

GROWTH OF DALITS IN INDIA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

It is been said that the movement of Dalits begin in India. Dalits were said to be the most ignorant community far before the time of freedom. Even after independence, they experienced inequality in terms of business opportunities, employment opportunities, and social & economic inequalities. Though Ambedkar has done a lot for their rise, Gandhi also did meticulous work for their betterment still, there is a huge gap in the development of other upper castes as compared to Dalits in India. Several Dalit movements have taken place but to date, the Dalits have to face discrimination, exploitation, violence, poverty, and inequality. The 50 % govt. driven plans have not been working in their true sense. This paper attempted to analyze the situations of Dalits in different socio-economic aspects, namely education, business, employment, art, and culture. Also, this paper analyses the position of Dalits in social and economic development under the inclusive growth goal of India.

KEYWORDS: Ambedkar, Caste, India, Dalits, Transformation.

Introduction

“For an individual as well as for a society, there is a gulf between merely living and living worthily.”- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

In the 75th year of independent India, we are wishing for a society, discrimination-free, and terror-free, we are looking forward to a nation filled with peace, equity, and equality. (Alam, 2022 a). The country is celebrating various technological advancements and better relations with developed nations, but inside India, we are still a community facing political powerlessness, exploitation, and inequality based on caste systems. (Nag, et.al, 2022). The Dalit people in India are still living a life of poverty, and social backwardness even after 75 years of independence. (Alam, 2022b). Several governments came and gone but, these Dalit communities in India are still struggling to overcome the cage of social discrimination and socio-economic exploitation, and backwardness. (Balan, 2019). Even today, there exists systems under which the Dalits are not allowed to come to the front line of society. Though it is not done illegally, morally their morale is kept down, and sometimes due to the limitations of poverty, they are ready to accept the exploitation (Malik, S. K. (2017). They are given value only at the time of elections to take benefit of their voting rights, every party offers them an agenda of their growth, the chances of their improved employment, their land rights and forget all the promises after elections. Around 200 million people of the Indian Dalit community remain neglected and ignored in the social milieu. (Banerjee, 2010), (Balan, 2019).

Indian society is a marginalized society have different classes of Dalit people, Backward Dalit people, and Dalit women. Not only this, these Dalit communities are even facing the internal caste systems inside their castes. Dalit Christians are an increasing issue in Dalit politics. (Panthee, 2020). The old problems are not solved yet new issues arise every day. Recently the Coronavirus has led people

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working in casual employment, and contractual and temporary employment to leave their jobs, several properties which were giving jobs to the minority and Dalit community people were unable to continue their jobs (Alam, 2022a).

Reasons for Studying Dalits

The most common and quick answer to this is inequality, a bane of Indian society (Hans, 2013). This inequality toward Dalits has brought a lack of education and employment opportunities for these deprived people. This also takes their confidence to live life proudly. They just start feeling like they are nothing and can't grow to the top positions (Nag, et.al, 2022). The difference is not limited to the physical differences but also on the mental level like skill differences. The system is not making them enabled but they are being excluded from the mainstream intellectual positions (Panthee, 2020). Even if, they reach parallel positions they have to face discrimination that hurts their social and moral values. It ruins their confidence to live, think and feel equal to the upper caste workers. To make a country rich in the true sense is to give social freedom, political empowerment, and financial security to all of its citizens, not only to the top layer of the citizens and leaving the deprived far behind. (Nag, et.al, 2022). As it is a famous quote that says that the strength of a chain is its weakest link, it is very much necessary to strengthen the deprived Dalit communities. Governments are playing their role by making different reservation programs, scholarships, and social equality plans, but to date, they have proven helpful only in terms of employment, if we talk about social acceptance, govt, are lacking far behind. (Gautam, 2022). As equality is not only a legal matter it is moreover a social matter, apart from making plans for their financial benefits, the governments should also work in spreading social awareness of bringing equity.

The discrimination against Dalits, backward, women, tribals, and minority have a long historical background of existence in India. It is continuing and it is deeply enrooted in Indian society. Also, in the social and economic development of India, they have very low status and contribution (Alam, 2022b). All the indicators of social and economic development like health, education income, etc. show the status of these excluded communities very low. The report (census, 2011) shows that the average growth rate of Dalit communities is very low compared with the national average.

The governments have made tremendous efforts for their upliftment and improvement in their knowledge and status but, either they were not done seriously, or they didn't sustain. The people were more inclined towards arranging their bread and butter and have less operating capacity to take benefits of this govt. mechanisms (Hans, 2013). The marginalized people are still the date excluded. The social inclusion goals of the country can only be achieved by providing them the equal opportunities to access cultural, social, economic, and political resources. Sincere efforts are required to bring them to the main streams and improve their level of thinking, thought process, values, and education so that they can use their rights of improvement effectively and can lead a better and happy life. (Hans, 2013).

Education and employment are the two strongest weapons to bring equalization and empowerment to Dalits and the deprived, then only the goals of social inclusion can be achieved. The Dalit study is a 'Socially democratic' study of the society, in the society, for the society. (Hans, 2013), (Banerjee, 2010).

Dalit: The Concept

The word 'Dalits' represents the community of people who are exploited for hundreds of years of our civilization based on caste systems. As per the Hindu varna system, there are four varnas based on the nature of jobs and duties towards society (Banerjee, 2010). Dalits belong to the lowest of the low varna. It belongs to not only one caste, but it is a synonym used for people of deprived communities, who were given tasks to perform that other powerful community were not ready to do. The Dalits is a common word to give identity to the unidentified lower, poor, and exploited class of people, who were not given the status to live equally in the mainstream of society, due to their backwardness, poorness, and financial weaknesses (Singh, 2012). These are the people who faced human bonded slavery and labour in the historical periods. Their income was not sufficient ever to lead a healthy and respectful life, not even sufficient enough to feed their families and send their children to schools, and enough to bear the medical expenses of their families (Singh, 2012). This financial poverty led them to ask for loans from the rich and upper-class people, who, use to humiliate them openly in society for the non-repayment of their loans. Sometimes in lieu of the loans, the poor people were asked to perform the tasks of scavenging, digging village graves, disposing of dead animals, and cleaning human excreta. Under the Dalit community, there are further sub-classes like Cobblers, Agricultural laborers, leather workers, street sweepers, and Scavengers (Sen, 2020). The latter group is considered the lowest of the low. These

practices broke their confidence in life, and these practices lead them to live a life of low profile, uneducated and deprived. These things keep continued for generations, and the people of these poor labour communities felt excluded from mainstream society, gradually. In India, Dalits are known by several names like, 'Dasyu, Dasa, Atisudra, Panchama, Trikultear, Adikarnataka, Adi Dravida, Schedule Castes (SC), etc. Ambedkar called them 'Depressed Class'. The journey of names given to these peoples has given them several names from 'Untouchables', 'unseeable', 'unapproachable', 'black castes', 'ati-sudra', 'Harijan', 'Depressed castes', to scheduled castes. But these names have not brought many changes in their status of inequality, backwardness, exclusion, segregation, and poverty. (Sen, 2020).

The Exclusion and Oppression

The Dalits are excluded, oppressed, culturally sub-adjudicated, and politically marginalized. Particularly in the Indian society, there were principles of untouchability and 'Purity and Pollution' which defined the social norms for Dalit communities like what occupations and jobs they can do, where they can sit, where not to sit, where they are allowed to live and not, who can they give water to, whom they can marry (Malik, 2017). All of these was detailed were and explained for every daily routine. These people are asked to live outside the village, where they can have low-income occupations, and they were kept excluded from the social changes and improvements that the people living inside the village were experiencing (Gurjar & Srishti, 2022). Their Participation and absence were defined on several occasions and this participation and exclusion is always a matter of debate in history. The differences and marginalization were sometimes visible and sometimes not visible but they always existed.

The discrimination towards Dalits does not only belongs to the Hindu religion, it exists in other religions also, let it be Sikhism, Islam, or Christianity. The names of the castes are different but the treatments of the Dalits in their castes are the same, as Hinduism (Malik, 2017). The leaders of upper powerful castes used to exploit the deprived poor Dalits of their communities. The lower caste people are not included happily in their main streams of work. There are incidents when it was found that there are separate burring places for Dalit Christians and non

– Dalit Christians (Gurjar & Srishti, 2022).

The caste systems in India, lead to both social oppression and class exploitation. The Dalits in India and land, live below the poverty line, though the population of Dalits in India is almost 16.2% of the total population, their control over the resources is hardly 5% (Malik, 2021). In India, out of the total population of Scheduled castes households 86.25% are landless and 49% of the Dalit population work as agricultural workers living in rural areas (Chalam, 2020).

The data reports that only 10% of the Dalit households can afford safe drinking water, electricity, and toilets which represents their poor social conditions. The Dalit communities are found victims of many crimes. The majority of the crimes remain unreported due to social fear, and financial inability to compete with the powerful and dominants (Malik, 2017). Even after then, they try to take the help of police and legislation, they are ignored by the Police or kept under the huge piles of others case files. It takes them years to find justice for the crime held to them. The sluggish legal mechanism of courts de motivates the poor and Dalit class to take their matters to court. Even after 74 years of Independence India is still caught in the cancer of caste systems. The Dalits are the most deprived, marginalized and vulnerable, and brutalized community in India. (Hans, 2012). It is the need of the hour to look up for their rights. The constitutional right of living with dignity has to be brought with a strong impact on society. The development of the country should be developed with equality. The Government of the country should spend a good amount of its budget on making effective schemes for their upliftment and improvement. The targets of 'cultural inclusion', 'social acceptance', 'political consciousness, and 'economic wellbeing' lead to a Dalit movement in India.

Dalit Movement

A movement means the faceless struggles combinedly don to get the rights, to get rid of the exploitations, and a combined effort of the deprived to get the rights of equality. The right to be treated as human, to be treated as equally capable to access the resources available in the country, equally capable to accept the opportunities of health, education, and employability, to be counted as equity of the country (Yatanoor, 2010). In India, the Dalit Movements were not organized in colonial times. The struggles yet existed from the inception of the caste systems in the society, but the efforts were faceless and were shredded by the dominants due to a lack of financial support and communal unity (Yatanoor,

2010). The modern Dalit movements began in the form of local movements, conversion movements, and grassroots endeavours (Carswell, 2012). These movements were the collective efforts of the localized people to bring social change. Most of the movements reflected rebellious movements at individual levels. The lack of unity at a bigger level was the biggest reason for the failure. The small struggles of getting respect timely turned into land struggles (Gurjar & Srishti, 2022). These village land reclamation struggles have taken the regional and national dimensions gradually. The Dalit movements created political awareness among the people and the creation of small political parties began. And the land movements begin with the human rights movements and turned into political movements of getting equality. This equality simply meant 'social Justice' - a concept which is later used by the govt. and political parties to promote their political agendas and government schemes. (Malik, 2017). The Dalit movement was called the assertion of rights (Gurjar & Srishti, 2022). Majorly it was done by Ambedkar and his team through the constitution.

The Indian political system was inclined and committed toward the growth of Dalits and weaker sections of the society since the inception of the independence movements. (Chalam, 2020). They felt the need that a major section of the Indian population was deprived, poor, socially backward, politically depressed, and socially degraded, and they felt it proper to bring constitutional provisions for their upliftment after getting freedom (Muthukkaruppan, 2014). The Independent Indian government made various constitutional rights and provisions for the upliftment of weaker sections, tribes, Dalits, and women. The practice of untouchability was declared illegal in India in 1947.

The reservation system was introduced to protect the right of these people. Later with the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report, a section of 27% population of the total population of India, teemed as 'other Backward Castes' were taken under the umbrella of reservation. They were given representation in national and state legislature, in programs of employment and services, and in social welfare, this has led to their development.

Gandhi saw The Dalit Problem as a social problem, whereas Ambedkar saw it as an economic and political problem created by upper castes (Muthukkaruppan, 2014). After becoming the first law minister he brought several reforms and later incorporated these reforms into the constitution. The Dalits were given several rights.

'Dalit' is a term used for the people exploited for generations based on castes. Dalit movements were not for hegemony but a life of equality and dignity (Muthukkaruppan, 2014). Any kind of movement to become forceful should be firstly socially and morally accepted by the people of the society. Public opinions create public policies that help in bringing bigger political changes.

Education and literature have also played an important role as a tool and strategies for the Dalit movement. From the efforts made by Ambedkar, the Dalits started focusing on education, there raised some poets which also wrote about the struggles of Dalits, also the non-brahmin movements worked and created an environment of movements, up till 1912, the political representations also started talking about the underprivileged, and the movement went strengthen gradually (Yatanoor, 2010). In the 1970s the Dalits become more conscious about the improvement of their life and the works of Ambedkar, they started recognizing the values and efforts done by Ambedkar for their betterment. That sort of thought process of youth was then called 'Ambedkarism', which is also recognized as the backbone of the Indian Dalit movement, whether it was on the individual level or in groups, or organizational level.

The political reforms brought several social changes also. Various bad practices, like untouchability, and bonded labour, have been banned. Spread of education, and opportunities in employment, Dalits after their struggles of liberation became more politically aware then and took the electoral path to secure political power. They found political power as a solution to all the problems. They were also provided with reservations in education, employment, and politics, which at a large provided gain to them. The game of reservation began from there. The system of reservation though provided benefits to many of them but there are masses of Dalits people who were made a button to play political games only (Gautam, 2022). The political parties attracted them and used their right of election for their benefit. Also, this system of reservation made the Dalits, individual-centric, and the Whole aim of Dalit liberalization was quite distorted. The Reservation, on one hand, proved beneficial to them but on the other hand, it brought some by-ins. It provided political opportunities to them, which they were not even able to think off when there was no reservation.

The Dalit politics was a result of critiques of the prevailing social order, which lead the society to redefine the concept of Justice. Though there exists the system of politics through the way of currency,

today it is been associated with emotions also, the whole gamut has become to catch the emotional nerve of the Dalits, find politics in their sentimental hurts and take their votes (Alam, 2022a). The "Alliance Politics" have also created an unforeseen danger to the liberalization of Dalits, because they use Dalit problems as an election agenda, just making them a highlight, that they exist in the political system, however, the alliances, just work in their favour, this is a kind of strategizing indirectly against Dalits if one wants to give liberalization to them, the creative work in this regard should be done, the social groups, political parties, and communities (Gautam, 2022). All of them need is just good politics, the political parties' social groups, and communities will decide the outcome. But sincere efforts should be done to bring fairness and justice to them.

Dalits in Social Inclusion

The aim of inclusive growth of a society can only be achieved by taking it altogether, without being differentiated on the bases of castes. (Kumar, 2022b). Though the roots of castism are deeply spread in Indian society, even in the present time directly or indirectly it exists, and the identity of an individual is given based on this traditional practice. Making this caste system meaningless would be the first step in the transformation of these Dalits, Deprived people, and minorities (Malik, 2021). The concept of modernization only can be successfully justified when there will be no difference between the 'touchable', and 'untouchables', between 'high', and 'low'. Though even in this modern era society finds it difficult to merge this difference between the traditional (caste) system and their critiques. Bringing change is always an inviting force of conflicts, there arises a need to be ready to adapt to the changes socially, morally, legally, and politically, for the growth of Dalits in the true sense (Malik, 2021).

For making a life worth living, there is a constant need to search for identity, which seems difficult for Dalits due to their suffering (Singh, 2012). The so-called upper class, or the touchable find it difficult to leave their domination over the poor, they find it difficult to see the untouchables sitting together with them, because of their fear of losing their own identity, the fear of losing their dominant positions, their hypocrisy, they do not want the deprived to come equitant (Kumar, 2022b). Transformation is a kind of journey that saves one's own self-respect and values and allows others to follow them by choice. Dalits are the people who see the concept of equality from a different dimension of justice, where they see all human beings are equal, all human beings are the same, they follow the practice of equality in their daily life, and raise their voices, where they feel injustice (Carswell, 2012). So, transformation towards inclusion should only be seen from one dimension of the caste system. It should be a combined political, social, legal, moral, and economic effort to bring the Deprived Dalits forward. The awareness of rights, human rights, women's rights, education rights, land reforms, social reforms, affirmative action programs, and spiritual growth programs should be implied to bring transformation to the existing system.

The socio-economic growth of the Schedule castes is focused on by the governments, in the present system government is making sincere efforts to bring them parallel to the mainstream society. The central government has started two new web portals for the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe categories. (Gautam, 2022). All the schemes belonging to SC/ST can be seen on these portals. Govt. is also able to see their implementation, progress, and allocation through these portals. There is a total of 506 schemes for the SC and ST communities in India. Among them, 233 schemes are for the SC category and the rests are for the people belonging to the ST category. A total of 26 departments have launched these schemes. The total budget for the schemes (SC) is Rs. 52399.55 Cr and the budget allocated for the schemes for STs is Rs. 31919.51 Cr. All this information will be available in the portal for the common people. The percentage share of SC/ST schemes in the Central Sponsored Scheme is 20.20% and the percentage share of SC/ST schemes in Centrally Sector Schemes is 10.74%. (Gautam, 2022). Also, the latest act The prohibition of employment as manual scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act was launched in 2013, to stop the manual scavenging practices (Pai, 2019). Various scholarship schemes for women and mothers are running. Multiple scholarship programs are running under the central and state government ministries. Not only financial support is going to work, but governments have to work culturally, socially, and politically to make their citizenship enlightened.

Dr. Baba Sahib Ambedkar, gave the clarion call by saying, "Educate, Organise and Agitate", which laid focus on the education of the Dalit children, his vision was clear that only education can make them better citizens, can improve their position, and can make them free for their traditional exploitations made on the name's sake of caste (Pai, 2019). But we can see the discrimination even after 75 years of independence that the scheduled castes have to face discrimination in education systems, there are

private institutions that do not follow the reservation systems, and the ones who got to manage to go to higher education institutions faced several academic biases. (Ilavarasi & Benet, 2018). There are reports based on Dalit studies, which show discrimination faced by SC employees in offices, discrimination, and exclusion faced by SC students in academic spheres, showing the lacking of the existing reservation system, which needs immediate overhauling (Kumar, 2020a).

Conclusion

Baba Sahib Ambedkar in his speech on 25 November 1949, asked the people of the country to make this country a strong democratic, he told the people to understand the contradiction of the principle of 'one man one vote' in theory, and 'one man one value' in practice, he said that we have to remove this contradiction to create a democratic nation in true sense. We have a long way to go to transform political independence into real social and economic independence.

The country is talking about globalization, technology, and inclusive growth. The time is challenging, and changing. Dalit Movements have to redefine their aims, whether they want to have a society established on the bases of equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice, or they just want to change the brackets of the existing equations of exploitation. The time of globalization demands clear stands from the different classes of people. The age of Learning and Enlightenment will blend with the new growth when the old bars of discrimination based on castes and religions will be distorted.

To make the dream of inclusive growth come true, the Dalit movements should be seen in the larger context as a "Social inclusion movement". (Sain, 2012). The European countries have already started their steps towards bringing equal opportunities to all adults, removing all the barriers of being women, poor, deprived, and poor, not only in economic and social issues but in ecological issues too (Ram, 2013). Being the modern society of India, we should recognize the fact that mere reservations, subsidies, and grants are not sufficient for social justice. The need of the hour is to bring opportunities for innovation, employment generation, and inclusions. With the concept of social inclusion and social integration, social capital can be formed to meet global challenges. The real test of a country's success is to see the level of peace, harmony, and equality prevailing in the society (Ram, 2013). The onus lies on the country's people to step forward toward sustainable economic development by creating an inclusive society full of peace, justice, and equality.

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