view below
 It is of my ability
 To march down the local store
 Whenever I hanker for a packet of *Kurkure*
 It is of the ability of the reporter
 To make a 'report' on the *Musahar* children
 It is of the ghastly shock,
 The readers of this report feel
 The ability of these readers to feel the ghastly shock
 Their affordability of guilt
 My affordability of guilt

But in this memory
 I feel no linearity of shame
 Continuing in me
 The 30-year old me, however,
 Feels a strange hankering loss
 I wish I could go back to that moment
 The moment little *Acchan* put the fistful in his mouth
 And the shame crept upon his face
 I wish I could run to him
 A little me
 In my white *petticoat*
 And white-ribboned pig-tails
 I wish I could run to him
 And put my little hand on his cheek
 And say, "It's nothing to be ashamed of."
 And then sit with him
 Our legs bobbing down the porch
 A flat-edged steel bowl between us
 Happily sharing the *ari varutadu*.

-X-X-X-

Ari Varutada: Fried raw rice, used to be consumed as a snack
 Taravadu: Ancestral house
 Kattanchaaya: Black tea
 Amma: Mother

Grihanathan: Head of household

Maaman: Maternal uncle

Musahar: A Dalit community belonging to the eastern Indian Gangetic plain

Akhri dal: A type of lentil that can be eaten raw

Acchan: Father

Pinakku: Cow fodder

Kurkure: Cornpuffs mass-produced by PepsiCo

Petticoat: Here, a white pinafore-like garment worn by girls, mostly underneath frocks

"प्रतिबिम्ब"

Gaurav J. Pathania¹

पैनी दृष्टि से देखो
या आँखें फाड़कर
फिर भी आसमान में सिर्फ दो ही तरह के बादल दिखाई देते हैं
एक:
हाथी की तरह विशालकाय लेकिन टुकड़ों में बँटे
आसमान के कोने में दुबके हुए से, छितरे हुए से काले बादल
दूसरे:
शेर, बत्तख, चूहे, चिड़िया, गाए और बंदर जैसी आकृति वाले
रुई जैसे मुलायम, पूरे आसमान में फैले हुए सफ़ेद बादल !

.....पृथ्वी पर जब भी हाहाकार मचती है
तो सफ़ेद बादल हवा से घबराकर कहीं दूर भाग जाते हैं
पर एन मौके पर, हजारों टुकड़े मिलकर बने "काले बादल"
फुर्ती से भागते हुए, गरजते हुए, पानी से लबालब
खूब जमकर बरसते हैं
और प्यासी धरती को एक लम्बे समय के लिए तृप्त कर देते हैं।

... पर पृथ्वी पर रहने वालों को
न जाने क्यों
तृप्ति के बाद
आसमान में सिर्फ सफ़ेद बादल देखना ही अच्छा लगता है
और अनंत आसमान के कोने कोने में फिर से सफ़ेद बादल छा जाता है
काला बादल न जाने कहाँ छुपा दिया जाता है
जब मैं आसमान में उस काले बादल को खोजने की कोशिश करता हूँ
तो सफ़ेद बादलों की आँख-मिचोली में मुझे खोटा सा लगता है
फिर मुझे पूरा आसमान पृथ्वी का ही "प्रतिबिम्ब" सा लगता है।

Below is the English translation:

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“Reflection”

You may see
With piercing eyes
Or give a cursory look
That spread of sky
Holds two types of clouds
Ones are huge
Elephant-like, fragmented framed
In corners obscure
Others are small
Acquiring myriad shapes
Sparrows, rabbits, cows and ducks
Cottony-soft in sheety-space
When the earth cries and clamours
White clouds shake and shatter.

While the black ones
Drench the ground
With satiating showers
As the earth settles
After the quenched thirst
The white clouds gather
Their privileged feathers
The Black clouds hide
In their invisible hyde
Up they see and say
How beautiful the sky is laid
With cosmetic decoratives
No one sees those
Who dared to deliver
Who volunteered to do
How come they remain unappreciated
And their authentic acts go unnoticed?

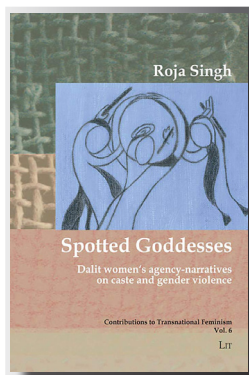
Translation:

The poem was originally written in Hindi in 2003. The author is grateful to Dr. Meenu Bhaskar, and Dr. Kalyani K. (JNU) for the English translation.

Spotted Goddesses: Dalit Women's Agency-narratives on Caste and Gender Violence

Author: Roja Singh

Publisher: LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien,
Zurich (2018), and Zubaan, Delhi (2019)



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How does one write about a social institution and social relation that is constituted by violence, but one that has become normalized in society such that the violence is viewed only in its dramatic expressions as an ‘atrocious’, an abnormality, an exception to its existence? How does one write about a social phenomenon whose end one wishes to see? How does one write about domination without making the victims into mute objects or free subjects? How does one write with a verve and tenor that conveys the urgency of a world desperately seeking change, while acknowledging the need to submit to analysis? Such questions demand writing that foregrounds accountability (who are our accounts of reality really for?) and perspectivism (from what location do we as writers speak?).

Jebaroja Suganthi-Singh’s book, *Spotted Goddess: Dalit Women’s Agency Narratives on Caste and Gender Violence* deftly places such questions in the mind of a reader, by making them think about how caste, the institution and phenomenon in question above, would appear through the experiences of say, Chitra, a Dalit woman born into historically constructed conditions and identities of caste, gender, sexuality, class and religion that put her to work from the age of five in stone quarries owned by terrorizing caste groups self-aware of their own command over the social distribution of wealth, power, and status. Or, of Rani, a Dalit mother whose questioning of a patently unjust practice of ‘two-tumblers’ (a cultural practice of segregating and stigmatizing Dalits at roadside tea-stalls by

forcing them to drink in a separate cup from all others) resulted in a caste grudge being nurtured by caste communities over twelve years and the subsequent abduction, rape, and torture of her daughter Vijaya. Or, of Kalai, a feisty and fiery Dalit feminist leader whose everyday battles (for others and her own self) against caste, patriarchy, and class domination are exhaustive but who knows that any flagging of the spirits would be detrimental to her entire community.

The book brings together an array of stories about how caste kills sociality, the spirit to live and commune, humanity in humans, and imagination in the young. It is simultaneously about the indomitable and indefatigable spirit and energies of justice-seekers resisting caste and demanding dignity. Choosing to *not* occupy a general Archimedean point when narrating or accounting for caste, the author instead speaks from particular locations, the spaces occupied by Dalit women in the Chengalpattu, Pudukkottai, and Puduppatti regions of Tamil Nadu, India. She throws her lot with Fanon's 'wretched of the earth'—the ones who clean (y)our toilets, the ones whose calloused and chafed hands speak a history and bear a burden for all of us, the ones whose bodies are made grist for the purificatory kilns of caste, the ones whose imagination and dreams need to be crushed so that (y)our sons and daughters can have the dignity of education, residence, and livelihood. In its insistence on invoking a *humanness* in the very spaces that are designed to obliterate and extinguish it, the book raises questions about what it means to be human.

But the book does this, *not* from the heights of a (now dead and buried) humanist subject—a knowing autonomous subject yet unaware of its own hubris and conditions of its own possibilities—but from the depths of an ordinary and intellectually honest subject muddling through and mulling over a life that appears unfathomable in its brutality and injustice. As the author puts it, “enraged by these atrocities, and my own ignorance, but at the same time...deeply muddled in my inability to act immediately” (13). This book is then neither straightforward ethnography nor airy theoretical treatise. It has gripping ethnographic moments, captures subjects ‘speaking’, sets up the background and historical context, is reflexive about the power relations and interstices within which the authorial self interweaves ‘speaking subjects’, insists on the distinctive nature of Dalit women’s experience without essentializing, probes and collects narratives of expression of experience and longing in the midst of brutalization, advances theoretical concepts to account for reality, and takes on the mantle of activism unashamedly as an intellectual form of accountability. It is rich and demanding of the reader.

The book’s aim is to bring attention to the voices of Dalit women, especially Dalit women leaders—“desirous voices in change-seeking and change-making” (14) who bring to light the ordinary narratives of Dalit women’s “suffering, punishment, and change-making-rebellion” (15). Lest the reader suspect the book of simply ‘giving voice’ or letting the subaltern speak in ways that make the interpreter innocent (what Spivak has called, the “ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern”, 1999: 254), the book is not in that mold either. Its subjects are crafted by the author—not simply assumed as knowing subjects. Thus, Dalits are not essentialized but viewed as heterogenous and inevitably intersected by class and gender within community, and stories of ‘subalterns’ are framed on a stage and proscenium that are consciously erected by the author. Consequently, the (mimetic) *re*-presentation of reality occurs without a disavowal by the author who dons the mantle of (political) representative in writing this book. Indeed, the book intends to, and succeeds, in “inserting the subaltern into

the long road to hegemony” (Spivak, 310)—a result of the author’s long and persistent engagement with ‘transnational feminism’ (the book is itself part of a series by that name) without making “missionary claims” (about ‘saving’ the subaltern). If the non-rhetorical Spivakian question is “Can the hegemonic ear hear” (Barret, 2004), then the question has two referents: the subaltern testimonies in the book, and the book itself as a testimony. The above attempt to locate the book within an intellectual milieu dominated by the faultlines of the politics of knowledge becomes necessary due to the possibilities that this book may itself be silenced within academia by dismissing it as an activist’s platform.

The book makes two explicit arguments—that caste needs to be viewed as a system of violence-punishment, and that Dalit women are agentive subjects operating on and through the ‘difference’ that constitutes them as untouchable subjects. Despite the book’s subtitle, the reader comes away with a view that it would be wrong to simply think about ‘caste violence’ as if it is an effect of an institution. Rather, the book makes a strong case for viewing *caste as violence* and provokes us to think about why speaking about ‘caste violence’ (or the violence of caste) begs the question of whether there is anything *but* violence in, of, for, and about caste. Viewing violence as the *raison d’être* of caste is powerful in that it problematizes the variety of functions served by caste that are regularly valorized—caste as identity, belonging and community. Consequently, the agency of Dalit women (the second argument above) is available only through their negotiations of this violence. It is here that the author brings into relief the way that caste as violence produces, distributes, organizes, and consumes ‘difference’ in its construction of casted and (out)casted, and gendered and sexualized subjects. Here, the author characterizes Dalit women’s agency as ‘earthy humanness’—a Dalit ethic of care that is unconditional, based on identification with others as a mode of claiming humanity, dignity and justice for all, and grounded in lived experiences of Dalit women characterized by the restlessness for change, subversion, transgression, and protest (19). Reminiscent of Ambedkar’s concept of *manuski*, earthy humanness also resonates with more recent works such as that of Shailaja Paik who speaks of a Dalit “womanist-humanist complex” (2021a: 127) and shows the multiple elements of *manuski* (2021a:129–30), and that of Nate Roberts (2016) whose work on Dalit religions in slums in Tamil Nadu brings into relief the notion of “to be cared for” as a way of provisioning the constitutive lack in caste—i.e. caring for others. The book additionally makes one argument in passing (how do religious symbols shape anti-caste praxis—a point I explore later in this review), and one methodological intervention (how to view Dalit subjects as interlocked in forms of oppression and exploitation and intersected by class-caste-gender-religion—a point I pick up below).

An implicit third argument in the book is that caste cannot be viewed outside of its dependence on patriarchy and sexual domination. This argument is self-evident in every part of the book—and therefore needs articulation. It is congruent with other scholars who have long conceptualized the deep roots of ‘caste-patriarchy’ (Omvedt, 1986), ‘caste-patriarchal bargain’ (Chakravarti, 1998), and most recently as ‘sex-gender-caste complex’ (Paik, 2021b). The book provokes us to think about how sexuality—in this case the masculinity of dominant caste men which *privately* wields power over dominant caste women—depends upon the *public* and routine humiliation and emasculation of Dalit men, and public shaming and hence subservience of Dalit women whose sexuality is sought to be domesticated/controlled due to its purported

lack of ‘culture’ or ‘civility’ even while being the object of desire of casted subjects. The characters in this book demonstrate how caste boundaries are routinely and emblematically inscribed (as punishment and reward) on the bodies of men and women who transgress them.

Viewing *caste as violence* and *as caste-patriarchy* allows us to further note that caste-patriarchy manifests itself in brutal and banal ways, an optic of power that is hinted at by the author’s explorations of the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of Dalit women. We tend to ‘see’ or ‘hear’ about caste-patriarchy only when the brutality is no longer possible to deny; when violence erupts publicly—in the form of what is known ‘caste atrocity’—an unfortunate term since it makes caste as violence appear exceptional as if everyday life under caste-patriarchy is not already atrocious. Nonetheless, caste-patriarchy is also banal, operating silently and invisibly in our everyday lives, as a ‘normal’ structuring force—part of our ‘traditions’, institutions and practices such as patrilineality, arranged marriage, ‘traditional’ family roles, and purity/pollution rituals. We can never understand the brutality of caste patriarchy without understanding the banality of its violence. For, it is the banal that grants ‘impunity’ to caste-patriarchy by framing transgressions of caste order as a ‘threat to the social order’ and therefore demanding the ‘reiteration of difference within hierarchy of power’ (Geetha, 2016:286). We see this ‘impunity’ at work in the regularity of the banal violence of caste-patriarchy—when Dalits sport moustaches, appear well-groomed, dare to ride a horse as grooms, appear in public wearing ‘good’ or modern clothing, neatly comb their hair, seek or even excel in modern education—all because these are viewed as the entitled cultural and *ritual* markers of dominant castes. The banal leads to the brutal, in an eerie confirmation of Freud’s ‘narcissim of small difference’, wherein a minor difference holds the key as a trigger for a violent attack (1930).

The book begins with a brief prologue that introduces caste and Untouchability to a lay audience and quickly establishes the strong presence of ‘Dalit women’ as historical subjects formed in the crucible of caste-patriarchy. We are also given a glimpse into the author’s journey of growing up in India and current location as a scholar-activist in the USA, and the various actors, institutions and historical moments that shaped her own sense of identity. The literateur emerges when the author speaks of the oral histories of Dalit women in this book as “splatter narratives [rising from within a mortar] dodging a pounding pestle” (12). The metaphors are haunting since the rest of the book gives glimpses into the mortar (i.e. caste-patriarchy as a system) that breaks Dalits, and the pestle (i.e. violence including punishment) in the hands of the pounders who use it in the normal unfolding of their everyday lives.

The introductory chapter centers the author’s ‘restlessness for change’—a feature that also characterizes the main inspirations for and protagonists of the book—Kalaimagal Arumugam (or Kalai) and Rani Periasamy. The author pithily identifies the centrality of ‘difference’ to caste and untouchability thus: “difference is the identification of the one to be violated” (42). ‘Difference’ becomes an anchor that allows the author to lay out her theoretical apparatus for shaping the narratives in the book. This is in the footsteps of a long line of scholars from Guru (1995) to Rege (1998) to Paik (2021a)—all of whom usefully explore the ‘difference’ of Dalit women. The author underscores the limits of the label ‘feminism’ as used in the Indian context where the existential reality of caste communities differs fundamentally from those of Dalit communities. As an alternative canvas, drawing upon the fine-grained work of Swarr and Nagar (2010), she looks toward ‘transnational feminism’ since it

is constituted by both intersectionality and difference (born of the dialogues between white urban middle-class feminists and Black, Native, and Chicana Others, and the postcolonial selves across the international division of labor and histories). This allows the author to speak of the need for a constant, vigilant and “thoughtful bonding across borders” (especially the borders of nation, culture, ethnic, other identities, 30). The chapter forcefully advances the author’s view of “difference as a verb” that enables a “praxis of ‘difference’ as a positively subversive act that Dalit women live into [sic] as a way of life—a spontaneous cultural practice affirming Dalit female identity” (38).

The next three chapters provide the background context for the substantive and ethnographic chapters that follow). Chapter one brings into relief a much-effaced fact—that Dalit women are at the forefront of Dalit struggles in very concrete and impactful ways—be it in the form of writing resistance poetry or other forms of expression such as songs, dance, theater, and social protest, building organizations across India for Dalits, and working as community organizers, trainers, lawyers, and union leaders. We learn that the subject position of being a Dalit woman is simultaneously “visible and invisible, touchable and untouchable, undesirable and sexually available” (60), and this enables, nay, requires them to work pragmatically and innovatively through “trans-cultural, trans-national, and trans-authoritative” practices, and frequently with allies—Dalit men for sure, but also men and women from caste communities—a theme that recurs in the book since it is critical for Kalai’s work.

Having established the historical centrality of Dalit women in making the present, chapter two cuts a short path through the forest of caste theory. Skirting the bulk of theorizations about caste from sociology, anthropology, and history, it takes one strand from Dumont—the ideology of purity and pollution—as a “strong ground” for caste (61). This is not without value despite the several critiques of Dumont especially that his account of caste falsely subordinates power or politics to status and ideology (Barnett et al., 1976). The author instead clearly shows the complementarity of power and ideology by underscoring the political character of caste as (ideologically) constructing Dalits as stigmatized, ‘dirty’, and as essentially polluted, and hence permanently pathologized as Other. The chapter also explores, albeit in a not so productive way, the ‘racial’ basis of caste and the Dravidian/Aryan distinctions—a view that is at odds with the scholarly consensus on rejecting racial theories of caste (Chairez, 2018; Kumar, 2016). The concluding part of the chapter locates Christianity as an alternative for Dalits under colonial and postcolonial conditions, the need to view dignity as a need especially for dehumanized populations, and the ways that the rise of Hindutva makes conversion into the greatest transgression and hence deserving of punishment. Given the earlier section, the reader could be reminded of the historical documentation of how the Christian views of Robert Caldwell, Monier Williams, as also William Jones converged with their need to have a racial theory of both, caste and south Indians (Dirks, 2001).

The next chapter builds upon the ideological basis of caste (purity/pollution) to ground caste practices in texts. Here the key idea is that the ideological domination of caste depends on the holding of ideological texts as ‘sacred’ (or at least as incontrovertible) and hence the meting out of punishment in social life in accordance with the characters of iconic stories within the texts. The chapter therefore explores the *Manusmriti* (a text made iconic by Ambedkar), and the stories of Soorpanaka in the *Ramayana*, and Hidimba in the *Mahabharatha*. It shows, with some force, the ways that certain populations are stigmatized as ‘different’ and hence as marked bodies

for punishment, reviling, mockery, exclusion, and exploitation (including sexual). While the author is right about treating ‘myth as archetype’, having a relation to social relations (98–99), such a translation from text to social relations needs to be viewed as far from simple reflection. People do not simply imitate text. Rather, texts, stories and characters are constructed as cultural models learned in the thick of social life, and become key shapers of human actions, especially making actions durable and patterned over time, or what social scientists now call ‘practices’ (Schatzki et al., 2001). People learn schemas of ‘right’ behavior, ‘right’ relations in their cultural repertoire (culture as well as mind), and these change or get reinforced continually through experience and participation in rituals of community belonging—the site for identity formation. That is what makes caste into a dynamic phenomenon, showing continuity with change over time across modes of political economic changes. It helps us explain how (and why) caste persists even when its hierarchies are produced and reproduced within specific contexts rather than being fixed and timeless reproductions.

Here, we finally get a glimpse of Mariamman, the Spotted Goddess, who operates as an icon and an index for Dalits, especially Dalit women. As the author powerfully points out, “Dalit spirituality is not about striving to run beyond this world of dilemmas but about making the dilemma of life an experiential reality to be embraced” (105). Dalit women then actually *identify with* Mariamman (hence as *icon*)—a goddess who has fallen from an exalted status and grace, been cursed by dominant actors, bears marks on her body as an ‘outcasted’ being. The social being of Dalit resembles the marginalized and stigmatized one in the realm of the gods. Further, the ambiguous state and status of Mariamman—as one inflicted by disease and yet prayed to as a healer of disease, a self who is suffering and yet one who is capable of liberating—is an *index* of the lived experience of Dalits who have to reach deep into their own selves to operate on the ideologically produced ‘difference’ that is the root of their socially imposed oppression. The author’s narrative about Mariamman also converges here with the recent arguments that ‘Dalit religion’ (or ‘slum religion’) transcends Hindu and Christian affiliations and is characterized by a moral universalism and pragmatic orientation to this-worldly problems (Roberts, 2016; see also Roberts, 2019).

The next four chapters (4–7) form the ethnographic core of the book. It is here that we see how Kalai and Rani and the scores of other Dalit women who resist caste, patriarchy, and class exploitation in Pudokkottai district, personify Mariamman. As the author observes, they are the spotted goddesses—suffering and healing in their liberatory struggles (164). We learn here about the organizations, Dr. Ambedkar Women And children Regeneration and Development program (or DA) and *Thai* (Tamil for mother) which is a residential program for Dalit girls founded by Kalai (and where Rani works as a key staff member). DA has been working for decades on everyday and institutionalized forms of casteism. These include responding to rapes, threats, kidnapping, maiming and killing of Dalits, and destruction of the meagre property possessed by Dalits on an almost daily basis; seeking formal residency rights for Dalit communities living in precarity; seeking to eradicate manual scavenging (a bonded labor practice wherein Dalit women from particular castes are condemned to clean the dry toilets of caste communities and physically dispose the feces); fighting for the right of Dalits to bury their dead in a dignified manner; protesting to end the entrenched and debilitating impacts of illicit liquor brewing within Dalit communities, a business that is a nexus of local politicians, religious leaders, and the underground economic overlords with the connivance of the police; seeking wages for ritually unpaid work

(such as beating the *dappu*); and fighting to eradicate long-standing cultural rituals that degrade Dalits especially Dalit women (such as the ritual of forcing newly-wed Dalit women to sleep first with a dominant caste man on their wedding night).

Notably, DA operates with the assistance of individuals from across the caste and religious spectrum (138) largely due to the incredible foresight and relational skills of Kalai who has built long-lasting relations with people who can use their power to resist caste in its local operations. Thus, the women of DA are engaged in activities as varied as writing petitions, learning to demand the filing of FIRs (first information reports of crimes against Dalits at police stations, frequently the most critical site for ensuring any modicum of justice within the law), staging protests and 'sit-ins' to running retraining programs in tailoring, bag-making and other skills for those rescued from manual scavenging, building *sangams* or local collectives of self-help groups, helping Dalit families to apply for and acquire the ration cards that helped with food insecurity, and running local schools and hostels for girls. The rich documentation of the life work of Kalai and Rani and others is captured by the author as a "demand" by "restless leaders" for "a real human life of dignity" (158). Kalai and Rani appear here as 'fierce'—a subversive reappropriation of being caste as Untouchable (166), one unafraid to risk everything (as Rani put it, one with *thunichal* or 'daring courage', 171).

Chapter seven invites the reader to consider how widespread this restlessness for change is. It documents the various oral traditions especially songs and poetry from Chengalpettu district, in which the 'spontaneous activism' of Dalit women shaped by their earthy humanness comes alive with meaning, poignancy but also always celebrating Dalit female identity even while reminding the singers and listeners about the oppressive conditions and precarity of their social being. One such song is a 'coming of age' for a Dalit girl. The author reflexively notes how the dialogue within the song between the mother and her young daughter simultaneously celebrates the beauty of the girl even while warning of the lurking dangers of caste punishment for being presumptuous about Dalit beauty (197). It also underscores the existential stress, anxieties, and real worries for the safety of all Dalits in a society that takes away their right to dignity and self-worth. Many of these songs are also social inversions and transgressions in which Dalit women perform acts that they are normally excluded from in caste society, and in this sense are indictments of social reality. The frequent use of metaphors and fantastic features (e.g. Dalit women with multiple eyes) are also noted by the author as ways of subverting the negative stereotypes of Dalits, proclaiming the power of inner strength, a "transcendence of the victimized and exploited bodies of the singers". And yet, the author wonders at the end how meanings of such songs are enunciated, and the inscrutability of such moments of self-fashioning.

The penultimate chapter, on the writings of Bama, one of the best writers on caste and patriarchy in Tamil, bring us back to the early arguments of the author—that the structure called caste is held in place by, among other things, the text and the code which forms the language context within which caste actors play out casted roles. Bama's writings are one of the most searing critiques of caste that produce deep insights into the hold of caste on social life but also point to the ubiquitous existence of rebellions, transgressions and subversions of caste by Dalits. The chapter is based on the author's reading of two of Bama's novels—*Sangati* (1994) and *Karukku* (1992) and an oral interview with the writer. The value of Bama's writings is that she is able to not only locate Dalit women as speaking subjects within a matrix of intersecting oppressive

forces of gender, caste, class and even religion (both Hinduism and Christianity), but shows how the codes of caste are regularly invoked and (re)inscribed as authoritative vehicles for norms such as songs, proverbs, exemplars (even legendary ones) each of which exercises authority over Dalit women and men. The story of Mariamma which the author explores in some depth, especially brings out the sexual politics of caste—masculinity, femininity, violence, ‘selective visibility’ of Dalit women and their bodies, normalization of oppression, and the reproduction of community (i.e. caste) boundaries and caste domination. The interview with Bama seamlessly leads to the concluding chapter where the author shares her personal journey which includes her own coming to consciousness of her casted identity, and a brief tracing of the moments of conversion to Christianity in her ancestral history. Again, we see the trepidations and normalcy of the visibility /invisibility binary with regards caste, and the care, efforts, and courage needed to come to caste consciousness as a Dalit woman.

This book fulfils a historical role. It responds to the call of our times for viewing and making space for Dalits to be leaders. It does this by showing how Dalit women have been leading the struggle against caste for a long while and speaking to the non-hegemonic ear about what is needed to annihilate caste. Their earthy humanness or unconditional ethic of care strikes at the root of caste’s uncaring and hence deeply anti-social character. The book is also a useful foil against the twin temptations of caste as identitarian politics and caste blindness. It demonstrates how leaders such as Kalai and Rani forge links with allies while foregrounding Dalit women’s experience, and consequently craft an inclusive caste-conscious anti-caste political community. Dalit politics, this book attests, is always an anti-caste politics and Dalit identity is an anti-caste identity. In this sense it validates the view that “castes cannot be annihilated by Dalits alone” but requires the active participation of all castes, especially privileged castes (Teltumbde, 2005:213).

Finally, I find the complex figure of Mariamma useful for negotiating the links between caste as a historical, material and symbolic social formation on the one hand, and the particular ideological formations we call ‘religion’ (Christianity, Hinduism in this case) on the other. The infructuous debates over the Hindu character of caste are in need of updating. To the author’s insight that caste is a “culturally rooted social stratification patented through religion” (22), one is prompted to recall two other insights from scholarship. The first is that this ‘patent’ (with religion) has considerably weakened if not expired; see for example Sheth (1999) on the secularization of caste, and Mosse (2012) on how Christianity can be viewed as ‘descaralizing caste’ or ‘denaturalizing inequality’ rather than upending caste. The second is that the secularization of caste does not preclude the continued ritualization of caste; here the classic work views caste as the emblematic “organization for ritual” in India and closely tied to ‘kingship’ and its legitimation (see Hocart, 1950). As noted earlier, the politics of small and ritualized difference triggers caste-patriarchal violence and its punishment (far more than in class violence) and this is due to the fact that a primary function of caste is to maintain a social order that ensures social reproduction of caste monopolies. Consequently, it is (secular) ‘culture’ today which is the chief ‘camouflage for caste’ in modern and multicultural India, legitimating ‘difference’ to serve the need for the mixophobic character of caste and enable the continued monopolization of wealth, power, and status (Natrajan, 2012).

When invoked by Dalits, Mariamma enables fierce fighters even as she is herself feared (and ‘set apart’ in the apartheid of caste), liberates the casted self even as she

is herself inflicted by caste the disease, inhabits the same space/spectrum as the caste Hindu amman/devi even while challenging the root of Hindu sociality, and revitalizes Dalit energies even when she is casted as enervating. It is a case of the “Master’s tools” being turned against the Master to rattle the house of caste, even though it may be limited as Audre Lorde (1983) cautions. To rework the words of Marx and Ambedkar, the spotted goddesses such as Kalai and Rani in their life work, speech and actions are indeed signifiers of the ‘soul of soulless conditions’, the ‘heart of a heartless world’ and the ‘sigh of the oppressed’, and their religion, far from dulling their senses, makes them the rising phoenix capable of annihilating caste.

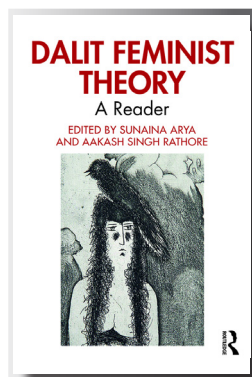
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Dalit-Bahujan Feminism: A Newly Emerging Discourse

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Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader

Edited by:
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Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader is a collection of essays written by feminist writers in India. Feminism as a school of thought emerged in India in the early 1980s and since then, several scholarly works have been produced by feminists. Towards the beginning of the movement, there were two distinct groups of scholars, both educated in the English medium. The common factor in both groups was that the scholars all came from the *dwija*¹ castes (Brahmin, Bania, Kayastha, Khatri and very few Kshatriya). The difference lay in the political positions which informed their standpoints—one group were Liberal Democrats, the others were Marxist feminists. After the 1990 Mandal movement, a third ideological school started to emerge. They foregrounded caste as a theoretical framework in understanding man-woman relations in India, as opposed to their predecessors who only theorized from the framework of class and democratic institutions.

The editors of this book have chosen to reproduce several essays written by both Marxist and Liberal Democratic, non Dalit-bahujan women writers and in doing so have made clear their Dalit feminist position. Sunaina Arya is a young Dalit woman Ph.D candidate and research scholar in the field of Philosophy. The

¹Dwija is a term for the people from the castes considered higher in the caste strata, who regard themselves as twice-born, and hence a pure form of Hindus.

second editor, Aakash Singh Rathore, whom I recently discovered in the academic domain, despite having come from Kshatriya family background, collaborated with her. What is interesting to note is they took a very strong Dalit position, in this case a Dalit feminist position. Generally, dwija male intellectuals in India or abroad, write on women's issues without grounding themselves on a serious feminist position. I am glad that Rathore being a Kshatriya, co-edited this book with an emerging Dalit feminist philosopher.

In 2012, on the occasion of my retirement from Osmania University, Susie Tharu, an early leading feminist of India, described me as a 'Male Sister of Feminism'.² I am not sure whether I deserve that description. But it is true that from the genesis of the anti-caste movement, Dalit-bahujan leaders like Mahatma Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Periyar Ramasamy all centered on the liberation of women. Dalit-bahujan feminism has its roots in the writings and work of Savitribai Phule and Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, who were founding leaders and educators who worked to bring about caste consciousness among the depressed castes in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Ambedkar took a clear theoretical stand on man-woman equality, including property rights for women. His stance on sex work, like his stand on Aryan migration and existence of race relations in India, are coming up for contested discussion in the present times.³

In this volume, the position of Nivedita Menon (the only Shudra Nair woman feminist of repute I know) on sex work is discussed at length. Arya and Rathore have positioned themselves for abolishing sex work, which has historically dehumanized Dalit-bahujan women as a consequence of their position on the margins of society. It is not dwija women or highly educated women who are employable in other sectors, but Dalit-bahujan women who are forced to take up sex work as a job. Sex work in the *Devadasi*⁴ form or bar sex work form is that which Dalit women are forced into; whereas globally, many women who are employable in other sectors might chose sex work as work for livelihood (Chapter 8). Importantly, the inherent caste system complicated and spiritualised sex work in India.

We must also examine that while sex work is mainly the job of Dalit-bahujan women in India, permanent widowhood—in some cases from childhood days onwards, with a condemned life in Kashi dens is often the only a life of Brahmin or other dwija women (as brought to light by the film *Water*)⁵—this too dehumanises women as human beings. The condemned widowhood and Brahminic child marriage,

²Kancha Ilaiah, Understanding Feminism: On Being a Male Sister of Feminism, *Frontier*, Vol. 46, no. 18, November 10–16, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.frontierweekly.com/archive/vol-number/vol/vol-46-2013-14/46-18/46-18-On%20Being%20a%20Male%20Sister%20of%20Feminism.html>

³See my Review of Tony Joseph's book *Early Indians* (2018) with a title, *Early India: Goats and Brahmins*, *Mainstream*, Vol. LVIII, No. 29, New Delhi, July 4, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article9591.html>

⁴Devadasi is a tradition of devoting young Dalit girls to temples in name of service to the God, where eventually they are sexually exploited by the temple priests and have no return from a sexually exploitative living. *Dev* literally translates as god and *Dasi* as female slave.

⁵*Water* is a Bollywood movie released in 2007, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hP35Okfv0m8>

and Sati were more barbaric than sex work. However, today these institutions are gradually being abolished. The dwija women are among the most educated and most globally mobile women from India. The Dalit-bahujan women are denied such opportunities (Part III).

When I characterised the patriarchies in India as ‘Dalit-bahujan Democratic Patriarchy’ and ‘Brahminic Patriarchy’ based on their open productive and reproductive participatory man-woman relations, many Dalit feminists also disagreed with me.⁶ The dwija feminists condemned me as a binarist in everything. But is it not a fact that historically the Dalit, Adivasi,⁷ Shudra women never had to live as permanent widows? Is it not true, that the dwija women not only lived as permanent widows from childhood days and had to go through Sati—a brutal murder of women till the British made laws to abolish such a system? Do dwija women living in the villages have the right to work in the production fields along with other male members in India even now? They do not.

Does that right not exist for all Dalit-bahujan women even today (see Chapters 5 and 9), unless they are brahmanized? This is uncritical support of a culture which disallows women to participate in productive work with other men based on the misogynistic premise that women are promiscuous. This brahmanic practice is also observed within Muslim communities. The culture of not allowing women productive work has caused destruction of their creative energies and has kept India underdeveloped when compared to China, its neighbouring country.

However, Chinese women under communist patriarchy are also prevented from holding higher positions in productive work. The communist feminists of India did not examine these practices of communist countries. In India, the liberal constitutional democracy gave scope to dwija women to enter into every state sector. Dwija women have accepted women’s reform over caste reform. This has led to Indira Gandhi’s emergence as the first woman Prime Minister in the late 1960s. In their professional endeavours, dwija women were aided by English education, introduced by William Carey, the Protestant Missionary reformer and Thomas Babington Macaulay from 1817 to 1834. Even in the twenty-first century, Dalit-bahujan women have not entered into that English medium education. This is despite Savitribai Phule who gave a call for their English education a long time ago (Chapter 4). The future of the Dalit-bahujan-*adivasi* women depends on the future course of English medium education for girls of those communities.

Dalit-bahujan feminism has to look at the roles of women in productive work and accessibility to public spheres of life. The dwija women now have better exposure to global forms of man-woman relations because of English education, which Dalit-bahujan women do not have. But they are still anti-productive labourers because, ironically, educated dwija women think that production is pollution. A cursory examination of dwija women feminist writings would show how indifferent they

⁶Refer to Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am Not a Hindu: A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy*, Calcutta: Samya, 1996, sixth reprint in 2002.

⁷Adivasi is a social term for the Indian constitutional category Scheduled Tribes for the communities who live close to nature, and modern technological resources have not reached them yet.

are to basic agrarian and artisanal production. Their discourse operates within the Brahminical textual narratives. Their absence in productive fields is as visible as that of Dalit-bahujan women in urban high-end jobs and markets. Therefore, a common English medium school education in government and private schools should be included in the main concerns of Dalit-bahujan feminists.

The present focus of Dalit scholars is around land ownership and reservation—both in education and employment. The regional language education of the Dalit-bahujan community cannot produce high-end thinkers. In the present situation, the Dalit feminist writings by Dalit women would be as weak as the writings of Dalit-bahujan men in the general theoretical discourse. Quality English medium education alone can produce writers and thinkers who produce books of high quality. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's life and works have proven this.

In regional languages, several Dalit women writers have been producing plenty of writings on the struggles of Dalit women in their day-to-day life—struggles which are unknown to the *dwija* or the 'upper' Shudra women, as they have not dealt with them at any time in their known history. A few of them—very young Dalit women, not so much Shudra/OBC women,⁸ are writing in English to re-frame the feminist discourse in a fresh way, which rightly is called 'Dalit Feminism' and they describe themselves as Dalit Feminists. Their critique of writings about women, especially Dalit women is a positive development. They are re-examining Phule, Ambedkar and other Dalit writers from their own experience and perception (Part II). This in turn gives new hope for further theoretical possibilities. Sunaina Arya's efforts show this promise.⁹

Dalit-bahujan feminism has a long way to go. It is certainly in its budding stage (Part VI). The only comparable school is that of Black Feminism, which has thrown up many powerful writers in the recent past (Chapter 10). *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, though has together a variety of feminist writings in one place, with a useful introduction with a theoretical perspective to develop Dalit-bahujan feminist ideology further (Part IV).

Dalit-bahujan feminism should not operate merely around sexual division of labourers within the home, kitchen, urban markets and urban working spaces as the *dwija* feminist women's writings do. Dalit feminist theory must not only engage with untouchability which the Dalit women suffer exclusively—but from a position

⁸OBC is an abbreviation for Other Backward Castes, which a constitutional term for the Shudra communities who are regarded higher over Dalits/'untouchables'/Scheduled Castes but lower than *dwija/savarna* or so-called upper caste communities, as per Hindu caste hierarchy.

⁹Read Sunaina Arya's 'Theorising Gender in South Asia: Dalit Feminist Perspective', Editorial article in Special Issue on 'Legacy of Gender and Caste Discrimination' of *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 2020, pp. XI–XXIV; 'Ambedkar as a Feminist Philosopher', chapter 4 in *Gender and Racial Justice*, Vol. IV of B. R. Ambedkar: A Quest for Justice (five volumes box set), edited by Aakash Singh Rathore, Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 89–113; 'Dalit or Brahmanical Patriarchy? Rethinking Indian Feminism', *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion Vol. 1, No. 1*, February 2020, pp. 217–228; 'Khader's Feminist Ethic against Imperialism: Proposing a Pluriversal Philosophic Resolve', for the Book Symposium on Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic (OUP, 2019), *Journal of Global Ethics*, Vol. 16, No. 3, Taylor & Francis Group. May 2021, pp. 371–387.

of strength acquired from their productive labourers and the democratic space they inhabit in the village settings of both home and production fields. Though villages are casteist social units as Ambedkar rightly observed, the *Dalitwad*s¹⁰ in themselves are democratic, productive and redistributive locations.¹¹ Man-woman relations must change across India by using positive structures that already exist in human societies the world over and also within India. Dalitwads are poor and hardworking, but not exploitative units like Brahminwads. Productive labourers is an agent of change, but leisure, which the Brahminic women seek as a mode of living, is anti-human.

Dalit feminism must set a new agenda for the feminist ideology of women writers of India. That will be possible when Dalit-bahujan feminists operate outside the theoretical trap that dwija women laid in India—casting the subject of woman as compliant with the Brahminical patriarchal roles. The Brahminic texts should not trap the Dalit-bahujan feminist discourse which should take inspiration from Dalit-bahujan women who made history in their fight with their socio-political and economic circumstances, as well as with oppressive men. The narratives of Dalit-bahujan goddesses like Pochamma and Maisamma are inspiring. Also, there are numerous modern women like Savitribai Phule, Ramabai Ambedkar, Chakali Ilamma (a Dhobi¹² woman in the Telangana Armed Struggle),¹³ Sammakka and Sarakka who fought the Kakatiya rulers in the thirteenth century, Warangal forest area and became well known figures. There are many such examples in every state in India, who should be Dalit-bahujan women's role models.

The only essay that goes against the genre of Dalit feminism, which the editors critically review in this volume is that of Nivedita Menon—'A Critical View on Intersectionality' (Chapter 1). Though Menon is a Shudra Nair woman, she does not accept her Shudra position as socially, spiritually controlled and exploited by Brahminism. That is her weakest point (Part V). Nair women historically suffered inhuman *Sambhandham*¹⁴ relations at the hands of Brahmin men. Her de-recognition of intersectionality emerges from her caste blindness, which is located in the *Editors' Introduction*.¹⁵ The Marxist feminist school also looked at Indian man-woman relations from a class point of view that does not recognize the Indian specificity of caste.

Dalit-bahujan feminism does not hold much water unless it is rooted in the caste consciousness of the woman writer involved. The women writers who came from upper layer of Shudra (only a few of them are English educated and engaged in writing) like

¹⁰Dalitwada is a term for the segregated settlement (the most infertile land of the village) where only Dalit people are placed, in order to prevent dwija communities from getting polluted by contact with Dalits who are considered lowest in the caste hierarchy. Wada literally means a housing settlement.

¹¹See Kancha Ilaiah, Dalitization Not Hinduization, in *Why I am Not a Hindu: A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy*, Calcutta: Samya, 1996, sixth reprint in 2002.

¹²Dhobi is a caste traditionally linked with the profession of washermen or laundrymen, which is one among the Dalit/'untouchable' communities.

¹³Sanjeev Gumpenapalli, Chakali Ilamma: A Revolutionary Woman, published in Indian Women In History volume of *Feminism in India*, December 28, 2017. Retrieved from <https://feminismindia.com/2017/12/28/remembering-chakali-ilamma/>

¹⁴See Kancha Ilaiah, *Untouchable God*, Calcutta: Bhatkal & Sen, 2013.

¹⁵For details, see Sunaina Arya, *An Enquiry into Ambedkar as a Feminist Philosopher*. M.Phil dissertation, Centre for Philosophy, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2017, July 26.

Nair, Reddy, Kamma, Lingayat and Vokkaliga, Naiker, Jat, Patel, Maratha and others did not know how to handle caste consciousness. They face discrimination by dwijas in many spheres in various ways, since they need to work with dwija women given their placement outside the fold of caste-based reservation. But dwija women also do not treat them as equals because they know that they are Shudra. From the lens of food culture, Shudras are meat-eaters with agrarian roots which the dwija women do not have. They face a very strange situation. Under the influence of dwija women, they understand that class position gives them some space to theorise. But class theorisation does not have much meaning in India, as India is primarily a caste society. This is also true for a majority of South Asia.¹⁶

The remaining essays in this volume are written by either by Dalit women or men, or sympathetic Brahmin women, or women from a Christian background. Many of them claim that they do not believe in religion or birth in a particular religion or caste. But a reader's awareness of the background of the writer makes all the difference. Ignoring religion in the feminist analysis avoids a key lifeline of women. Rather, it is seen that women cling to religion more than men today.

Feminism of the Dalit-bahujan school based on the experience of women, would be different from that of men. Feminist theory emerged based on the 'experience' as the basis of analysis and the 'personal is political'. Nevertheless, *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader* is an important source for many further studies and is indispensable, especially for young research scholars.

¹⁶See Sunaina Arya, 'Theorising Gender in South Asia: Dalit Feminist Perspective', Editorial article in Special Issue on 'Legacy of Gender and Caste Discrimination' of *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 2020, pp. XI–XXIV.

Retro-Modern India

Author: *Manuela Ciotti (2010)*

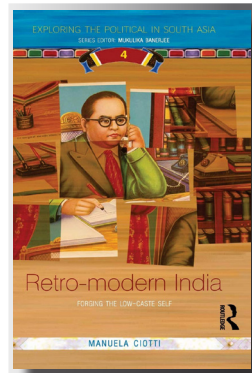
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For the past two decades or so, modernity has been getting re-examined by experts from several disciplines as diverse as philosophy, architecture, painting, literature, cultural studies and social anthropology, among others. Consequently, the Enlightenment and its project have been critiqued on various fronts. Some of the most serious criticisms made against ‘modern’ knowledge are that of racism, misogyny, Orientalism, colonialism, and for the past few years, Islamophobia as well. To a certain extent, the present scholarship accepts that modernity is not a universal phenomenon and it has significant limitations. What are those limitations and to what extent are many projections of modernity still relevant? Which arguments are valid, and which ones are not? Amongst the arguments advanced by modernity, which ones are worth keeping and which ones are not? Is it one singular *modernity* or there are multiple contextual *modernities*? *Retro-modern India* (2010) tries to answer some of these tough theoretical questions of the present age. The book is an exercise in social anthropology and takes ethnography as the methodological tool. The writer, Manuela Ciotti, gives us a systematic view of the modern self of a marginal social group in India. Her position is that of understanding modernity as much a non-West phenomenon as it is Western.

Chamar Modernity

The book is an enlarged version of her doctoral dissertation. It is based on a fieldwork conducted in a village in Uttar Pradesh in India. This village, which she calls Manupur, is located a few kilometres away from Banaras city, a city known across the world for its Sanskrit cultural heritage. An ethnographic fieldwork was carried out for twenty-one months from 1998 to 1999, with further short

visits till 2005. Ciotti interviewed three generations of Chamars from both genders. This ethnography focuses on a single caste, namely, the Chamars who are considered untouchables as per Hindu social order. The book is rich in ethnographic details, and sociological concepts are interspersed throughout the text. The overall narrative is a dialogue between theory, concepts and field observations, all weaved in a seamless fashion. The leitmotif, in the fabric thus weaved, is the Chamar life-world. It is this life-experience of a single ex-untouchable caste which is the focus of the book. Ciotti has coined a neologism 'retro-modernity' (p. 35) and it certainly hits the bull's eye to understand Dalits in modern India.

In simple terms, Ciotti argues that for the Chamars, their past, present and future are deeply embedded into each other. This entanglement is so strong that the Chamars are moving ahead in their conceptual framework of time by constantly referring to the past. This past is itself imaginary and emanates from the present life circumstances. Thus, the present/modern is located in past/non-modern and that past/non-modern itself is re-created in the imaginings of the present/modern. In her own words, "in order to be modern in contemporary India, the Chamars appropriated the features of a past modernity" (p. 12). In the introduction chapter, Ciotti delves deep into the recent debates surrounding modernity, rather 'alternative modernities' (p. 36). She coins the term *Chamar modernity* to make the point that Chamars have their own version of modernity which is overlapping with, yet different from, the modernity as we understand it in common parlance. This 'past modernity' is situated not in the West, but within Indian history and culture (p. 20). Ciotti's site of observation is local, supra-local and national (p. 21). Modernity, for her, has two forms—metropolitan and provincial—which are 'not mutually exclusive but a web of juxtaposed fields of powers, economies and identities' (p. 16). For Chamars, modernity and development are synonymous. But Chamars are not the beneficiaries of economic growth since India adopted the privatisation (LPG) model. Rather they are logically on the losing side, as Scheduled Castes (SCs) would not get reservations in private sector jobs and education. Thus their chances of improving their status as middle class get slimmer. Ciotti places her concept of modernity more in the discursive space than in the material one. Hence it is the aspiring middle class which displays the tendency of 'retro-modernity', modernity as status, not telos (p. 38).

There is one small point made in the book which is worth mentioning here as details will emerge later. Ciotti (p. 36) uses the term 'reproduction' to state how Chamars imitate the lifestyle of the nineteenth century Indian middle classes which was a product of colonial modernity itself. The second term which she uses is subversion by which she means a Dalit movement for human rights and dignity. Recently, a few thinkers have stressed on 'subversion' to understand Dalits in India. Retro-modernity is exactly that tension between 'reproduction' and 'subversion' (p. 35). The second point is Ciotti's disagreement with Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2002) distinction between elite and subaltern/peasant classes (p. 43). For Chakrabarty, elites understand secular-religious binary, but not the subalterns. Ciotti submits that such a distinction is not justified because if that were the case, we would not witness most of the upper and middle class people supporting the Hindutva ideology and a party rooted therein. The book tells us, albeit indirectly, that 'Chamar modernity' is in favour of Dalits, Muslims and women while 'high caste Hindu modernity' is against these vulnerable groups.

The subtitle of the book provides us with an equally important facet of the book. It tells us about the empirical-cum-conceptual arguments of the book. It places the *Chamar Self* at six fields: changing political economy, weaving occupation, modern education, their religious belief, rising political consciousness and transforming gender roles. It is the interplay of these six fields that makes a Chamar modern, or retro-modern in their outlook. These fields are never understood as separate but as a web of factors mutually affecting each other.

Political Economy and the Making of Modern Chamar

Retro-modern India locates the formation of Chamar identity in the political economy at local, regional and national levels. It says how, with a changing agrarian economy, the Chamar self has changed as well. Some portions are dedicated to political economy at the national and international levels, but the book quickly narrows down to regional and local economies. At the level of Uttar Pradesh, land remained central for control as zamindari abolition remained ineffective, though Ciotti could have said why the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) never saw a serious redistribution of land. One reason, as Zoya Hasan (1988) tells us, was the resistance of GB Pant against RA Kidwai's plan to implement land redistribution. This meant that rural Chamars were mostly agricultural labourers while urban Chamars were employed as industrial labourers. Few SCs who got land titles never got the right to cultivate their land. Work and ritual statuses were closely tied, and UP had, what is often called, Jajmani system (p. 68). Manupur had the same pattern where Brahmins, Thakurs, and Kayasths were landlords, in control of social relations as well (p. 74). Chamars preferred to work within the village and the nearby Benares city (p. 77). Chamars in eastern UP had neither done leatherwork nor carried carcass for at least four generations. Citing the seminal essay 'Dalit movements in India' (1999) by Nandu Ram, Ciotti says that eastern UP Chamars fought against the humiliating practice of post-partum rituals done by Chamar women where the Chamar women had to cut the umbilical cord of the new born.

No major outward migration was observed by Ciotti during her fieldwork. It was in the 1930s that the Chamars started to work in the handloom weaving industry (p. 72). Weaving was the first urban occupations for the Manupur Chamars (p. 73). Most of the master weavers were Muslims and they trained Chamars for sometime before employing them as workers (p. 73). This shift of patron-client relationship from high caste Hindu landlords and Chamar peasants to Muslim weavers and Chamar workers brought about a series of effects altering the social relations among these groups. Older ties got broken and newer ones formed. Chamars were now free from the almost bondage-type working conditions to fairly conducive labour relations.

Another aspect is jobs for the aspiring middle class Chamars. Chamar youth showed preference for government jobs over private ones. This is quite unusual as government jobs are way too few to cater to any social group. As per Ciotti's own survey in 1999, government salaries contributed to the livelihood of 10 per cent of the Chamar households. But what is the reason for the Chamar non-preference for private jobs? Ciotti never asks this question, sadly. I, personally, would submit that this happens due to the rampant discrimination which youths face at the hands of their high caste Hindu bosses.

Tani-Bani of Chamar-Muslim Relationship

Our conceptualisation of Self is always in relationship with others; thus, being is equally a becoming. For Manuela Ciotti, Chamars of Benares have an extremely cordial relationship with the Muslims in the nearby region. This positive image of Muslims is located at two nodal points—the occupation of weaving and the memory of anti-Muslim pogroms. Weaving gave birth to interdependency between Muslims and Chamars that was much better than the Jajmani system of old. Ciotti states how Chamar weavers got interest-free loans, better wages, flexible work timings, friendly working conditions and no stigma of untouchability while working under Muslim weavers. This was also because Muslim weavers themselves were from middle/low ranking castes. Thus, no serious conflict of ritual status ever occurred between them. As stated earlier, this has been happening since the 1930s onwards when Chamars got involved into weaving under the guidance of Muslim master-weavers. Daily commuting to Benares city, riding a bicycle became a common thing among the Manupur Chamars. Ciotti argues that the weaving occupation loosened the tight grip of caste which was based on stigmatised work. Here she disagrees with Nicolas Dirks (1992) and BS Cohn (1987), who argue that colonialism consolidated caste. Weaving broke, partially though, the older Jajmani bonds where rural Chamars were labelled outright as untouchables when they worked as sharecroppers under Brahmin, Thakur and Kurmi landlords. Ciotti also departs from the usual Marxist understanding of ‘working conditions’ where only measurable entities like wages, sanitary conditions, workers safety, timing, etc., are considered. She believes that as anthropologists, our task should also be to understand the experiential aspect of ‘working conditions’. It is here that the Chamars felt more liberated under Muslim weavers than under dominant caste landlords. All these together were a new and welcome experience for Chamars.

Closely associated with the weaving aspect, is the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments in eastern UP. Citing the work by N. Kumar (1988), Ciotti discusses how the sari became the main artefact within the silk weaving industry in Banaras. Weaving helped Muslims gain socio-economic prominence and this created status anxiety among the rich Hindus. Traders and moneylenders like Marwaris, Sindhis, Gujaratis, Agrawals and Khatri based in Banaras city despised this growth and peddled anti-Muslim sentiments. Sadly, the middle ranking castes among the Hindus fully bought this sentiment and embraced the militant form of Hinduism. They started committing violence against not only Muslims but also Dalits (Gooptu, 1997). As a consequence, business was badly affected both in terms of economic growth and social relations. One pogrom took place in 1939. Hindu traders stopped transacting with Muslim weavers, which further made Chamars vulnerable. In such situations, Chamars found themselves to be the victims of resurgent Hinduism despite getting their untouchables stigma reduced over time. This again consolidated their ties with Muslims, and they found solace in their own religion—Ravidasi. This has been my experience as well with Chamars in 2020 when I visited Banaras. I found Chamars to be extremely sensitive to the Muslim question and considered all religious minorities as their own—*manav manav ek samaan*.

Sadly, this weaving part was on the wane while Ciotti's fieldwork approached its completion. Younger generation Chamars were freer from Muslim master-weavers but again dependent on high caste Hindu traders in the city. This made them partially dependent upon contingencies of a global market and vulnerable to casteist overtures as well.

Modern Education as Liberation

Next to political economy and weaving, is the importance of education in the making of the modern Chamar self. Ciotti's findings are almost similar to what has been reported across India about the significance of modern education among Dalits. Education for Manupur Chamars is not merely acquisition of skills and a step towards employment—though their enthusiasm for education is as strong as that of Brahmins—it is far more profound than this instrumental understanding of education. For Chamars, *parhe likhe hona* (to be educated) not only means to be literate and skilled but also to be refined in character and thought. Modern education is the only form of education that Chamars received as the doors of traditional 'Hindu' knowledge were closed on both women and Shudras. It was the colonisers who opened the door for everyone. Till today, we find high caste Hindu men opposing affirmative action programs for women, SC, ST and OBCs in educational institutes. This refinement in character is an interplay of modern education with social status and political orientation. An educated Chamar supports his wife, remains aware of the politics of Uttar Pradesh, leads a frugal life, is critical of Brahmanism/ Hinduism, avoids liquor, has family planned, and has some social standing gained through cultural capital. It is this well-educated section among the Chamars, which is re-writing the Dalit history through the prism of social justice (p. 120).

Ciotti observes that education is not reproducing the social inequalities but is levelling differences. A few college youths told her that casteism is deeper and hidden among the urban educated high caste Hindus than the rural ones. Despite increasing social status, Manupur Chamars were aware that the congenial behaviour of Brahmins over the past few years is because of changing power dynamics rather than any change in heart. The best part of chapter 4, is the use of works by Marc Bloch (1989) differentiating between traditional and modern knowledge and how Chamars completely reject their traditional knowledge in favour of the modern one. One, however, does not understand fully why Ciotti places growing political awareness among the Chamars solely due to modern education, perhaps an error drawn from the assumptions of Dipesh Chakbaraty and Sudipta Kaviraj. It is the same education which has become a tool at the hands of high caste Hindus to oppress Muslims, Dalits and women. Interestingly, Ciotti herself makes it clear earlier that the Chamar self is a web of interaction among education, religion, occupation and political economy.

Ravidasi Chamars: Religion as Social Justice

One of the strengths of *Retro-Modern India* is its theoretically sound approach towards religious beliefs of the Chamars. Manuela Ciotti must be applauded for using the work

of anthropologist Talal Asad (1993) and his understanding of religion as a historical product of discursive formation. Who is a Hindu and who is not, is looked at through Asad's lens. Hinduism remains an anthropological category shifting its meaning across time and space. Citing the work of Mark Juergensmeyer (1982) on Ad Dharm movement in Punjab, Ciotti states that religion for Dalits has remained a central force for social movements since long ago. It is here that the book is at its best. Religion, for Dalits, is not antithetical to modernity, but a part of it. The religious-secular binary does not hold in the Dalit lifeworld, indeed in anyone's lifeworld. Ciotti critiques the inadequacy of the Enlightenment framework to understand human behaviour and thought. Following Asad, the book says that religion is constitutive of modernity and not opposed to it. This includes Ambedkar's adoption of Buddhism.

Chamar lifestyle is different from caste Hindus in many ways. This non-Hinduness of Dalits in UP, has also been mentioned in other anthropological works (Searle-Chatterjee, 1994). For example, they have their own rituals, they eat pork, have their own minor temples, and bury their dead (p. 152). Since the 1990s, the Chamars have stopped calling Brahmin priests. They have their own interpretation of Satya Narayan Katha, they support inter-caste marriages, reject Hinduism, and accept Saints Kabir and Ravi Das. Due to the rise of the BSP, some showed interest in Buddhism while most considered themselves to be Hindus for namesake. There were also a couple and two women who became Christians. Ciotti's usage of the term 'genealogical amnesia' borrowing from Carsten (1995) tells us why Manupur Chamars do not remember their own ancestors, reject Brahmanical versions of their lowly origin, and have their own myths of origin around Adi Hindu theme. 'Chamars have selected which past to emphasise', Ciotti quips.

The non-Hinduness of the Chamars takes a distinct form during anti-Muslim pogroms. Chamars find themselves stuck between two extremes—caste Hindus as attackers and Muslims as victims. Citing the works of Zoya Hasan (1996), Mary Searle-Chatterjee (1994) and Nandini Gooptu (2001), Ciotti says that militant Hinduism, though supported by urban high castes, percolates down to middle order castes. This has been twice the case with 1930s and late 1980s UP. Urban Hindus became anti-Muslim while rural ones became anti-Dalit. As stated earlier, upward mobility of Muslims and Dalits led to status anxiety among high caste Hindu traders and middle caste Hindu workers. One is surprised to see the situation still persisting where middle order castes are re-playing their roles as 'warrior defenders of Hinduism', a phrase used by Gooptu (2001) while describing communalism in UP during the 1930s. This led to two things—consolidation of Chamar-Muslim relationship and spread of Saint Ravidas' message.

The Chamar self is intermeshed with the twin figures of Ambedkar and Ravidas and no conversation would occur without mentioning either of the two, reflects Ciotti. Banaras might be a centre for Brahmanical Hinduism, but Chamar subjectivity negates this powerful discourse. Social equality remains the core of the preaching of Saint Ravidas, a fourteenth century saint. Quoting Vijay Prasad (2000), Ciotti says that the ideology of Ravidas and an independent location in the economy gave Chamars a distinct subjectivity. Perhaps this also explains how Shiv Narayani and Satnampanthi Chamars also have the same idea of religion—a practical philosophy for social justice.

Party Politics for Life and Justice

Another important source of the Chamar modern self is politics. For Chamars, politics is an inextricable part of their lifeworld. In Manuela Ciotti's words, 'Chamar politics revolved around the most intrinsic features of the community's social persona.' Using a work by Paul Brass (1965), the book says how the poor (which consisted of mostly Dalits and Muslims) were in patron-client relationship with the Congress government. Interviews with villagers show that Indira Gandhi was revered among Dalits and Muslims for her *Garibi Hatao* program. From the late 1980s onwards, the discourse of the BSP started gaining ground in Banaras. Chamars knew what 'bahujanwaad' (rule by plebeians), as well as 'manuwaad' (rule by patricians) was. This book accepts how, more than the material rewards, it is the discourse of development that influenced Chamars. The author details how both material and symbolic benefits accrued to Dalits whenever Mayawati got power. This includes fulfillment of SC-ST quota in government jobs, Ambedkar Village Scheme for rural development and renaming of districts after Bahujan icons. If Ciotti agrees with Corbridge and Harris (2001) on the concepts of 'material' and 'symbolic benefits', we find her disagreeing with Kanchan Chandra (2000) on the concept of 'ethnic parties'. For Ciotti, BSP was not a Chamar party but a group of all marginalised castes and groups. Her interviews showed her how deeply Chamars were influenced by the image of Ambedkar but only few talked about Buddhism. Much of the Hinduisation of SCs can be attributed to the Poona Pact which made SCs dependent upon caste Hindus for their welfare. This aspect could have been elaborated a little more. The Hinduisation of SCs is a deliberate plan by the Indian state. Despite all these, the book tells us how 'Chamars' preferred this term and found 'Harijan' to be casteist. The term 'Dalit' was used only during political meetings and had little relevance for the Chamars of Banaras.

Chamar Women and Modernity

Ethnographic accounts have always faced one major limitation, that is, fieldwork with women participants. Fieldwork for women ethnographers is also more challenging than for men. Manuela Ciotti must be applauded for doing fieldwork in a patriarchal set up and bringing out the hitherto hidden aspect of rural women of UP. Ciotti interviews a number of women from Chamar caste and unlocks the interaction among social development, change in gender relations and modernity. There is no denying that gender relations among the Dalits are different from high caste Hindus. Chamar women have been working outside their houses for centuries, are outspoken and enjoy greater sexual freedom. No reported cases of dowry and female foeticide were heard of by Ciotti. It is here that we see how Dalit women have an edge over high caste Hindu women as far as making life choices is concerned. This is peculiar to Dalit women as even Brahmin women are not allowed to marry non-Brahmins. Chamar modernity is equally a cause and an effect of these historically empowered women. Modern education and the consequent new middle class have brought certain changes in this narrative.

Ciotti, in her signature style, again uses two hermeneutic tools to understand Chamar women subjectivity. N. Kumar (2005) delineates ‘historical’ and ‘anthropological’ women—the former is an urban, middle class, educated, high-caste Hindu who was active in the anti-colonial struggle while the latter is the rural, poorly uneducated, low caste woman who had little idea about the national struggle. The former is assumed to be urbane while the latter is rustic. Both Chamar men and women, while becoming middle class, are imitating the lifestyle of the high caste Hindus of the colonial period. Thus, modernity again takes a retro turn. Chamar women receive education and reproduce a higher class status but are equally burdened by newer norms of domestication. This gender roles reproduction among the newly middle class Chamars draws its repertoire not from local Hindu elites but from the nationalist imaginings of the nineteenth and twentieth century Hindu elites.

Ciotti critiques the concept of ‘capital circulation’ by Bourdieu (1986) positing that it is not a gender-neutral process. Increase in cultural capital leads to a slight decrease in freedom of younger Chamar women. Still men preferred educated and working women for marriage and supported them during participation in village panchayat elections. While Dalit women are supported by Dalit men, caste Hindu women are opposed by their own family and kinship men. Thus, the reproduction of class among the Chamars is never unilinear. As mentioned earlier, there are many elements in the making of the Chamar self which make Chamar modernity quite different from the usual caste Hindu modernity. One feels slightly disappointed to see no proper mention of inter-caste and inter-faith marriages among the Chamar women—one of the biggest indicators of women empowerment. Nevertheless, one strong point which the book makes is that Chamar women do have a significant contribution in the imagining of India as a nation.

Limitations and Way Forward

Retro-Modern India succeeds in telling the story of a formerly untouchable caste in India. I have few quibbles and a doubt about the method used in the book. All along the text, Ciotti has used the term ‘Hindu-Muslim riots’ by which she actually meant anti-Muslim pogroms. She uses the phrase ‘low castes’ by which she means ex-untouchables and not ‘backward classes’. There is the usage of the expression ‘urban middle class of colonial times’ by which she actually means *Hindu* urban middle class. She has made mention of ‘direct and mediated dominance’, the concepts used by Jeffery, Jeffrey and Jeffrey (2008) but not elaborated upon it. In the same way, Ciotti could have elaborated much more deeply on the importance of reservations in education and jobs. Much of the desire for government jobs comes from the fact that the untouchables can get middle class jobs only through reservations due to extreme casteist environment in both education and jobs. She has mentioned that in the 2005 village election, a Chamar won the seat. This was the first time a Dalit became a village chief which became possible only due to the reservation of seats for SCs. Ciotti merely mentions that even backward class Hindus preferred Brahmin pradhans but has not asked why? It is in this context, I want to raise a methodological question to

the book at hand. How can one understand one's Self without looking at it through the eyes of others? Our selves are constituted of both self-image and the image which others have of us. Both images influence each other. How do Chamars find themselves vis-à-vis caste Hindus? How does the untouchability line influence this? Are well-educated middle class Chamars accepted by caste Hindus? Why did educated Chamar youth tell Ciotti that they face deeper and subtler casteism in cities? Recent scholarly works point out a change of form, not lessening, of casteism. Readers should know that like Chamars/Dalits, Muslims and Christians are also considered as untouchables in the Hindu social order. The Chamar modern self is equally forged through such event interactions of daily experiences of humiliation, casteist political institutions, and exclusionary discourses. The Chamar self and a desire for social justice become synonymous with each other.

Nevertheless, the book makes a significant contribution to our present understanding of modernity, Indian society, Uttar Pradesh culture and Dalits. It must be read by social anthropologists to understand Indian society in general and Dalits of Uttar Pradesh in particular.

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Caste, Gender and Fire in Maadathy: An Unconventional Fairy Tale

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Maadathy: An Unconventional Fairy Tale directed by Leena Manimekalai, a crowd-funded production pioneered by Bhavana Goparaju is one of the most riveting feature film releases in 2021 in the global film world. Exposing the monstrosity of the intersections of caste and gender in India, the film was a Jury award winner in 2020 and a nominee for the Kim Ji Seok award in 2019. Made in 2018 but officially released in 2021, it is a story in itself of awry patriarchal media authoritarianism in India. Viewers can watch the film on neestream.com and upcoming on Amazon Prime as well.

The film focuses on a family from the Puthirai Vannar referred to as the “unseeables” – a sub-community of Dalits, the outcastes in India. Vannar are launderers hired to wash the clothes of the dominant caste and other Dalit communities, including menstrual cloths. They are not allowed to be seen and are expected to stay hidden from the dominant caste. However, those very eyes pillage these women and children exercising selective “visibility” and selective “touchability” upon their bodies. It is that everyday politics of vision in that “seeing” and “being seen” activity we are appalled by in the film. Irreversible rules of eye-to-eye contact and eye-to-body contact are the forbidden acts that the Vannar community should bear the burden of safeguarding, while the dominant caste men establish their prerogative to break on their own terms; their eyes cannot lock but bodies do.

We first hear the story of this community in the novel *Koveru Kazhuthaigal* by Imayam in 1994 (translated as *Beasts of Burden*). Imayam tells the story of a Vannar family who constantly slide into economic and physical mires unable to retrieve their sinking selves. As Imayam suggests, everyone finds pleasure in feeling above somebody else, whatever that momentous pleasure maybe.

C. Lakshmanan and K. Raghupathy's work, *Theedamaikkul Theendaamai: Puthurai Vannar Vaazhvun Irappum*, 2017 (*Untouchability within Untouchability: The Life and Death of Puthurai Vannar*) is one of the few research-based books on this community.

Seeped in an organic methodology of participatory cinema, Manimekalai combines history, fact and life presented in Dalit Tamil (with English subtitles) as she grapples heavy themes, such as caste, gender and communal hierarchy that strangulate, rape and murder women. The film is based in an ethereally fantastical village, home to Puthurai Vannar in South India, tucked into breathtaking mountains, waterfalls, river and forest that the cinematography unfurls. She secured training for her actors from the Vannar community with whom they stayed for the entire film production. Such expert knowledge and lived experiences of the community, brings us closer to the truth that under such innocuous beauty, lurk pursuing perils. In the filming process, the Vannar community share their social condition—that if you are a Dalit Vannar woman, you will be raped as an everyday routine (Manimekalai, 2021). In the partnership between caste hierarchy and a much older globally normalized scriptural ordinance of patriarchal authority—the precursor to imposed caste, race and gender identities—pre-determine a Vannar girl's life and death. Like young Yosana (Tamil word for thought) in the film, Dalit girls are victims of sexual violence made permissible in a dominant caste-driven patriarchal ideology which I will call patria-caste that does not spare recruiting Dalit men into their patriarchy. The All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch Delhi, India states 16,236 reported cases of rape of Dalit girls and women in 2014–2019. Rape of minor Dalit girls is recorded at 2,642 in 2017–2019, in just three years. Of course, there are numerous unreported cases. This aspect is highlighted in the careful planning that involves teamwork whether it is rape carried out by a single man or multiple men, both of which the film depicts. Powerful structures of governance set already wounded Dalit men against one another, kicking them onto a survivor wrestling ground to grab a few rupees. The Vannar men's experiences of dominant caste men who manipulate their vulnerable sub-ordinate masculinity as prime meat, instigating anger and mistrust against their own, is clearly layered for the viewer. As stated by the Vannar community, Leena brings into the film, women in dominant caste communities as well who seek their own victim-erasure in securing superiority over Dalit men, women, and other gender identities.

The heart-wrenching acting by Semmalar Annam as Veni, maps numerous points of geographies of fear that the Vannar women should but cannot avoid and geographies of refuge that fail to protect these women and children. The cartographers comprise actors across territorial, religious and caste boundaries, using women's bodies to announce acidic patria-caste intertwining of entitled settler syndromes in their self-declared occupation of those sacred spaces. In the film, Veni laments to her father-in-law, "When I think of Yosana's future, I feel fire in my lap." He responds, "Of course. It is natural. Your mother, grandmother and your great grandmother. It is the fire in the lap of all the women." Veni anguishes, "She keeps wandering like a wild bird. I am struggling so hard to protect her." The sacrilege of mental and bodily spaces leaves the Vannar women emotionally, psychologically and physically maimed for generations as they go about their everyday chores carrying "fire on their laps" (*Maadathy*). The destruction of bodies, families and minds continue as due processes of planting flagpoles of male dominance on beautiful bodies and reciprocal territories resulting in trauma. Yosana's bold curiosity of the geographies of her own body,

nature's incarnations and the male body turns into a punishable crime and her sweet-crush is crushed by the hurt male ego that needs quenching.

The producers, along with Leena Manimekalai are to be highly commended for producing a film that was bound to face hurdles. The team dared to render visible the story of Dalits cornered in invisible spaces where intersectional nodes of caste, class, religion and gender identities leave women bare and bleeding. Co-habiting with danger, Dalit women's bodies are a hunt for all men irrespective of caste identity who find solidarity with dominant castes in replicating hegemonic masculinity as a cultural normative. Zora Neale Hurston's words echo as we watch this film: "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (*Their Eyes were Watching God*, 1937.) Socially shunned women are the ones sought for work, sex, and dehumanization. The film compellingly reveals the complexity of the tragedy that lies in the alluring trap of alcohol and toxic masculinity doled out in conniving ways by dominant caste members that Dalit men fall prey to—a patria-caste.

Young Yosana, brilliantly and captivatingly played by Ajmina Kasim, revolves around us in this film, enjoying a caressing closeness with nature as water plays on her body. Water is simultaneously alive, dead, peaceful, turbulent and ghostly as a gurgling bearer of blood oozing from body and mind carrying "pollution" and "purity" all at once. Yosana is a talking friend to animals and birds in her universe. The scenes where Yosana and nature's other beings coddle in feeding a pomegranate to monkey friends are delightful and moving when the baby donkey-friend, an extension of her innocence, faithfully reciprocates her kindness. Yosana claims her natural right to admire nature almost as a fixation and provides copyright to that natural world to own her in a reciprocity that is fairytale-like. Her mother complains, "Is this your only chore? Feeding the rabbits, singing to the quails. Who will marry you?" As a free wanderer, and water lover, wading in the gorges by the river, she desirously gazes, touches a forbidden male body with her gaze, and steals his smell to quench her confused response to a sexual awareness. Unfortunately, it is that same innocent curious admiration that allures her into a cave-tomb where her mother's fear comes true. Ever since Yosana emerged from her womb as a girl, a Dalit girl, a Dalit Vannar girl—she knew that the stars lined up in that order to determine her fate.

Yosana trustingly crawls into the crevices of our thoughts and emotions demanding our affection and attention, leaving us restlessly feeling untrustworthy. She comes to stay whether you like it or not, but you will. She drags you along with her into a vivacious innocence that moves you to fall in love with her with an ease as cotton flies from the trees we are shown. You most certainly will smile, laugh and cry with her. The merging of the natural elements with the supernatural carries Leena's talent to a level of genius storytelling. The duplicity of a dialectical opposition of "to be seen" or "not to be seen" as a human being, is intentionally reified in Yosana. She hurriedly runs away from the simultaneity of deification, but the viewer cannot escape the unfolding of the hypocrisy of deity devotees who will construct and destruct female bodies to score in that ruthless game of a culturally normalized and socially perpetuated ritual of rape. The real tragedy is the infiltration of that dangerous combination of casteist patriarchy into oppressed groups who look for the Other to readily exercise power upon. Are not all who carry such exhibitions of masculinity and caste power both explicitly and implicitly, complicit? The film disallows us as we become desperate to magically remove our omnipresence in this story. We are haunted by our own ghosts with whom we play hide and seek in our hidden crevices.

With powerfully placed symbolism in colors, body fluids, water, eyes, body and much more, Leena weaves her own magical web of a genre where she but leaves the facts as frozen droplets on those strands, mesmerizing the viewer in its multidimensional intersectional layers. Each leaf, sound, sweat drop and each hurl of the hand beating the clothes on the stone, the washer woman's pressing feet into menstrual blooded clothes, stain our guarded minds as an unforgettable horror despite the scenic views. Human and non-human actors—both bleeding and unbleeding—blend like the colors on the canvas testifying to these hidden stories. Erasures of borders of the human and the spiritual worlds direct us to not just imagine a world free of caste borders, but a world where lessons ought to be learnt and put to praxis in nature's economy of un-exploitative and un-authoritative blending of task and be-ing. In the ruins of the temple (one of the many un-bleeding actors) we see a collapse of the marriage of capitalism and religious structures and in the hut where Yosana's divinity resides in a young new-generation-boy who shows the path to an empathetic casteless and genderless structure as he hands a cloth to a menstruating woman. Leena unfolds our eyes to follow Yosana's world of seeking justice alongside creating a counter world to vampirism that chases women, Dalits and all those vulnerable.

In this new genre of storytelling where “to be” or “not to be” or “to be seen” or “not to be seen” are not choices of a human or a ghost, but an anomalous state of being which through magical surrealism Leena exposes as devious reality. *Maadathy* webs diverse strings of genres where horror leaves us in disbelief that we ask ourselves “Can this be true today?” We are left in a state of helplessness—an unfamiliar place in nature, where the arduous yet beautiful terrains of the “unseeable's” isolated habitat of body and mind merge in explosions of new grounds where we hesitate to plant our feet in. However, we do follow playful Yosana, entranced but left with a feeling of being duped. We wonder as to who orchestrated that disappearing act of Snow White's apparitions that we were led by. Clearly, since that cinematization of binaries of good and evil in 1938, the dominant male is still on that quest for a tall-ego compensation through domestication of women by marking their forbidden territories as dangerous. Do we not know that patria-caste assumes many forms to allure little girls like Yosana with forbidden fruit, and a princess will fall? Princely powers stand by to violate a fallen princess while distant drums erect yet another deity: conventional fairy tale gone wrong, but a conventional caste tale gone mighty right. Yosana is bewitched by her choices of a free spirit and awareness of emotions and pays the price for plucking the forbidden fruit off a man's back.

Maadathy, a “must see” film, leads us to consider Shakespeare's Ophelia who lies torn at the junction of forbidden desire, blame, and all other Eurocentric canonization of ranked patriarchy that mangles women's bodies and minds. Ophelia drowns and Yosana rises flooding the film in several apparitional forms and in the clever all-pervasive symbolic details. Yosana no longer just tenuously breathes but stands strong and tall as an incarnation of *Maadathy* to protect all vulnerable beings and exorcise the colluding forces of caste and patriarchy that seek a pan-camaraderie. Can she conjure a life of her choosing where geographies of fear will transform into safe homes for beautiful bodies and minds? Leena leaves us to imagine a new generation of kind boys and men who will choose a sincere mission of the deincarnation of patria-caste where a pariah parent can lull their sweet child on a fire-free lap and as she grows, can actually enjoy a swim with her daughter.