

**SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS IN INDIA AMBEDKAR TO
CONTEMPORARY DALIT MOVEMENTS**

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Abstract

B.R. Ambedkar has been at the forefront of the Dalit resistance and empowerment movement in India. As a result, the fight against discrimination based on caste and the pursuit of social justice in India have become inexorably interwoven. In addition to playing a significant role in the composition of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar took aggressive measures to assist the oppressed Dalit people. These measures included the establishment of quota laws for employment and education. His unwavering dedication to the causes of social justice, equality, and dignity laid the groundwork for successive Dalit movements in India after the country gained its independence. Concerns about land rights, educational opportunities, political representation, and employment are just some of the numerous socio-political and economic issues that Dalit organisations have taken up over the course of the years. In spite of the fact that human rights organisations and grassroots organisations have maintained in their fight against caste-based violence and discrimination, there has been a significant shift towards political assertiveness with the arrival of leaders such as Kanshi Ram and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). In the contemporary era, Dalit activists have expanded their activities into new venues, including as online forums, social media, and legal lawsuits, in order to raise their profile and advocate for legislative reforms. It is imperative that continual efforts be made to establish a society that is really equal since, despite the existence of affirmative action and legal safeguards, caste-based atrocities, structural exclusion, and socio-economic injustices continue to exist.

Keywords: *Dalit Movements, Social Justice Movements, B.R. Ambedkar, India.*

INTRODUCTION

The continual struggle against discrimination and unfairness based on caste is mirrored in the history of social justice movements in India, which spans from the time of B.R. Ambedkar to the Dalit movements that are taking place now. Ambedkar, a prominent figure in India's social and political landscape, played a significant role in putting an end to the persecution of the Dalits, a historically persecuted minority that was also referred to as the "Untouchables." The work that he did resulted in the inclusion of affirmative action laws in the Indian Constitution. These regulations assured that Scheduled Castes would have access to educational opportunities, employment possibilities, and political representation. In spite of constitutional guarantees, caste-based discrimination persisted after independence, which led to the formation of post-independence Dalit organisations such as the Dalit Panthers in the 1970s. These groups were inspired by the Black Panthers in the United States. The battle against oppression and for Dalit identity was fought by these organisations, and they used radical methods in their campaign. Through the formation of intersectional alliances with other oppressed people and the use of internet venues, Dalit activism in

contemporary India has turned towards a more progressive direction. Movements such as the Bhim Army and the rise of Dalit political assertion under the leadership of Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan are examples of groups that demonstrate the dynamic nature of the struggles for social justice. The use of social media, public protests, and legal action have all contributed to a rise in the fight for Dalit dignity, land rights, and representation. The ongoing struggle for social justice in India is primarily dependent on Dalit movements because, despite the progress that has been made, incidents of violence and discrimination based on caste continue to be significant problems.

Over the course of time, Dalit communities in India have created new strategies, ideologies, and platforms for resistance in order to accommodate the shifting sociopolitical climates over this time period. Through creative expression, intellectual works, and political engagement, Dalit communities attempted to prove their right to self-determination in the decades that followed Ambedkar's passing. Both Narmada Pawar and Namdeo Dhasal were pioneers in the development of Dalit literature. This genre of writing enabled oppressed people to join together through the expression of their own experiences of being subjected to caste discrimination. There was a parallel increase in political mobilisation, with Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and other parties seeking to garner support from marginalised castes in an effort to overturn the political establishment that was comprised of upper-caste individuals.

In this contemporary era, Dalit organisations have turned to online activism as a new tool in their fight against caste-based crimes and systemic marginalisation. Through the use of online forums and hashtags such as #DalitLivesMatter, they have brought attention to caste-based violence and discrimination, which has given a global dimension to their fight. Protests came out all throughout the country in reaction to the flogging incident that occurred in 2016 with Una and the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula in 2016. These events brought back conversations about caste prejudice in classrooms and on the streets respectively. Legal action, community welfare, and street-level mobilisation are some of the strategies that groups like the Bhim Army have used in order to challenge the caste system and the state's apathy towards Dalit rights.

Dalit feminist organisations have developed at the intersection of gender and caste in order to bring attention to the predicament of Dalit women and the many types of oppression that they are subjected to systematically. There has been an increase in knowledge about the issues that Dalit women face, including as sexual assault, economic exploitation, and social isolation, thanks to the National Dalit Women's Movement and activists such as Ruth Manorama. Even though there are statutory guarantees for social justice, there are still many forms of discrimination that are based on caste. Some examples of these sorts of discrimination include economic exclusion, honor-based violence, and manual hoarding. As a result of the perseverance of contemporary Dalit organisations who battle these injustices in court, in rallies, and through policy advocacy, Ambedkar's ideal of an egalitarian society is still at the forefront of India's ongoing social and political revolution. The ongoing conflict demonstrates that the road to social equality and the elimination of castes is a long and winding one, despite the fact that we have made significant progress in this direction.

Idea of Social Justice

The concept of social justice belongs to the realm of justice, and it is derived from the idea of ethical morality. Concerns about social justice have an effect on the expansion of social welfare programs as well

as other policies pertaining to sustainable development. What exactly does it mean to assert that a social system is considered to be just? When Kelson made the statement about social justice, she meant exactly this. When it came to human activity, this order managed it in a way that all men could agree with, which ensured that everyone could find joy within it. It is the purpose of social justice to bring about peace in society. Satisfaction is guaranteed by a social system that is fair. In light of the fact that the fair social system seeks to eradicate social handicap from birth, there is a discrepancy in both social and economic conditions. This goes hand in hand with having equal rights and a fair chance to participate in society. In order for there to be social justice, it is necessary for all persons to have the same opportunity to develop as individuals. From Ambedkar's perspective, justice is founded on the rights of individuals and the ideals of morality. Within the framework of India's constitution, the concept of justice encompasses not only economic justice but also social justice and political justice.

Ambedkar's Perspective of Hindu Social System

Ambedkar was opposed to the idea of a Hindu social order and did not have a pleasant relationship with the Hindu faith. Ambedkar was of the opinion that the conversion of religions in order to provide social justice must be done in the name of the Buddha faith. He also remarked that Buddhism is the most effective approach to adopt in order to achieve harmonious social living. Ambedkar is quoted as saying, "I have no faith in the philosophy of incarnation; and it is wrong and mischievous to say that Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu." My former religion, which stood for inequity and tyranny, has been abandoned, and I have been reborn. As of right now, I do not worship any of the Hindu gods or goddesses. I am not going to recite the Shradha. To the letter, I shall adhere to the eighty-fold way that Buddha outlined. In addition, he said that the world owes a great deal to rebels who would dare to debate in front of the polite and assert that he is not infallible. Additionally, he stated that Buddhism is a genuine religion, and that I would live my life in accordance with the three principles of knowledge, the correct path, and compassion. That credit, which any progressive society is required to offer to its rebels, is something that I do not care about. On the other hand, if I am successful in convincing the Hindus that they are the sick men of India and that their illness is putting the health and happiness of other Indians in jeopardy, then I would consider myself to have achieved my goal. Because of the following grounds, Ambedkar made the choice to leave Buddha in charge of conservation:

- The logical awareness of evaluating things for the benefit of humankind.
- The autonomy that allows people to recognise their own worth
- Reaching beyond the lowest level of human existence to realise the higher life
- The uprising against human captivity and repression
- The complete shift from society's conventional paradigm of providing physical amenities for everyone
- The restoration of neglected reality and the liberation of forgotten humanity

Occupation is the basis for the Hindu caste system. According to Justice Venugopal, caste conflicts and discord emerge from the social system's hierarchical assignment of roles. According to Venugopal (2005: 16), the caste system represented the rejection of social justice due to its unequal treatment of individuals. According to Gopal Guru's citation of Ambedkar, Hindu law is the established order's law and was created by the touchables. Obedience and respect were the only options for the untouchables. When it comes to the touchables, the untouchables have no rights. Nothing is permissible for them, and they do not have any kind of equal right. Except for what the touchable are willing to provide, they owe no one anything. We must not give in to the demands of the untouchables. Praying out of kindness and favour will allow them to be pleased with what is supplied. It is true that Hindu law does not support the equal rights of all groups. As a result of their treatment as slaves, the touchable groups formed the untouchable community.

Ambedkar's Nation of Social Justice

The West and India aren't the only places where injustice exists. Injustice and caste prejudice are among the current pressing challenges. Among oppressed groups, Ambedkar started a movement. He derived his idea of justice from the 1789 French Revolution. According to Ambedkar, social democracy—which encompasses the three principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity—forms the basis of social justice. The third thing we need to do, according to Ambedkar's presentation in the constituent assembly, is not to settle for just political democracy. It is imperative that we expand political democracy to include social democracy. Social democracy must be the bedrock of any lasting political democracy. How would you define social democracy? Liberty, equality, and fraternity are the cornerstones of our way of life.

Liberty, equality, and fraternity are not to be seen as three distinct but interdependent ideals. According to Larbeer (2003: 64), separating them would be like destroying the very essence of democracy. The Just Society Order rests on these ideals, which originated in the French Revolution. All political philosophy revolves on two fundamental principles, which Raphael concedes are justice and liberty. Some notion of such framework is necessary for any civilisation. According to Raphael (1986: 68), justice is the fundamental principle of social values and the glue that keeps a community together. His view of freedom represents a fundamentalist school of political and philosophical thinking. Ambedkar argues that there are two distinct types of liberty: civil liberty and political liberty. The three fundamental views that Ambedkar addresses in his ideas on civic liberty are the freedoms of mobility, speech, and action. In theory, the Indian constitution protects civil rights derived from the Bill of Rights, but in fact, this is seldom the case. Many people use the term "civil right" to describe one or more of these freedoms, or more broadly to describe the government's duty to safeguard dalits' rights against infringement.

Hindu A significant cause of caste conflicts in the southern region of Tamil Nadu, temples are both places of oppression and resistance. Hindus of lower castes attack and oppose Dalits on a variety of grounds, including access to temples and festivals (The Hindu, June 14, 2009). The fact that dalit groups are not permitted inside temples and do not have access to civil rights is highlighted. According to The Times of India (July 28), Dalits face discrimination in schools and have limited access to temples. There were three or four complaints each day received by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes in Chandigarh. Reports of ongoing crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have left Prime Minister Manmohan Singh "disturbed" (The Hindu, September 8, 2009). This comment essentially acknowledges that SCs do not have access to civil rights. According to the National Crime Record Bureau, the number of

crimes committed against Scheduled Castes grew by 10.9% from 27070 in 2006 to 30031 in 2007, across a range of offences.

Objectives

1. One goal is to examine how Dalits' struggles for recognition and equality are reflected in literary works.
2. The second objective is to research the Dalits' fight for social justice via their political and economic conflicts.

Methodology

For this study, the researcher has used a variety of approaches, including surveying, collecting samples, and doing analyses, descriptions, and comparisons. For its data and information, the research drew from a wide range of sources, such as books, journals, and internet databases. In order to get significant insights into the subject matter, the researcher strives to analyse and interpret the data effectively using a rigorous and methodical methodology. This study aims to provide a thorough and strong analysis of the issue by combining several research techniques and using a variety of sources.

Examining the social justice movements in India reveals notable patterns in the mobilisation of Dalits, the influence on policy, and the advancements in socioeconomic conditions. There has been some improvement and some continued inequality according to statistics on Dalit literacy, employment, and political representation. Scheduled Castes (SCs) had a far higher literacy rate in 2011 than in 1951 (approximately 66%), according to data from the Indian Census and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). Disparities are still far more pronounced as compared to the rest of the country, and Dalit students have an alarmingly high dropout rate, particularly at the university level. Systemic prejudice contributes to exclusionary practices, as shown by the statistics from the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), which shows that Dalits are still under-represented in esteemed schools like as IITs and IIMs.

Social justice movements have had an effect on employment and political representation trends. A high percentage of SCs are still working in low-paying, unorganised sector occupations, even though reservation regulations have expanded Dalit involvement in government positions, according to NSSO statistics. Even though it is against the law, more than 40% of India's inhabitants still engage in manual scavenging. As a result of constitutional protections, the number of Dalit Members of Parliament (MPs) has increased, rising from 14% in the first Lok Sabha (1952) to over 16% in the most recent elections. But the higher castes still control the major political parties' leadership posts. According to an analysis of caste-based violence data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), there has been an uptick in crimes committed against Dalits, with more than 50,000 incidents recorded per year in the last several years. This suggests that those who have achieved social and economic mobility have often faced resistance. While Ambedkar's constitutional changes did set the stage for Dalit emancipation, the data shows that modern movements still need to use internet activism, politics, and the law to tackle systematic inequality.

Setting the Scene for the Dalit Movement in South India

While keeping the Dalit issue front and centre, the South Indian Dalit movement also made it an intrinsic part of the broader conversation on emancipation and enablement. However, it seems to have neglected the bigger themes of liberation and the persecution of Dalits, which are crucial to it, and is now at a crossroads. Everyone can see the internal strife and disintegration within the Dalit movement, as well as its failure to influence public policy. It is important to remember how the Dalit struggle in South India contributed to the broader goal of Dalit liberation in India and to think about the key issues that the movement faced in this context. Considering the divergent paths taken by the Dalit movement in various parts of southern India, it could be instructive to zero in on Tamil Nadu from this vantage point. This setting provides an opportunity to draw attention to three separate issues related to the Dalit struggle in southern India. Deprivation of self-respect, human dignity, and rights are manifestations of the long-standing social connections that are ingrained in public and social institutions and that Dalits experience. Concerns about obtaining those resources that would help one build self-confidence were brought together with those of other persecuted groups. A major tenet of the dalit movement that has persisted to this day is the hope of uniting the Dalits with other associated communities. Dignity and self-hood are deeply intertwined with cultural inquiry. On the basis of their language, religion, symbols, and traditions, Dalits sought to establish a unique cultural autonomy for themselves in the future. Successive governing regimes have sought to claim these resources, use them, and perpetuate their domination over Dalits, destroying the heritage it shared with the self-respect movement. Furthermore, Dalits have created their own cultural assets via their struggle. However, the Dalit movement, which is disorganised, has failed to make good use of these assets. A lot of the issues brought up by the Dalit social movement are related to their quest for a sense of identity that can be both acknowledged and supported by a society that values equality.

Dalit Movements in Tamil Nadu Today

The importance of the Dalit movement as a liberalised principle cannot be overstated in the current context of economic globalisation, military aggressions, and new kinds of exclusion. In modern-day Tamil Nadu politics, the fight for Dalit emancipation has begun to take front stage. Emergence of new social movements marked the last ten years. The theoretical and political frameworks were ill-equipped to comprehend or address the new demands and concerns brought up by the mobilisations of women, Dalits, tribals, unorganised sectors, and ethnicities. Therefore, one must take a stance in order to comprehend these 20th-century movements. A "war of position," to use Antonio Gramsci's terminology, would indicate a divergent stance. It only implies that in the past, Dalits were not included in the power struggle for government positions and were driven out of the centre arena. The combined efforts of the disadvantaged and repressed in caste-ridden Indian culture are the sole reason for any change in Sanathana Hindu society. Because the downtrodden banded together under the flag of rebellion, no matter the cost, all of these things came to pass. If the governing elite and powerful are scared of anything, it is the Dalits' ability to stand together. Theoretically, "struggle" is particularly ill-defined.

The idea of fighting "victim-hood" is prevalent most of the time. However, expressing the shared desire of the growing Dalit awareness in Tamil Nadu is challenging. If the lives of Dalits are peaceful and unruffled, it can only indicate one of two things: either they are about to be liberated from brutal tyranny or they have already won. (The quiet of the socially dying is all it is—not true serenity). Because they have banded together and organised, Dalits are now able to overcome any and all challenges. Suffice enough to say that the oppressed's daily battle became their own existence. Fighting was formerly an integral part of being a

Dalit. All of a sudden, it has become their whole lives. This shift has both inspired and paved the way for the modern Dalit struggle.

In an effort to make sense of the new Dalit movement that has emerged in Tamil Nadu over the last fifteen years, many have looked at the state through many lenses. Such assessments or conceptualisations give birth to the Marxist, Periyarist, and Revolutionary understandings of Dalit movements. The Dalit movements may be better understood if I provide the background. The establishment of the "Dalit Resource Centre" in Madurai made a substantial contribution to the emergence of modern Dalit movements. In reality, the Centre has been involved with several Dalit movements. Being a member of this Centre myself, I feel compelled to examine the modern Dalit movements through the lens of the Dalit Resource Centre's contributions. In light of this, this article makes an effort to zero in on the Dalit movements that took place between 1989 and 2004 using the Dalit Resource Centre in Madurai as a case study. I have focused only on the Dalits' movements in the southern areas since there is where this centre is based and where its operations are concentrated. The fact that this article only focusses on the southern regions makes it unworthy of the title "Contemporary Dalit Movements in Tamil Nadu," which I acknowledge.

Members of the Dalit caste. Thus, I do not consider this article to be an academic exercise in analysis but rather an attempt to place Dalit movements in context. Studies of cultural identity and the history of liberation have their foundation in Buddhism. In a same vein, the fight for identity-based politics and the freedom of the Dalit movement has its roots in Buddhism. Buddha was the catalyst for the first uprising of the downtrodden against oppression. An uprising against social injustice was launched by Buddha and his disciples during the time of the Vedas. The Sangam movement was named for it. This uprising began on the banks of the Ganges at Isiyadhanam in Kasi on the full moon day of 589 BC in the city of Vaikasi. This was the first uprising against the traditional Brahminic religion, which had grown into a powerful institution due to the caste inequality it promoted via its four Varnas. It was the Buddha who first spoke out against this. Buddhism sprang out as a humanist social liberation movement, whereas the Sangam arose as an opposition to the Aryan Brahminic concept of born capitalism.

Movements of Dalits in Andhra Pradesh

Through its many stages and interactions with the Naxalite movement in Andhra Pradesh, this section aims to develop a narrative of the dalit movement's evolution. It contends that the three enormous massacres against dalits—in Karamchedu in 1985, Chundur in 1991, and Vempentta in 1998—can be understood by looking at the effects on the dalit movement and how it evolved. The political rhetoric, objective, and strategy of change of the dalit movement were moulded and remoulded around these horrific incidents. While fighting caste crimes, it saw the naxalite movement as an ally and, at times, a reflection of the society-wide caste order. Not only does the question of solidarity between these movements become critically important in moulding them, but it also determines the character of future social revolution. It is ironic that during this brief period of celebrating and praising the "proliferation" and "fragmentation" of identities and battles, there seem to be completely fresh opportunities to unite.

An Autonomous Dalit Uprising in Karamchedu It was in 1985, when dalits were massacred at Karamchedu in coastal Andhra Pradesh, that the modern autonomous dalit struggle began. Rooted in the intricate cultural, political, and economic shifts that this hamlet experienced in the last 25 years was the Karamchedu massacre. The Kamma small-scale farmers from Karamchedu, known for their expertise in tobacco

production, started moving to neighbouring districts like Karimnagar in the 1970s, when they started growing tobacco on bigger plots of land. As they farmed bigger plots of land, the migratory Kamma farmers found success with cotton and tobacco. While some of the emigrant Kamma farmers found success growing cotton and tobacco in other parts of the country, others in Karamchedu saw the knock-on consequences.

CONCLUSION

According to the results of this research, Ambedkar's concept of social justice rests on the legal framework of equal rights and human dignity. All citizens of India have equal rights as a direct outcome of his ideas in the constitution. His demands for a reservation system and separate electorates for Dalits were the first at a round table conference, and as a result, all three of those meetings were unsuccessful. The only way to uplift dalit communities, which legal institutions preserve, Ambedkar realised, was via affirmative action. The caste system in India gives rise to inhumane practices among groups, and Ambedkar did not support its aspirations. According to Ambedkar, the economically dalit people are so downtrodden that they have no say in matters of state or money. Legal and constitutional provisions, as well as organising them to fight for basic rights, provide support for Ambedkar's views on sustainable development of the Dalit people. Crime against them rose as a result of their prohibition by India's affluent elite. The state's execution apparatus will be strengthened by social democracy. In addition, everyone agrees that his socioeconomic and political concept is the best way to deal with the complex social and political problems of today. There is a dalit movement for independence and justice in several Indian states, and Ambedkar did think about include dalits in mainstream politics. He shared the view that the rule of law is a potent tool in the struggle against prejudice. Institutions would spread Ambedkar's concept of justice via civil society, according to the study, but his idea of social justice could not be implemented properly. Everyone, Dalit and non-Dalit alike, will step forward to comprehend his proposal. Ambedkar wrote the constitution that outlawed caste discrimination because he cared about the well-being of all disadvantaged sections of Indian society. Hence, in order to achieve a fair society within the bounds of constitutional and legal procedures, Ambedkar's concept of social justice remains pertinent in modern Indian society.

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