

# DALITS: VIOLENCE AND STRUGGLES FOR RIGHTS

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## 1. Introduction

Dalits are a people broken, exploited and forgotten. There are around 200 million Dalits<sup>1</sup> who are formerly known as the Untouchables or the Outcastes in India. The origin of the status of Dalit goes back to the more obscure pages of history. The Dalits are believed to be the ancient Dravidian race, the original people of the Indian subcontinent. The degradation of the Dalits is probably a product of the Aryan invasion, with the dominant Aryans reserving the higher status for themselves and relegating the darker skinned, native inhabitants to lower and untouchable status. History is witness to the violence and the violent encroachments on human dignity and human rights of the Dalits. This article looks at the violence and oppression on Dalits, the assertion of Dalits for their human rights, their rights on religion, politics and education to bring about the reality of freedom, justice and peace paving the way for a dignified life.

The Dalits<sup>2</sup> who are divided into various subcastes known as *jatis* have been systematically deprived of their rights and dignity by the upper classes of India. They have suffered and continue to suffer multiple forms

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<sup>1</sup>The term Dalit in Sanskrit is both a noun and an adjective. It has been derived from the root *dal* which means to crack, open, split, etc. When used as a noun or adjective, it means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, dwnetrodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed, etc. Today this term is used frequently and has become popular among the Dalits in India.

<sup>2</sup>The Dalits are known by many other names, which were / are given to them by others, mainly to despise them or to show contempt. These include: *Dasa, Dasyu, Raksasa, Asura, Avarna, Nisada, Panchama, Mletcha, Svapaca, Chandala, Achuta* – Untouchable, Exterior Castes, Depressed classes, *Harijan* etc. Besides these names, there are a number of other titles or names at the regional language level. For example, *Chura* in Punjab (North West India); *Bhangi* or *Lal-Beghi* in Hindi (North India); *Mahar* in Marathi (Central India); *Mala* in Telgu, *Paraiyan* in Tamil and *Pulayan* in Malayalam (South India). James Massey, *Roots: A Concise History of Dalits*, Delhi: ISPCCK, 1991, 10.

of oppression, which have always been explained or justified by the dominant culture. Dalit does not mean low caste or 'poor' but it denotes the abysmally low status to which a certain section of the people has been reduced, through a religio-cultural process. Socially and culturally, economically and politically, Dalits have been subjugated and marginalized throughout their history. Because of the age-long oppression, the Dalits have been denied their sense of self-identity and dignity. Today the Dalits are on the path of re-discovering their rights, identity and dignity. They are a powerful force and their assertions for rights are gaining momentum all over in India.

## **2. Violence *Paramo Dharma***

Most Dalits live on the brink of destitution, barely able to feed their families and unable to send their children to school or to break away from cycles of debt bondage. They are segregated from the non-Dalits in all spheres of life. They are forbidden to enter places of worship, to draw water from public wells or any action that may bring them into contact with the non-Dalits. The Dalits do what is considered as the most menial and degrading jobs. They are made to dig the village graves, dispose of dead animals, clean human waste, etc. They are deemed polluting for higher caste people and therefore "untouchable." The upper castes may touch a cat, touch a dog, touch any other animal, but the touch of these human beings results in pollution.<sup>3</sup> According to government statistics, an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers who clear faeces from public and private latrines and dispose of dead animals; unofficial estimates are much higher.

The Dalits are considered to be untouchable; even seeing them or thinking about them or being in contact with their shadows can be polluting. The untouchability<sup>4</sup> is the basis for atrocities and violence, denial of basic needs, land rights, legal discrimination, infringement of civil liberties, inferior or no people status, dehumanizing living and working conditions, impoverishment, malnourishment, bad health

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<sup>3</sup>For various forms of suffering in the name of pollution Dalits have been subjected to in the hands of upper castes see M. C. Raj, *Dalitology: The Book of the Dalit People*, Tumkur: Ambedkar Resource Centre, 2001, 80 ff.

<sup>4</sup>Although "untouchability" was abolished under Article 17 of the Indian constitution, the practice continues to determine the socio-economic and religious standing of those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy.

conditions, high levels of illiteracy and continuing social ostracism – all of which remind a Dalit that he is an untouchable and therefore is not at all an equal.

Untouchability is not at all an issue when it comes to the question of sex. According to Amnesty International 2005, Dalit girls have been forced to become prostitutes for upper-caste patrons and village priests. Devadasis, literally meaning “female servants of god,” usually belong to the Dalit community. Once dedicated, the girl is unable to marry, forced to become a prostitute and eventually lands up in urban brothels. Dalit women are frequently gang-raped, beaten and tortured as a form of retaliation. Sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women are used by landlords and the police to teach them “lessons” and crush dissent within the community. Naked parading, ritualistic prostitution and sexual harassment of Dalit women by the dominant caste persons are still common in many parts of the country even today.

Crimes and atrocities on Dalits have ever been increasing over the past few years. Chopping off heads of Dalits, maiming limbs, chasing them from their huts and looting their properties, still persist. The current government statistics of murder, rape, and assault that Dalits are subjected to paint a horrible picture.<sup>5</sup> The helplessness of Dalits gets multiplied by the general apathy of bureaucrats and especially of the police refusing or delaying justice. Even when Dalits are attacked by upper castes it is always the Dalits who bear the brunt of the violence from the protective forces. Any attempt to defy the social order is met with violence or economic retaliation. Efforts of Dalits to assert their rights or their resistance against the violence unleashed on them are viewed as acts of disobedience and law and order problem. This results in brutal attacks on Dalits by the state machinery, especially by the police. The Dalits are at the receiving end, both by the dominant caste and by the state police force, which is also very much dominated by the dominant caste persons.

Violence against Dalits has its distinctiveness of being embedded in the social structure dominated by the upper caste. It is the caste-based hierarchical structure that lays down the norm of conduct for human relationship between its more privileged groups and the subdued and subordinate ones. The National Human Rights Commission’s (NHRC)

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<sup>5</sup>For a detailed account by Human Rights Watch for the extent and means of discrimination against lower castes see: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org).

report says: “It is the caste relationship in Hindu society which is getting disturbed by forces of pressure both from above and below. The frequency and intensity of violence is an offshoot of desperate attempts by the upper caste groups to protect their entrenched status against the process of disengagement and upward mobility among lower castes resulting from affirmative action of State policy.”<sup>6</sup> The ground has thus been made more fertile for tension and unrest to grow in many parts of the country. The situation has also turned ripe for communal and casteist forces to sow the seeds of division and discord and indulge in violence. Dalits, being the most vulnerable of the poor, are the worst hit, with atrocities against them continuing in a number of states. Often violence takes brutal forms and turns into acts of atrocities against the Dalits.

### **3. Right on Rights**

Human rights is one topic that is being prominently discussed these days. It is more critically discussed in the wake of growing atrocities against the historically deprived groups. Human rights can best be defined as those rights which human beings have simply because they are human beings. A common basis or justification for human rights has been the concept of Natural Law. Though unwritten natural law consists of a code which any reasonable man presumably agrees upon as the basis and govern all human actions. Natural Law takes precedence over all man-made laws, rules and customs. The best modern standard of human rights has been outlined by the General Assembly of the United Nations on Dec. 10, 1948 under the title “Universal Declaration of Human rights.” According to the first Article of this declaration, ‘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.’

The preamble to the Indian Constitution resolved to constitute India into a sovereign, social, secular, democratic republic and proclaimed to all its citizens – ‘Justice: social, economic and political; Liberty: of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship; Equality: of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity, assuring dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.’ Hence India cannot be the monopoly of privileged or dominant groups. Dalits cannot be treated as second class citizens.

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<sup>6</sup><http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-george270405.htm>, on 28 Feb. 2010.

Dalit human rights has become an international issue and organisations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Minority Rights Group and Anti-Slavery International are making Dalit Human Rights a priority issue and are concerned to raise the issue internationally in UN bodies, governments and the public-at-large. In recent years an increasing number of human rights organisations and bodies are coming to recognize the practice of untouchability and caste discrimination as gross human rights violation. Since caste still operates as a defining condition in establishing marriages, social relations and access to employment, millions of Dalits and other former low-caste people lag behind in education, employment and overall development.

The government may boast of economic progress and grand new development schemes, but it has failed to address issues like education, caste and gender discrimination and the rural-urban gap. The result is continued upper-caste dominance in professions, business, and culture. Dalits continue to face the wrath of the caste lords and are denied of human dignity and their rights including a just share in the resources like land, water, mines etc. Exceptional to the general attitude the upper castes offer *puja* to Dalits at their house close to Ugadi festival at Hallikerehundi in Chamarajnar taluk of Karnataka. This unique tradition has been observed by the upper castes in symbolic repentance for the years of subjugation the Dalits (Kalibali community) have undergone. The Kalibalis apply black ash along with castor oil on their body and are taken in procession on the occasion of *puja*.<sup>7</sup> However one wonders why the Dalits should apply black ash and castor oil on their body! The Dalits continue to suffer for their identity and dignity. Their right to a decent dignified life is under severe threat.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*Deccan Herald*, 20 March, 2010, 6.

<sup>8</sup>Neither the Constitution, the legislations, and the judiciary nor the other Human Rights mechanisms in the form of Human rights commissions at various levels from the states to the centre are providing effective safeguards and guarantees to ensure Dalits rights. Even the most powerful instrument currently available in defence of Dalits rights, namely SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, hardly provide effective safeguards for protection and promotion of Dalit Human Rights. This often results in the culprits going scot-free, which in fact gives them more confidence and courage to carry on such criminal activities without any difficulty in future.

#### 4. Rights and Religion

India is a battleground of various forms of religious violence. History of the dominant Indian culture is marked by a history of violence. Indian scriptures especially the *Puranas*, Epics and *Bhagavat Gita* are full of narrations of violence and killing often in the name of dharma. Hence *himsa* as enjoined by the Vedas and applied to mobile and immobile creatures is nothing but *ahimsa* or dharma.<sup>9</sup> Over the centuries, many Dalit groups have converted from such 'killer culture' to other faiths, often to escape widespread discrimination and achieve higher social status. However, such converts often lose benefits conferred by the Government's affirmative action programs because these, according to the Constitution, are reserved only for those having scheduled caste status.

Dalits and Tribals who have adopted new paths of emancipation are often the targets of Hindu religious extremism. Converts to Christianity are particularly targeted. Christian missionaries have been operating schools and medical clinics for many years in tribal areas and among the very poor, and Tribals and Dalits have benefitted as a result. Hindu extremists resent these gains as disturbing the traditional social order, since better educated Dalits and Tribals no longer accept their disadvantaged status as readily as they once did. Some Hindu groups fear that Christians may try to convert large numbers of lower castes, using economic or social welfare incentives. Many acts of violence against Christians stem from these fears, and most go unpunished. Many states have also adopted anti-conversion laws, in violation of India's constitutional protection for religious freedom.

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief, Mohan Bhagwat, recently came up with a controversial formulation: "He who is an Indian is a Hindu and he who is not a Hindu is not an Indian."<sup>10</sup> Bhagwat sees India as a melting pot in which all the Indians are reduced to Hindus, ignoring India's binding obligation under the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in preventing its majority community from swallowing up minorities.<sup>11</sup> The constitutional commitment to secularism

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<sup>9</sup>Denis Vidal, ed., *Violence/Non-Violence Some Hindu Perspectives*, Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2003, 87.

<sup>10</sup>Mano Mitta, "India: Melting Pot VS Salad Bowl," *Sunday Times of India* (Bangalore), March 7, 2010, 21.

<sup>11</sup>Bhagawat conveniently forgets the fact that vast majority of the Dalits in our country are not Hindus and they have nothing to do with Hinduism. See, A. M.

has been compromised to Hindutva ideology to the extent that India for all its claims to being a liberal democracy, finds itself on the US “watch list” of 12 countries where violations of religious freedom are engaged in or tolerated by Governments. No one including the Governments seems to be concerned about the right of the individual to adopt his/her way of life or religion of choice. As Berwa states, “Dalits and Tribals are not Hindus, and they can decide for themselves.”<sup>12</sup> Who has empowered the Hindutva forces to be the spokesmen of Dalits and Tribals? There are desperate attempts on the part of such forces to keep the Tribals and Dalits forever poor, illiterate and under subjugation.

The question of Dalit Human Right is not just a matter of addressing the atrocities, but it corroborates to the affirmation of land rights of Dalits, resisting the forces of globalisation, communalism, casteism, patriarchy and so on. This paves the way for collective action, leading to people’s movements resulting in social change. This is the ethical course of addressing Dalit human rights. Justice A. S. Anand the Chairperson of the NHRC calls upon the government to adopt a rights-based approach rather than a welfare based one in addressing the condition of the Dalit people. Terming the continuation of discrimination and atrocities against Dalits as shameful, Justice Anand blamed mainly society’s “indifference” and “refusal to change its mindset.”<sup>13</sup>

In most parts of the country Dalits are either small or marginal farmers or landless. Historically they are one of the long persecuted groups of people betrayed of rights over land and any form of resources. Land is a productive asset and people are more emotionally attached with the land in many ways. For many it is the symbol of their freedom. To some it is the image of their fight against the upper caste. It also represents the mark of reiterating the lost identity. To many it is the icon of self-determination, co-existence and community feeling. But to the corporate sector and agents of development it is a commodity to be consumed. Land can be purchased and sold for commercial purpose; it could even be acquired forcefully. Every time the common man sacrifices himself for the relish and enjoyment of the elite. In an age of globalisation and marketisation,

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Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, *Essays on Dalits Religion and Liberation*, Bangalore: ATC, 2006.

<sup>12</sup>Laxmi N. Berwa, *Asian Dalit Solidarity*, Delhi: ISPCCK, 2000, 115.

<sup>13</sup><http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-george270405.htm>, on 2 March, 2010.

the life values sustained through the community life and love are constantly eroded and substituted with competition.

Looking back at the land struggles in the past, the participation of Dalits in land movement is quite sizeable in various parts of the country, particularly in the armed movements. None of these movements, however, have emerged into a Dalit land rights movement with a perspective of social change in the basic knitting of the structure. One prime factor of the failure of the Indian working class movement was that it was mostly led by upper caste bourgeoisie who never wanted to change the basic social frame. Therefore the realisation of change in the brahminical social order could not be internalised.

The implementation of land reforms has been subverted by the absence of political will and bureaucratic commitment, loopholes in the law, tremendous manipulative power of the landed class, lack of organisation among the poor and excessive interference of courts. Therefore the intended benefits to the poor in general and particularly the Dalits failed to materialise. Hence the whole question of the land rights of Dalits has gone into oblivion.

The winds of privatisation under the economic reforms have already shaken the very foundations of the Dalit reservations. Globalisation is the new trend which lays foundations for a kind of neo-colonisation by spreading capitalistic regimes all over the world controlled by a few. The questions whether the Dalits will be able to defend their rights in such situations and will there be any space for them in the course of a globalized market economy remain unanswered.

## **5. Rights and Politics**

Power is another major ground leading to mass scale atrocities against Dalits. Power, particularly in terms of political power through reservation and other policies of compensation, had resulted in drawing hatred from the upper caste segments. This is widespread in rural areas particularly with the awakening of Dalits at the panchayat level. The Dalits have been in dark in exercising their political rights, particularly, the rights to contest the village local body election. Dalits were prevented from contesting in local body elections and in case elected, not recognized and allowed to function as leaders of village body Panchayats. The dominant castes do not assimilate the winning of a post in election by a Dalit and the people in power still have no real concern for the emancipation of the Dalits.



There has been a sharp increase in violent manifestations of Castocracy in local communities ever since the local government system got strengthened through the Constitution amendments. When the panchayat raj institutions have been seen by the upper castes as the tool for the lower castes to assert their rights as individuals living in a democratic polity the latter have become targets of caste based discrimination and violence. The upper castes who have been controlling the affairs of the village and the community and the rural economy cannot tolerate the changes that are being brought about by the decentralized democratic institutions. Therefore, from the beginning of the implementation of the panchayat system, tensions, violence and killings have taken place in order to resist the transformation.

In the local body elections the upper castes suppress the rights of the lower caste to exercise their franchise. Similar incidents have occurred in most of the states. The northern states, which are prone to more caste conflicts, are witnessing human rights violations after the introduction of the new phase of panchayats. There are a number of instances indicating the presence of powerful caste elites that continue to thwart attempts for a constitutional resolution of social justice issues at the village level. The frequent reports on the killings of Dalit men, women and children are not only restricted to backward states, where the process of decentralization of power to the local level has not really taken off. Caste violence is part of the social reality in India.

It may also be mentioned that the police (law and order machinery) are not under the authority of panchayats. The people belonging to the lower castes are being subjected to unabated atrocities particularly through the connivance and collusion of the state administration and the local police. In many instances, cases are not even registered against the perpetrators (who are mainly the upper castes) by the police who are greatly influenced by the upper castes or majority of whom belong to the upper castes.

Discrimination, deprivation, exclusion and exploitation are endemic to every society, which leads to frustration, anger and aggression. Those who are subjected to injustice and oppression tend to rebel and revolt. These reactions culminate in assertion which give rise to people's movements. When people become conscious of the inequalities and injustices, they mobilise and organise themselves to struggle against those who subject them to servitude and bondage. In the case of the Dalits it was

Ambedkar who tried to organise and unite all Dalits under one banner.<sup>14</sup>

Dalit politics gradually developed into two dominant strands. The first group belonged to the early Ambedkarites, who were led by the ideology of Ambedkarism<sup>15</sup> focused on two ways to upward mobility -- education and agitation. The second group of Dalit leaders found place under paternalistic Congress umbrella and were incorporated by upper castes. Since the death of Ambedkar, the Dalit community was divided into various parties. It was Kanshi Ram who successfully breathed new life into Dalits through his movement for the emancipation of the 'untouchables.'

Kanshi Ram, for the purpose of uniting Dalits, initially launched an organisation called All India Backward and Minorities Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF). Though he was initially concerned with the empowerment of all the unprivileged communities, after 1981 Kanshi Ram concentrated exclusively on Dalits and established Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti, known as DS4. The DS4 party reached soon to fame and power through its provocative slogan: "*tilak, tarazu aur talwar, inko maro jote char.*"<sup>16</sup> This slogan since then reflected his core philosophy of creating a state of permanent caste antagonism in the minds of his supporters.

Kanshi Ram anointed Mayawati – a former schoolteacher, his successor. Dalit politics particularly in Uttar Pradesh today revolves around India's so called Dalit queen Mayawati, who through her hard work, political understanding and understanding of changeable environment has reached at the helm of affairs in the government. Mayawati, after realising the changing political circumstances, came with the new political equation of Dalit-Brahmin<sup>17</sup> coalition and changed her

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<sup>14</sup>See, Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994.

<sup>15</sup>'Ambedkarism' as a leading ideology is a living force in India today which defines the basis of the Dalit movement and to a large extent the anti-caste movement urging to abolish the social and economic exploitation involved in caste and capitalism.

<sup>16</sup>The slogan is roughly translated as beating with shoes the Brahmins, who wear their *tilak* caste marks, the banias or businessmen symbolized by *tarazu* or a pair of weighing scales, and the oppressive landlords, the thakurs, denoted by *talwar* or sword.

<sup>17</sup>Mayawati did this to widen the appeal of her party beyond her traditional Dalit voters and bring Brahmins and other upper castes into her programme of all-

earlier offensive slogan of *tilak tarajo aur talwar inko maro joote char* into a new colourful slogan- *Haathi nahin, Ganesh hain, Brahma Vishnu Mahesh hain*; it is not just an elephant (logo of the Bahujan Samaj Party-BSP), it is Lord Ganesha, it is Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Mahesh. The BSP's effort is obviously based on the political calculation that a Brahmin-Dalit combination, along with Muslim support, would bolster its chances. Dalits are seeking a new social contract -- this time at the initiative of the Dalits themselves, and on their own terms and conditions. Mayawati has taken a lead in refashioning a new social synthesis and declared that her party had never been against the upper caste communities or the Hindu religion. “We were branded as anti-upper castes and anti-Hindu by *manuvadi* vested interests, including political parties and sections of the media.”<sup>18</sup> Her party was opposed to discriminatory tendencies and attitudes such as caste oppression. Mayawati is an icon of Dalit political assertion in modern India even while the future of her Brahmin-Dalit combination is viewed with the eyes of suspicion.

## 6. Rights and Education

The history of Dalits is a history of deprivation. Deprivation in the field of education is a serious blow on the all round development and progress of Dalits. Why are the Dalits deprived and why is it that their thought did not occupy the main stream of education in India? A systematic analysis of the problem takes one to the great cultural debate – the class-caste struggle between the upholders of a Brahminic, upper class minority and the exploited low-caste Dalit majority. In the field of education, in spite of the continuing simmering of the Dalits, the anti-caste challenge from below, the prevalent face of India continues to be Brahmanic and Sanskritized.

Ambedkar's revolutionary address to the Dalit majority of the pre-independent India stands out as a challenge for the modern Indian Dalits: “With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle ... It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality, which has been suppressed and mutilated by the Hindu social system, and will continue to

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round development. The move is seen as Mayawati's attempt to consolidate support among the upper castes, especially Brahmins, to checkmate Congress' attempts of wooing Dalits and Samajwadi Party's attempts to unite all backward castes.

<sup>18</sup><http://www.hindu.com/2005/06/10/stories/2005061008120100.htm>, on 2 March, 2010.

be suppressed and mutilated if, in the political struggle, the Hindus win and we lose. My final word for advice to you is, 'educate, organize and agitate', have faith in yourselves and never lose hope."<sup>19</sup>

Early Vedic education was confined to the twice-born (*dwijas*), the Dalits were prevented under severe penalties from access to the Vedic knowledge. The Dalits' movement under the leadership of Ambedkar began to consciously oppose the Hindu socio-religious values and hierarchies. It was perhaps in the field of education that the Dalits met with the stiffest resistance and opposition from the caste Hindus. Ambedkar saw education as a human right, and a fundamental civic right. He advocated the education of children and youth saying, "Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of every one... higher education should be made as cheap to the lower classes as it can possibly be made."<sup>20</sup> He saw education as an instrument of equality, "that meant raising the level of lower classes to the level of higher classes" and argued that if these "communities are to be brought to the level of equality, then the only remedy is to adopt the principle of inequality and give favoured treatment to those who are below the level."<sup>21</sup> This theory of reservation affirmed by Ambedkar could create a small educated section among the Dalits. Mahatma Jyothirao Phule, a social reformer from Maharashtra and a victim of untouchability could properly realize the importance of education in improving the lot of the backward castes. He stated very categorically that, "For want of education intellect deteriorated. For want of intellect morality decayed. For want of progress wealth vanished. For want of wealth the Shudras perished. All these sorrows sprang from illiteracy."<sup>22</sup>

At schools the text books contain generally only Brahminical narratives (*Puranas*). The history of the Dalits and their gods and goddesses has not found any place in them. The history books were full of stories of Kshatriya kings. According to K. Illaiah, "We read their love stories and their war stories; we read about their problems and prospects, their dreams. Dalitbahujan life figured nowhere in the curriculum. We had

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<sup>19</sup>Cited in T. Kadankavil, ed., *Religion and Politics*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997, 9.

<sup>20</sup>Cited in B. Das and J. Massey, eds., *Dalit Solidarity*, New Delhi: ISPCK, 99.

<sup>21</sup>Cited in Das and Massey, eds., *Dalit Solidarity*, 99.

<sup>22</sup>Cited in R. K. Kshirsagar, *Dalit Movement in India and its Leaders*, New Delhi: MIS Publications, 44.

been excluded from history. In fact, it appeared as if our history was no history at all.”<sup>23</sup> Such lop-sided education often alienated the Dalit students from their roots, conditioning their minds and attitudes causing their continued embarrassment, even humiliation as second class citizens. At the degree level the English texts replaced the Brahminical framework with European one. The European systems, whether of religion or society or politics, presented a world of both the rich classes and poor classes. In political science the cultures of different classes were presented as a part of the study of liberal democratic ideas of ‘equality’ and ‘inequality.’<sup>24</sup> Education is vital in the Dalit’s struggle against inequality and oppression in a system where scales are heavily loaded against them.

In independent India the main objective of education is to look after the needs and development of Dalit children who have remained isolated from the ambit of education for centuries. After the independence there is considerable rise in the educational standard of the Dalits. However, it has been found that the growth of the educational standard among Dalits is not uniform and educational facilities among backward castes are being distributed unevenly. In almost all the states in India certain prominent castes among the Dalits are dominating the educational facilities meant for the whole Dalit society. The only reliable indicator of educational advancement at the moment is the level of literacy. As Rajawat claims, at the moment there are more than a million and a half postmatric scholars belonging to the Dalits.<sup>25</sup>

Education is a precious acquisition for enabling the members of disadvantaged communities to benefit from the policy of positive discrimination. The scheme of reservations under the general policy of positive discrimination was, in its initial stages, started with employment under Government. The upper class continues to argue that youth who come from the Dalits are less meritorious and therefore do not deserve any reservation. The old time prejudices against Dalit education not only continue to exist today, but have also acquired new dimensions and aggressive proportions. As Ilaiah asserts, “The post-colonial Brahminical India is more hypocritical than the medieval and ancient Sanskrit Brahminical India. At that time Brahminical forces were open and

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<sup>23</sup>K. Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, Calcutta: Samya, 1996, 54.

<sup>24</sup>Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, 55.

<sup>25</sup>M. Rajawat, *Social Justice and Dalits*, New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2005, 157.

transparent about their superiority. They never accepted the notion of equality. But the post-colonial Brahminism propagates that it stands for equality of opportunities and lives in its Brahminical English world.”<sup>26</sup> In spite of the lofty ideals of the country’s Constitution, the dominant forces in society and the ruling powers of India wish to ensure that education may not spread easily and make the subservient Dalits assertive and aspiring and endanger the social order. The anti-reservation demonstrations, Hindutva agenda and anti-Minority conflagration only go to support such a view and demand Dalit solidarity and united action to bring back equality, liberty and dignity of every Dalit.

Dalits were never allowed to develop into modernity and equality. The violent, hegemonic, Brahminical culture sought to destroy Dalit productive structures, culture, economy and its positive political institutions. Everything was attacked and undermined. This process continues in post-Independent India. In the name of democracy the upper caste Brahminical leadership has cornered the post colonial development of the country in its entirety. The Brahmins have focused their attention on politico-bureaucratic power, the Baniyas established their hegemony on capitalist markets and the Neo-Kshatriyas established their control over the agrarian economy. To counter the intellectual forces that emerge from the Dalit society modern Brahminism has reorganized itself in more aggressive forms of Hindutva and Hinduization. Hence the need of the hour is not Hinduization or Brahminisation but Dalitization, which alone can establish a new egalitarian future for the Indian society.<sup>27</sup>

Dalitization is a process of learning from the Dalit localities (*Dalitwaadas*) in order to acquire a new consciousness. One has to learn from the scheduled caste localities their collective living and collective consciousness that builds the fabric of social living. Their social context is productive and distributive. Equality is its inner strength. Human beings relate to one another basically on humane terms. The material basis of society is rooted not in wealth but in labour power whereas the non-productive life of the upper castes can survive only on private property.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ilaiah, “Bogus Merit Theory,” *Deccan Herald*, 1 May, 2006, 10.

<sup>27</sup>Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, 114-115.

<sup>28</sup>Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, 116.

## 7. Conclusion

Throughout history the oppressed Dalits have always struggled for their ‘human lives.’ Today the emerging Dalit movements make the oppressed become more human through their liberative struggles. That makes them be awakened and have a strong determination to resist any sort of dehumanization. The process of humanization of Dalits is to feel one with them and to struggle with the Dalits’ call for revolt.

Other than the things that the government and others have to do for the emancipation of the Dalits the awareness of the Dalits themselves is the most essential requirement. Any amount of education or awareness programmes cannot result in the assertion of the Dalits. Instead it has to come from within. The oneness of all sects of Dalits and their inner force to break the shackles are the need of the day. The Dalits keep their search for true identity and thirst for the recognition of their human dignity which they want to keep alive and burning in their very being. Our educational enterprises, health care services and social involvement and all the humanitarian and liberative activities are to be motivated and directed towards the welfare of the Dalits by renewing our commitment to promote human dignity, freedom and justice to the oppressed. The welfare aimed at is possible only through the establishment of the ethical foundations characterized by the lofty values of freedom, equality, love, justice and peace.

Today we have to join hands with the emerging peoples’ movements like Dalit Liberation Movement in order to realistically put its vision into practice. We should join hands with the awakening and upsurge of the Dalits as they are potent instruments with which they reclaim their identity and dignity. This requires rigorous political education, creating a critical consciousness that they are *made* Dalits and that they need to unify themselves into one mighty movement to renew the commitment to truth, realizing that truth will make them free. But unfortunately our philosophizing today in general remains at the *mantra-moksha-leisure-non* productive philosophy of the upper castes. In joining hands with the struggles of the Dalits we have to create Dalit histories of our nation, Dalit philosophies and theologies for today, relevant to the Dalit awakening based on a sweat, labour, life productive philosophy of the Dalits rediscovering the identity and dignity of all Dalits.