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Reframing Social Justice: Dalit Women's Experiences In India

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Introduction

Recent scholarship has increasingly highlighted the significance of Dalit women's suffering within India's caste-stratified society. Dalit refers to communities historically oppressed and excluded through the caste system, resulting in deep seated social, economic, political, and religious marginalization. Dalit feminist theology interprets this oppression not as divinely ordained but as a manifestation of structural sin embedded within caste patriarchy. Within this framework, Dalit women endure intersecting forms of violence shaped by caste, class, and gender, positioning them among the most vulnerable yet resilient subjects of history. Drawing on the biblical notion of *dal*, the crushed and powerless, this study reframes Dalit women's suffering as a critical theological site of resistance and divine solidarity. Focusing on the Jogulamba Gadwal region, the article foregrounds Dalit women's lived realities of landlessness, labour exploitation, social stigma, and patriarchal control, while affirming their agency, survival strategies, and ongoing struggles for dignity, justice, and liberation.

1. Meaning and Significant of the Word Dalit

The term *Dalit* signifies oppressed, crushed, or scattered, representing the powerless individuals in India, often referred to as the *low cast*. They face social, economic, and political alienation, with their rights being consistently denied. Within the religious hierarchical order, they are relegated to the lowest rung as *untouchables*. Due to their poverty and lack of land, they must rely on landowners or the dominant class for survival, often becoming bonded or born slaves.[1]

1.1. The Biblical Term of Dalit

In Dalits Journal described the word Dalit in Hebrew *dal* which means broken, oppressed, weak, frail are gives similar meaning and content. In the Old Testament the frailty of the *dal* is described as physical[2], social[3] and military[4], and require charity / justice for their survival. Being *dal* or frail/weak is not only a condition but also the consequence of being made weak or impoverished, being emptied or made unequal, which is caused by the exercise of power, under domination. The *dal* i.e., frail poor being powerless are unable to defend or lift up themselves. Because of their social and economic frailty, they are easily crushed/ downtrodden and do not have the means to recover.[5]

Dal has been used together with other Hebrew root words like *ebony* (needy poor) and *ani* (brought low, afflicted, subdued, violated, forced, ravished) to describe a whole range of domination including physical and social oppression, sexual violation, economic exploitation and political manipulation.[6]

[1]M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 267-268.
[2]Genecis41:9
[3]Proverbs 19:4
[4]Job32: 16-20
[5]M.E. Prabhakar and Godwin Shiri, Dalits in *Doing Christian Ethics: Context and Perspective*, ed., by Hunter P Mabry (Bangalore: BTESSC, 1996), 1-2
[6]Prabhakar, "Dalits," 1-2

1.2. Dalits are known by various name

1.2.1. Depressed Classes

Later, the British called them the *Depressed Classes* until the Census Report of India, 1931, which referred to group's outcaste for lack of caste norms as *Exterior Classes*. Scheduled castes were termed by the Simon commission and incorporated in Section 279 of the Government of India Act, 1935.[7]

1.2.2. Marginalized

Dalit, also known as Avarnas or Scheduled Castes, represents marginalized groups in India. It encapsulates their struggle against deprivation and discrimination, symbolizing their quest for dignity, equality, and justice. Adopted by these communities, Dalit asserts their identity and rights, signifying resilience and the fight for a fairer future.[8]

1.2.3. Harijana

Historically termed *depressed classes* in 1931, they were initially referred to as *mlechchas*. Ambedkar advocated for a separate electorate at the Round Table conference, proposing terms like *Protestant Hindus* or *Non-Conformist Hindus*. Gandhi objected, advocating for Harijan (children of God), contested by untouchables who preferred Dalit, signifying the suppressed or oppressed.[9]

2. Social Order in India

2.1. Sanskritization

Sanskritization, also referred to as Brahminization, denotes the process through which lower castes seek to enhance their social status by adopting the rituals, customs, values, and lifestyles of the upper castes, particularly the Brahmins. Far from negating caste, this process ultimately reaffirms and reproduces the caste system. Sanskritization accepts the legitimacy of caste hierarchy and aspires only to a higher position within it. The hierarchical structure itself remains unchallenged; what changes is merely the relative placement of groups within that structure. Consequently, caste is not dismantled but rather strengthened and normalized.[10]

Despite social change, modernization, education, and political reforms, there has been no radical normative break with caste thinking in India. By normative, one refers to the underlying value system the ideas and assumptions that define what is considered natural, moral, and socially acceptable. Within this framework, elitism, hierarchy, submission, and resignation are not simply imposed externally but are deeply internalized within social consciousness. Hierarchy thus becomes constitutive of the Indian social ethos rather than an accidental feature of it.[11]

Because caste is embedded in social norms, differential treatment of individuals and groups is naturalized and justified. Each caste is treated according to its perceived position in the hierarchy. Although some non-Brahmin castes have historically attained political or economic power, Brahmins have largely retained ideological dominance through control over religion, ritual authority, and knowledge systems. Lower castes receive only relative recognition, never genuine equality.[12]

For Shudras and especially Dalits, caste operates as a profoundly psychological and moral form of oppression. This internalized subordination is reinforced through doctrines such as karma, samsara, and caste-based ritual duties (svadharma). Instead of encouraging resistance to injustice, these doctrines promote endurance, resignation, and acceptance of suffering as divinely ordained or morally deserved. In this way, caste functions not merely as a social system but as a powerful mechanism of ideological control that shapes consciousness, disciplines dissent, and perpetuates inequality.[13]

2.2. Svadharma

Historically, *svadharma* was conceived as an internal and subjective principle governing the individual life of persons. Ancient thinkers understood these individual duties in terms of inborn or inherent traits *gunas*. According to this framework, human beings are endowed at birth with three fundamental dispositions: *sattva*

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[7]Ruth Manorama, Dalit Women: The Downtrodden Among the Downtrodden in Women's Studies in India, ed., by Mary E. John (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008), 446.

[8]James Massey, *Dalits in India Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with Special, Reference to Christians* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 133.

[9]Somsen Das, *Christian Ethics and India ethos Revised & Enlarged* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 37-43.

[10]M.N.Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1952), 23-46.

[11]Gail Omvedt, *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 30-37.

[12]Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity* (NewDelhi: Orient Longman, 1995), 46-50.

[13]Srinivas, *Religion and Society*, 23-46.

(truthfulness and purity), *rajas* (energy, passion, and martial vigor), and *tamas* (darkness, inertia, ignorance, and dullness). Over time, these psychological dispositions came to be rigidly and exclusively associated with particular castes. Thus, Brahmins were identified with *sattva*, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas with *rajas*, and Shudras and Dalits (the so-called untouchables) with *tamas*.[14]

It is at this point that hierarchical thinking entered the system. These correlations were interpreted in a mechanical and static manner, especially by upper-caste groups, who failed or refused to recognize that the *gunas* exist in varying combinations and degrees within every human being. This reductionist psychology became another ideological mechanism for relegating Dalits to the lowest social position. The emphasis shifted from *nurture* to *nature*, reinforcing the belief that Dalits were inherently inferior. Even Dr. S. Radhakrishnan once wrote, In the natural hierarchy there cannot be one moral standard for all. Such thinking justified what Benoy Kumar Sarkar described as a theory of pluralistic morality different moral standards for different social groups.[15]

While it is true that individuals may be born with certain tendencies, it is equally evident that education, social environment, and conscious effort can transform character and personality. The rigid equation of caste with specific *gunas* reflects an obsolete and passive psychology. Human nature is neither fixed nor deterministic, as the theory of *gunas* was interpreted to suggest. Instead, this framework functioned as a subtle but powerful form of social conditioning, persuading Dalits to believe that they were inherently inferior. In this way, Dalits were compelled to negate their own essence or ontology. This process of domination resulted in the historical domestication of Dalits in Indian society, conditioning them to internalize inferiority, obedience, and subservience. As Radhakrishnan rightly observed elsewhere, a proper understanding of the human person must integrate both nature and nurture.[16]

This human-made alienation extended further with the construction of a fifth caste, labeled as *mlechchas* or barbarians, who were placed entirely outside the pale of Aryan society. Dalits were regarded as the lowest among human beings and were believed to suffer from permanent pollution. No ritual purification was considered sufficient to cleanse them. They were frequently equated with animals such as dogs and crows. The *Manusmriti* institutionalized this alienation by prescribing severe and demeaning regulations governing Dalit life and social contact. Dalits were forced to live outside villages, use only earthen vessels, and were denied basic human interaction. Even if their vessels were burned, they were considered unfit for use by others. Shockingly, the penalty for killing a Dalit was equated with that for killing a dog. Dalits were compelled to carry clappers to announce their presence, as their very shadow was believed to be polluting. Thus, they were rendered not only untouchable but unapproachable.

At this juncture, it is necessary to clarify what constitutes alienation. Alienation is not self-evident; fundamentally, it arises wherever freedom and responsibility are negated. Freedom constitutes the true essence of the human person the capacity to think, choose, and act voluntarily. It is the power to *be* and to *do*. Yet freedom cannot be separated from responsibility, which implies accountability, responsiveness to others, and engagement with the broader social context. Responsibility distinguishes the human from the animal mode of existence.[17]

Within the *guna svadharma varnadharma* matrix, especially for Dalits, freedom and responsibility are not absolutely denied but are severely constrained. Such a system cannot maximize these foundational human values. As a result, human capacities become atrophied. Dalits are objectified, treated as means rather than ends, and deprived of agency. Sartre's description of human beings as "things," rigidly determined by birth and environment, aptly captures this condition. Life loses authenticity and becomes merely a social construct.[18]

When Dalits internalize this imposed hierarchy, alienation becomes entrenched. They are alienated from themselves, losing selfhood and personal identity. This produces a profound identity crisis, as they struggle between preserving their humanity and conforming to oppressive structures. Human beings particularly Dalits are thus reduced to prisoners of causality, bound by heredity and social conditioning. Thrust into existence under these constraints, they experience life as enslavement rather than freedom. This is the

[14]Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India* (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976), 32-35.

[15]M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), 22-30.

[16]M.N. Srinivas, *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987),22-26.

[17]Srinivas, *The Dominant Caste, 24-26.*

[18]Srinivas, *The Dominant Caste, 24-26.*

essence of alienation: the systematic erosion of freedom and responsibility. Ultimately, the *guna svadharma varnadharma* configuration empirically and structurally alienated Dalits, embedding inequality into the very meaning of *dharma* itself.[19]

2.3. Varnadharma

Ancient Indian society was ordered and organized according to the principle of *Varnadharma*, which became a powerful determinant of social life. What initially functioned as a horizontal and pragmatic division of the population gradually evolved into a rigid hierarchical or vertical stratification. Originally, this arrangement served as an empirical and expedient means of maintaining cohesion and harmony within a heterogeneous society through the division of labor. Over time, however, this social differentiation acquired religious legitimation through the *Sruti* and *Smriti* corpus of Hindu tradition. Its roots can be traced to the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rigveda*, where the cosmological origin of the caste system is articulated, and this idea is reiterated in the *Upanishads*. The ancient Indian lawgiver Manu further recalled and reaffirmed these *Sruti* traditions, thereby consolidating and systematizing the caste-based social order.[20]

3. Layer of Caste

For centuries, a segment of humanity in India has been labeled as untouchable, effectively rendering them seemingly unapproachable due to perceived permanent pollution. This group comprises 429 distinct communities among the untouchables themselves.[21]

3.1. Origin of Untouchability

The origins of untouchability in ancient Indian society are unclear, but some theories suggest it may have arisen from the Aryan invasion. Aryans conquered and integrated defeated groups into their society at lower status levels, contributing to social hierarchies. Conflict with groups like the Nagas and Dassas also influenced these dynamics.[22]

Over time, Aryans became increasingly aware of their race and status, seeking to preserve their lineage. This awareness led to the emergence of the priestly class, who wielded significant influence. To maintain control and societal division, they introduced a system of graded inequality. Society became vertically and horizontally stratified into numerous castes, with status rigidly determined by birth.[23]

Endogamy, the practice of marrying within one's caste, was encouraged to uphold purity and lineage. Conversely, exogamy, marrying outside one's caste, was discouraged as it was seen to disrupt the established social order. Stringent laws were enacted to cement and perpetuate the caste system, restricting free social interaction.[24]

In this hierarchy, a Brahmin marrying a Kshatriya woman was deemed lower in status but not categorized as an untouchable. On the other hand, a Sudra marrying a Brahmin faced severe punishment and was relegated to the lowest caste, branded as a chandala an untouchable and the most scorned among the outcasts.[25]

3.2. The Sacralization of Caste Hierarchy

The concept of Varna emerged in the Rig Veda to distinguish Aryans from Dasyus and evolved into a fourfold classification by the Tenth Mandala. While three Varnas were Aryan, the fourth, considered non-Aryan, was integrated into Aryan society. Groups like Chandalas and Nishadas, later labeled untouchables, were initially referred to as Panchajana and not treated as untouchables by Vedic Aryans.[26]

3.3. Bhagvad Gita

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna acknowledges the four-fold social structure, which he attributes to the division of qualities (guna) and actions (karma). He asserts that while he is the creator of this system, he remains the imperishable non-doer. This suggests a move away from hereditary considerations to a system

[19]Omvedt, *Understanding Caste*, 35-37.

[20]Somen Das, *Christian Ethics and Indian Ethos (Revised &Enlarged* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 37-38.
[21]Das, *Christian Ethics*, 37-43.
[22]Bhagwan Das and James Massey, *Dalit Solidarity* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), 45-46.
[23]Das, *Dalit Solidarity*, 45-46.
[24]Das, *Dalit Solidarity*, 45-46.
[25]Das, *Dalit Solidarity*, 45-46.
[26]Katti Padma Rao, *Caste and Alternative Culture* (Madras: GLTC&RI, 1995), 2.

based on qualities and actions. However, the Gita doesn't address the status of the fifth caste, the mlechchas (barbarians), who are left outside Aryan society.[27]

3.4. Scientific Approach

The passage outlines ancient India under Bali Chakravarti, where indigenous groups like Astikas, Pisachas, Rakshasas, and others ruled. They faced invasion by Aryan forces from Iran, leading to their incorporation into the Aryan social hierarchy. Mahatma Phule pioneered historical analysis on caste, while B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar E.V. Ramaswami Naicker advocated for caste abolition.[28]

3.5. Bim Rao Ambedkar

Ambedkar recognized the caste system's two aspects, it segregates people into distinct communities and establishes a hierarchical order among them. Castes operate as a graded system of sovereignties, each fiercely protective of its status. In the event of a breakdown, some castes stand to lose more prestige and power than others.[29]

4. Dalit Resistance in Modern India

4.1. Structural Oppression

Dalits have historically been subjected to systematic exclusion from almost every sphere of social life. They were denied access to education, temples, public spaces, and social interaction with upper castes, which reinforced their isolation and inferiority. Economically, Dalits were deprived of land ownership and meaningful employment opportunities, forcing them into poorly paid, insecure, and degrading forms of work. Because most Dalits were landless and trapped in poverty, they had little choice but to depend on upper-caste landowners for their daily survival. This dependence was not voluntary but coercive, often taking the form of bonded labor, where entire families were tied to a landlord through debt, custom, or inherited obligation. As a result, Dalits were effectively born into exploitation, with their labor controlled and their mobility restricted, leaving them with little possibility of breaking free from this cycle of oppression. Such conditions ensured the continuation of caste dominance by keeping Dalits economically vulnerable, socially subordinate, and politically powerless.[30]

4.1.1. Human Dignity Denied

Out of an estimated one million Christians in Karnataka, at least two-thirds are of Dalit origin. Of these, more than half reside in rural areas, often living in close-knit clusters of poorly constructed that shed houses located in segregated *keris* on the outskirts of villages. Unsurprisingly, they constitute some of the poorest and most marginalized sections of rural society. The majority of these Christian Dalits belong to the *Madiga* community, a label that continues to signify impurity and untouchability in the perception of dominant castes, despite their conversion to Christianity. In southern Karnataka, many Christian Dalits trace their origins to the *Begaru* (Cheluvadi) community; however, they too are treated on par with other so-called untouchables within village social hierarchies. Conversion has thus failed to dismantle caste-based stigma in everyday social relations.[31]

Despite their marginalization, Christian Dalits along with Dalits of other faiths form the backbone of village economy and social life. They provide essential labour by toiling in the agricultural fields of non-Dalits and by performing a wide range of menial and degrading tasks that sustain village cleanliness and functionality. These activities are carried out within a traditional system known as *Madigathana Okkaluthana*, which, in practice, operates as a form of bonded labour. Under this system, Christian Dalits remain economically dependent, socially controlled, and structurally subordinated, revealing how caste-based exploitation persists even within religious communities that formally profess equality and human dignity.[32]

4.1.2. Social Humiliation

Dalits, despite their indispensable contribution to village life and the rural economy, are systematically denied the right to live with dignity in many villages of Karnataka, including Christian Dalits. Social exclusion is deeply entrenched and manifests through everyday practices that regulate space, movement, and social interaction. In hundreds of villages, Dalits are prohibited from entering village tea shops, denied the services of barbers and washermen, and restricted from using common water bodies, such as canals and embankments, which are freely accessed by non-Dalits. They are often unable to move freely or confidently

[27]Das, *Christian Ethics*, 37-43.
[28]Rao, *Caste and Alternative Culture*, 120-121.
[29]Das, *Dalit Solidarity*, 60-61.
[30]M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Delhi:ISPCK, 2013), 267-268 .
[31] M.E. Prabhakar and Godwin Shiri, "Dalits" in *Doing Christian Ethics :Context and Perspective*, ed., by Hunter P Mabry (Bangalore: BTESSC, 1996), 7-11.
[32] M.E. Prabhakar and Godwin Shiri, "Dalits" in *Doing Christian Ethics :Context and Perspective*, ed., by Hunter P Mabry (Bangalore: BTESSC, 1996), 7-11.

through dominant-caste localities, purchase goods without intimidation, or occupy public spaces without fear. Participation in religious or marriage processions ordinary social rights for others is frequently denied to them, reinforcing their symbolic exclusion from collective village life.[33]

This systemic discrimination extends beyond spatial segregation to deeply ingrained patterns of verbal abuse and social humiliation. It is not uncommon for dominant-caste children to address elderly Christian Dalits in derogatory and demeaning language, while Dalits themselves are socially conditioned never to speak assertively or assert their dignity in interactions with upper-caste individuals, regardless of age. Casteist verbal abuse thus becomes a normalized feature of everyday life. More disturbingly, this climate of structural inequality fosters conditions in which physical violence, molestation, and sexual assault against Dalit women occur with alarming frequency. In certain villages, long-standing domination has produced a culture of forced compliance, in which Dalit families particularly the poorest feel powerless to resist the sexual exploitation of their daughters by dominant-caste landlords. The rising number of young, unmarried mothers within these communities is not a reflection of moral failure but a tragic consequence of systemic powerlessness, economic dependency, and the absence of social and legal protection.[34]

4.2.Dalit Movement

Dalit movements across the country are rising with renewed intensity against persistent discrimination, violent oppression, and the systematic denial of human dignity. Central to this resurgence is a crucial and contested question: around what identity should the Dalit movement rally? While the shared experience of victimization provides a powerful impulse for collective resistance, no transformative movement can be sustained solely on the basis of suffering. Historically, successful liberation movements have combined the exposure of oppression with the affirmation of positive human worth. The workers' movement, for instance, not only revealed economic exploitation but also asserted the dignity of labour; the Black liberation movement not only condemned racism but also proclaimed that Black is beautiful; and the women's movement not only critiqued patriarchy but also affirmed women's creative role in the production and sustenance of life. In a similar way, the Dalit movement faces the challenge of articulating an identity that moves beyond negation toward a life-affirming vision.[35]

One major trend within the Dalit movement has transformed the critique of the caste system into a constructive vision of an egalitarian and caste-free society. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar came to the conclusion that such a humanist social vision required the support of a religious tradition capable of legitimizing equality and human dignity, which led him to embrace Buddhism. Another strand within the movement has moved toward an ethnic understanding of Dalits as the original inhabitants of the land. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, who articulates this perspective, acknowledges that the term "nationality" cannot be used in its conventional sense, since Dalits do not share a distinct race, language, territory, or religion. Instead, Dalit identity is grounded in a common historical experience of social and religious discrimination, economic oppression, and the shared challenge of shaping a liberated future. However, it remains difficult to envision how lasting emancipation can be achieved solely through a nationality ideology that lacks a concrete territorial or linguistic foundation.[36]

The life and work of Dr. Ambedkar testify to the necessity of a multi pronged approach to Dalit liberation. Ambedkar organized struggles simultaneously on the basis of caste, class, and religion, recognizing that oppression operates on multiple and interconnected levels. He led movements against caste-based discrimination, economic exploitation, and the religious legitimation of inequality. The Mahad Satyagraha of 1927 asserted the fundamental right of Dalits to access common water resources, symbolizing the struggle for dignity in everyday life. His critique of the *baluta* system exposed the exploitative division of labour in the traditional village economy, while the public burning of the *Manusmriti* constituted a radical challenge to the moral authority of texts that sanctified social hierarchy. Organizationally, Ambedkar worked with trade unions and peasant movements, and political formations such as the Independent Labour Party in the 1930s and the Republican Party founded in 1957 sought to build alliances on a broader class basis. At the same time, the Scheduled Caste Federation retained a caste-based focus, reflecting the continuing reality of

[33] M.E. Prabhakar and Godwin Shiri, "Dalits" in *Doing Christian Ethics :Context and Perspective*, ed., by Hunter P Mabry (Bangalore: BTESSC, 1996), 7-11.

[34] M.E. Prabhakar and Godwin Shiri, "Dalits" in *Doing Christian Ethics :Context and Perspective*, ed., by Hunter P Mabry (Bangalore: BTESSC, 1996), 7-11.

[35] Gabriele Dietrich and Bas Wielenga, *Towards Understanding Indian Society* (Tiruvella: Kristava Sahitya Samiti,1997), 205-206.

[36] Gabriele Dietrich and Bas Wielenga, *Towards Understanding Indian Society* (Tiruvella: Kristava Sahitya Samiti,1997), 205-206.

caste oppression. Finally, the conversion to Buddhism aimed to establish a religious foundation through which new social relationships could be forged on the basis of equality rather than hierarchy.[37]

4.3. Dalit Identity

Dalit movements across India have gained renewed momentum in response to persistent caste-based discrimination, violent oppression, and the systematic denial of human dignity. From a Dalit theological and liberation-ethical perspective, the central question is not merely resistance but the construction of an identity capable of sustaining transformative struggle. While the shared experience of suffering provides an initial point of solidarity, liberation cannot be grounded in victimhood alone; it must be accompanied by an affirming vision of human worth and social transformation. In this regard, the Dalit movement parallels other emancipatory struggles that exposed oppression while reclaiming dignity and agency. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's life and praxis offer a decisive framework for such an identity one that integrates caste struggle, class solidarity, and religious critique. His challenges to untouchability, economic exploitation, and Brahminical theology, culminating in his embrace of Buddhism, articulated a liberative vision rooted in equality, rationality, and human dignity. Dalit theology interprets this movement as participation in God's ongoing work of humanization, calling not merely for reform within the caste system but for its ethical and theological dismantling. Thus, the Dalit movement emerges not only as a protest against caste oppression but as a prophetic struggle for an alternative social order grounded in freedom, justice, and dignity for all.[38]

5. Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Settings of Dalit

5.1. Political Effects in Dalit Life

In the early 1900s, Jogulamba Gadwal was part of the Telangana region in princely Hyderabad State, ruled by the Nizam from 1724 until its integration into the Indian Union in 1948. Founded by Mir Qamruddin Chin Quilich Khan, Hyderabad State comprised Telangana (Telugu), Marathwada (Marathi), and Kanarese (Kannada) linguistic regions.[39]

The Telangana region comprised nine Telugu-speaking districts: Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Khammam, Medak, Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda, Atraf Balda, and Bhagat (Hyderabad). Jogulamba Gadwal was situated within the former Mahabubnagar district in south Telangana.[40]

In 1950, MK Vellodi became Chief Minister, and four Hyderabad state Congress representatives were appointed ministers. Telangana merged with Andhra State in 1956 based on linguistic criteria outlined in the States Reorganization Act. Despite democratic governance, Telangana faces socio-economic challenges, making it one of India's most underdeveloped regions. Telangana was established as a separate state on June 2, 2014, and Gadwal became Jogulamba Gadwal district on October 11, 2016.[41]

After India gained independence, the village's political landscape evolved significantly. Local governance structures like the Gram Panchayat empowered the villagers to take charge of their development. The democratic process allowed them to elect representatives and voice their concerns, shifting from colonial era oppression to self determination. The establishment of democratic institutions and the adoption of a democratic framework brought new opportunities for political participation. Local governance bodies, such as the Gram Panchayat, emerged, allowing the villagers to have a say in their community's development. In Jogulamba Gadwal like in many other regions, certain castes held positions of prominence and power. These dominant castes included the Reddy community and Brahmins. The village administration structure comprised individuals holding key positions such as *Patwari* (often a Brahmin *Karnam*), *Mali Patel* (typically a Reddy), and *Police Patel* (also from the Reddy Community), who served as village officers. These roles were crucial for the effective governance of the village. This dominant caste held significant social and economic power. Dalits faced significant caste discrimination and were exploited in various ways, with their children taught to respect the upper caste to secure employment.[42] The Dalit communities faced discrimination and social exclusion, although efforts toward social reform and upliftment gradually gained momentum during the 20th century.

[37]Gabriele Dietrich and Bas Wielenga, *Towards Understanding Indian Society* (Tiruvella: Kristava Sahitya Samiti,1997), 205-206.

[38]Gabriele Dietrich and Bas Wielenga, *Towards Understanding Indian Society* (Tiruvella: Kristava Sahitya Samiti,1997), 205-206.

[39]Jayaker Yennamall, *Dynamic Personality: The Life of D.N. Purushotham* (Chennai: Notion Press, 2023), 5-6.

[40]Yennamall, *Dynamic Personality*, 6.

[41]Yennamall, *Dynamic Personality*, 5-7.

[42]Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindustan Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Calcutta: Samya, 1996), 10-11.

5.1.1. Land Grabbing

In India, with a population exceeding 1.3 billion, approximately 120 million Dalit agricultural workers face exploitation by upper castes. Denied land ownership due to casteism, they suffer economic and social deprivation, making them vulnerable to inhumane attacks. In regions like Telangana's Jogulamba Gadwal district, Dalits swiftly acquire land within new projects, displacing lower caste villagers through methods like direct purchase or political influence. They extend their influence by assuming leadership roles in villages beyond their native areas, emphasizing their persistent struggle for land rights amidst systemic challenges.[43]

5.1.2. Political Control

In Telangana's Jogulamba Gadwal district, Brahmin, Kamma, and Reddi castes unite to suppress lower castes, asserting dominance in some villages due to their numbers, land ownership, and political clout. Reddis and Kammas emerge as village leaders, their power extending beyond politics, rooted in various aspects of village life. Political leadership is more about rallying followers than owning resources, with caste ties crucial for support. Leaders from larger caste groups wield more influence, ensuring political control remains in their hands, often fueling caste conflicts to maintain authority. In incidents like Karamchedu, it's the middle-class Kammas who lead attacks on Dalits, exploiting caste sentiments among the poor.[44]

5.2. Socio-Cultural effects in Dalit Life

The socio-cultural setting of Gadwal during the 20th century was deeply rooted in its agrarian economy and traditional practices. The agrarian economy in Gadwal was a means of sustenance and the cornerstone of the villagers' way of life farmers followed age old agricultural practices passed down through generations, relying heavily on the monsoon rains. The cyclic nature of farming (from ploughing and sowing to harvesting and threshing) dictated the village's life rhythm.[45]

Most of the population was in agriculture, cultivating crops like paddy, cotton, and sorghum. The village was tightly knit, with strong kinship ties and a closely connected community, social customs and traditions played a focal role in the lives of the villagers, governing aspects of marriage, festivals, and daily routines.[46]

Dalits faced significant caste discrimination and were exploited in various ways, with their children taught to respect the upper caste to secure employment.[47] The Dalit communities faced discrimination and social exclusion, although efforts toward social reform and upliftment gradually gained momentum during the 20th Century.[48]

5.2.1. The Tyranny of the Household

The caste-based social structure also influenced social hierarchies and gender roles within the village. Men typically held positions of authority and decision making, while women played essential roles in household management and agriculture.[49]

5.2.2. Language

Telugu was not just a means of communication; it was the cultural glue that bound the community together, says AL Sunder Raj. The village's distinct dialect, filled with idioms and proverbs, was a source of pride and identity.[50]

5.2.3. Marriage

Marriage within the same caste was customary, while inter-caste marriages were actively discouraged. Among Muslims, polygamy was common, and it was also practiced by some Hindus. Lower-caste families openly discussed extramarital affairs, and marital disputes often became public knowledge.[51] Child marriage was expected, and widow remarriage was prohibited.

[43]Rao, *Caste and Alternative Culture*, 14.
[44]Rao, *Caste and Alternative Culture*, 16-17.
[45]Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, 11-14.
[46]Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, 12-13.
[47]Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, 14-16.
[48]Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, 114-13.
[49]Ilaiah, *Why I am not a Hindu*, 16-18.
[50]Interview with A.L. Sund Raj, Rtd. Govt. Employee, Gadwal, 9th February, 2024.
[51]Ilaiah, *Why I am Not a Hindu*, 5.

5.2.4. Devadasi System

Lower-caste women in Jogulamba Gadwal endured dehumanization and exploitation through practices like *jogini*, and *dasi* (slave girl). The *jogini* system bound women to serve in temples, denying them autonomy and subjecting them to social isolation. Similarly, the *dasi* system forced young girls into servitude for higher-caste families, depriving them of basic human rights. Sadly, there was minimal outcry against these injustices, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation. Addressing these issues requires legal reforms, societal awareness, and empowerment efforts to challenge ingrained cultural norms and uplift the voices of lower-caste women.[52]

5.2.5. Songs and Folk Music

Cultural traditions, such as the folk dances like *Dappu* and *Bathukamma* alongside storytelling sessions during festivals, played pivotal roles in preserving the heritage of the village.[53]

5.2.6. Traditional Life Style

A significant portion of the community remains trapped in long-term debt, primarily due to limited financial resources and exploitative lending practices. Moreover, many individuals are relegated to traditional but stigmatized occupations like animal skinning and drum beating. These occupations, while culturally significant, face societal discrimination, hindering social mobility and exacerbating economic challenges. Overall, the combination of economic marginalization and social stigma perpetuates cycles of exclusion and disadvantage among these individuals.[54]

5.2.7. Contemporary Challenges to Social Equality

In both rural villages and urban centers, untouchable individuals continue to confront challenges to their dignity and security as they assert their constitutional rights and challenge age-old customs. Discrimination against Dalits persists in various forms, from denying access to basic amenities like clean water to subtle biases in education and professional settings. Scheduled Caste students often face deliberate marking down, while professionals born into untouchable families encounter prejudicial treatment regardless of their actual performance. Discrimination extends to healthcare, housing, and career advancement, perpetuating societal divides. Moreover, universities and colleges misuse their authority, hindering progress through nepotism and corruption. Despite constitutional guarantees, the struggle against caste discrimination in India remains deeply entrenched and multifaceted.[55]

5.3. Economical Effects in Dalit Life

5.3.1. Banded Labor

Dalit endure persistent marginalization characterized by financial constraints, limited lifestyles, and restricted access to education, compounded by enduring societal prejudice. Their settlements, primarily in rural areas, consist of makeshift shed houses clustered in enclaves known as *Keris* on the village outskirts, highlighting their status among the poorest in the community. Many Dalit trace their roots to the Madiga and Mala sub-castes, further stigmatizing them as impure and untouchable, perpetuating prejudiced perceptions. Despite embracing Dalits often labor in non-Dalit fields and undertake menial tasks, akin to bonded labor under the traditional guise of *madigathana Okkaluthana*.[56]

5.3.2. Agriculture Labor

In Jogulamba Gadwal, Dalits historically relied on agrarian livelihoods, dependent on traditional farming methods tied to monsoon rains. “The mid-20th-century Green Revolution brought modern agricultural techniques,” observes E. Raju.[57] yet rising literacy rates spurred Dalits to seek alternative employment. However, alarming trends persist, with rising school dropouts, unemployment, and early marriages among girls as young as 14-15. Advancements in agriculture and technology, including new irrigation systems and factories, have further marginalized Dalits, particularly affecting agricultural labourers.[58] With limited land holdings often mortgaged to upper caste landlords, Dalits face perpetual debt cycles. Additionally, a significant portion of the community engages in stigmatized occupations such as animal skinning and drum beating, exacerbating their economic challenges.[59]

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[52]Prabhaker, “Dalit,” 11-13.

[53]Ruth Manorama, “Dalit Women: Downtrodden among the Downtrodden,: in *Indigenous People: Dalits Issue in Today Theological Dabate*, ed., by James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 160.

[54]Prabhakar, “Dalits,” 9-11.

[55]Das, *Dalit Solidarity*, 57-58.

[56]Pawde, “The Position of Dalit women in Indian Society,” 145-147.

[57]Interview with E. Raju, MEO, Education Department, Itikyala, 11th November, 2023.

[58]Prabhakar, “Dalits,” 7-9.

[59]Prabhakar, “Dalits,” 9-11.

5.3.3. Traffic Victims

India has an estimated 13.6 million children in bonded labour, with a significant number of Dalit women forced into prostitution. Predators, often from upper castes, traffic victims from Jogulamba Gadwal to brothels in cities like Meerut, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata, with a substantial portion being Dalit women.[60]

5.4. Religious Factors

Hinduism played a central role in the lives of Jogulamba Gadwal residents. The people were adorned with temples dedicated to various deities, reaching hosting its own festivals rituals. These religious centers were not just places of worship but also hubs of cultural and social activities.

However, Dalits were barred from certain temples dedicated to deities like Shiva, Rama, And Anjaneyulu. Their beliefs centered on deities without specific temple structures. Dalits worship Maisamma, Maremma, Poleramma, Muthyalamma, Uppalamma, Ellama,[61] Pochamma, Kattamaisamma, Kaatamaraju (Beerappa), Potaraju, etc.[62] They also worshiped caste-specific gods and goddesses, each caste having its own *Kuladevudu* or *Kuladevatha* (caste-specific deity). Jogulamba Gadwal had temples dedicated to the goddesses Pochamma and Yellamma, primarily for the Dalit community.

5.5. Social Stigmatization

Dalits, historically labeled as "untouchables" or Scheduled Castes, endure discrimination rooted in traditional notions of purity and pollution, resulting in their exclusion from various social and religious spaces, notably temples. Temple entry restrictions curtail Dalits' religious participation, depriving them of equal opportunities in ceremonies and festivals. Often, Dalits are barred from entering inner sanctums, reinforcing perceptions of pollution. Some temples even designate separate entrances or areas for Dalits, perpetuating social hierarchies and reinforcing notions of inferiority. This segregation extends beyond temples, with Dalits facing separate seating and limited access in public spaces, fostering social isolation and stigma. Such practices not only stigmatize Dalits but also uphold societal perceptions of their inferiority, further marginalizing them within communities.[63]

6. Status of Women

6.1. Dalit Women

Dalit women in India face multifaceted oppression stemming from their class, caste, and gender identities. Historically, they have been subjected to systemic discrimination and exploitation within Hindu society. The intersectionality of caste and gender exacerbates their vulnerability, as they are often relegated to low-paid jobs and denied access to education and basic amenities. Despite their significant contributions to the workforce, Dalit women endure dehumanizing working conditions, irregular wages, and limited opportunities for social mobility. They are disproportionately affected by violence and sexual assault, with the majority of rape victims belonging to lower caste. The present situation reflects a worsening trend of atrocities and threats against Dalit communities and women, highlighting the urgent need for systemic reforms and social justice measures to address their plight and ensure their rights and dignity are protected.[64]

6.2. Role of Dalit Women in Family

In patriarchal family structures, women encounter systemic obstacles that restrict their autonomy and reinforce gender inequality. Governed by patriarchal values, women are assigned subordinate roles and excluded from certain activities traditionally reserved for men. These norms stem from outdated beliefs portraying women as inherently dependent on men. Women are expected to prioritize the needs of their husbands and children above their own aspirations. Traditional gender roles, reinforced by myths and rituals, further limit women's agency. Additionally, a woman's worth is often tied to her ability to bear male children, perpetuating discrimination. Despite shouldering familial responsibilities, women have limited property rights and minimal participation in religious ceremonies. This imbalance of power and opportunity

[60]Das, *Dalit Solidarity*, 65.

[61]Satyananrayan and G. Venkat Rajan, eds., *Retrieving the Past: History and Culture of Telangana, national Seminar* (Hyderabad: Osmania University, 2004), 286.

[62]Ilaiah, *Why I am Not a Hindu*, 7-8.

[63]Suratha Kumar Malik, "Dalit and the Historiography of Temple Entry Movements in India: Mapping Social Exclusion and Cultural Subjugation," in *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* ed., by (Midnapure: SAGE Publications India (Pvt)Ltd, 2022), 1-14

[64]Ruth Manorama, "Dlit Women: Downtrodden among the Downtrodden," in *Indigenous People: Dalits Issue in Today theological Debate*, ed., by James Massey (Delhi, ISPCK, 2006), 163-167.

undermines women's ability to control their lives and make independent choices within patriarchal family structures.[65]

6.2.1. The Tyranny of the House hold

The caste-based social structure also influenced social hierarchies and gender roles within the village. Men typically held positions of authority and decision making, while women played essential roles in household management and agriculture.[66]

6.2.2. Economic an Patriliny

In Gadwal rural and urban areas, traditional systems like *Madigathna Okkaluthana*, Dalit women bear the brunt of severe economic challenges and exploitation. Predominantly engaged in agricultural labor, they endure menial tasks for meager wages, which are even lower than those of men due to gender-based discrimination. Their earnings often fail to sustain their families, especially during lean seasons when work opportunities dwindle. Many Dalit women are forced to mortgage their small patches of land, exacerbating their economic vulnerability and perpetuating cycles of poverty and indebtedness.[67]

6.3. Women in Society

6.3.1. Inequality

Dalit women in Gadwal experience daily struggles and bitter experiences rooted in gender-based oppression and inequality. They are often denied access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making processes within their communities. The patriarchal structure of society reinforces these inequalities, with men holding positions of power and control.[68]

6.3.2. Injustice

The low status of women in Gadwal reflects the biased and unjust nature of the society, where women are marginalized and their voices are silenced. The control exerted by men further perpetuates gender-based discrimination and reinforces power imbalances.[69]

6.4. Women Challenges

6.4.1. Physical Oppression

In Gadwal and Telangana, as in many parts of the world, women may experience psychological and physical oppression due to unjust systems and traditional structures of injustice. These systems may include patriarchal norms that prioritize male authority and control over women's lives. Additionally, economic disparities and lack of access to education and healthcare further exacerbate the challenges faced by women in these regions.[70]

Women in Gadwal and Telangana, particularly those from marginalized communities, may bear the brunt of poverty, ignorance, and discrimination. They may have limited opportunities for economic empowerment and may be denied basic rights and freedoms. Moreover, traditional gender roles may confine women to domestic spheres, limiting their ability to participate fully in social, economic, and political life.[71]

6.4.2. Dowry System

In Gadwal, Telangana, and across India, women confront unequal status and roles within traditional societal structures. Despite being revered as sacred mothers, they are often marginalized and treated as property, excluded from decision-making processes. This reflects deep-seated attitudes where women are objectified rather than regarded as equals deserving of rights. The dowry system, prevalent in regions like Gadwal and Telangana, worsens the commodification of women, perpetuating inequalities and reinforcing traditional gender norms. Economically disadvantaged girls are especially vulnerable to exploitation. Legal limitations and lack of awareness about human rights further perpetuate injustices against women, compounded by illiteracy, which hampers their ability to advocate for themselves and participate in decision-making.[72]

6.4.3. De Humanizing

In Gadwal, Telangana, Dalit women endure intersecting forms of oppression due to their caste, class, and gender identities. They face exploitative working conditions, engaging in low-paying jobs with little

[65]Evitli Shohe, *Sumi Theological Trained Women and Their Contributions in Church and Society: A Feminist Historiographical Perspective* in MTh Thesis, 2015.

[66]Manorama, "Dlit Women: Downtrodden among the Downtrodden," 160.

[67]Prabhaker, "Dalit," 7-77.

[68]A. Ramesh, "Historical Root," in Indigenous People: Dalits Dalit issues in today's Theological Debates, ed., by James Massy(_____:_____, 1994), 76.

[69]Ramesh, "Historical Root," 76.

[70]M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 186-188.

[71]Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 186-188.

[72]Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 186-188.

protection. Economic disenfranchisement increases their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Ruth Manorama's concept of triple alienation emphasizes the complex nature of their oppression, where discrimination based on caste, gender, and socio-economic status compounds their marginalization, reinforcing systemic barriers to their empowerment and well-being.[73]

6.4.4. Physical Violence

In Gadwal and Telangana, women's roles remain largely confined to domestic spheres, with limited access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making power, a trend seen across India. The caste system exacerbates these inequalities, particularly affecting Dalit women who experience discrimination and exploitation. Dalit women endure economic hardship, social exclusion, and violence, embodying the intersectionality of oppression where caste, class, and gender intersect. Their experiences highlight historical violence and exploitation, with their bodies used as tools of oppression. Despite their resilience, Dalit women face barriers to empowerment, including limited education and socio-economic mobility due to entrenched social hierarchies. Their journey toward advancement continues amidst systemic challenges and discriminatory practices.[74]

6.4.5. Alcoholics

Equality of gender is made an issue. But one has to think about the difference in the status of women themselves. These are presumptions of literate women about illiterate women, or about Dalit and poor women. The educated women think that these women tolerate their husbands addicted to alcoholics, get beaten up, and give birth to many children. But at the same time no one thinks about high alcoholism in the middle class families, and about the tensions arising because of it. The educated, women have always sympathized on their issues.[75]

7. Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS)

The Madiga movement, spearheaded by Manda Krishna Madiga and initiated in 194, aimed to address the disparity in government reservations for the Madiga community in Andhra Pradesh. It gained significant momentum, leading to the establishment of a commission headed by Justice Ramachandran Raju. The commission's recommendations were initially implemented but later suspended due to legal challenges. Subsequent efforts, including reports submitted in 2008, sought to address Madiga grievances through amendments to Article 341. However, the movement strained relations between Madiga and Mala communities and failed to achieve resolution through dialogue. Despite garnering political and social support, the movement continues to press for legislative action in Parliament.[76]

7.1. Madiga as a Major Dalit Community

The Madiga surpass the other caste groups in the Church today all caste groups in this Church today, all castes including Brahmins, kshatriyas and sudras can be seen in good number. This is one Church in which the distribution of caste groups among the faithful is not lopsided. The 300 assemblies spread over 2 large districts have an apex body. It was formed for the sake of fellowship among the assemblies, and the 3 main office bearers are a Shudra (President), a Madidga (secretary), and mala (treasurer).[77]

7.2. Madiga Dandora

The Madigas, during the last decade, have become aware of the disparities in the distribution of opportunities available. This unequal utilization of such opportunities led to a popular movement called *Madiga Hakkula Dandora* (Announcement of the Rights of Madigas). Some are now adding *Madiga* at the end of their names as a more prominent tag of identity just like Reddy, or Choudary (Kamma) people. This will further widen the cleavange between Malas and Madigas. The rift went down to the level of the students who were organized as the Madiga Students Federation of India (MSFI).[78]

7.3. Caste Dynamics and Christianity

The history of Christianity among Telugu people is marked by mass movements influenced by caste, culture, and missionary endeavors. Caste, integral to Hinduism, posed challenges and played a significant role in conversions. Major movements resulted in a dominance of Mala and Madiga castes among Telugu Christians, notably in Protestant denominations. Missionaries like John Clough and organizations like the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church drove conversions, often intertwining denomination with caste.

[73]Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 186-188.

[74]Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 186-188.

[75]V. Devasahayam, *Dalits & Women*: *Quest for Humanity* (Madras: The Gurukul Summer Institute, 1992), 142.

[76]Anuparthi John Prabhakar, *Analysis of Sermons Preached in the Rural Dalit Telugu Baptist Congre*gations: *A Search for* D.Th Dissertation, 2010.

[77] K. Job Sudarshan, "Christianity Among the Mala And Madiga in Andhra Pradesh: Trends and Issues," in *Christianity in India: Search for Liberation and Identity*, ed., by F Hrangkhuma (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 81-82.

[78]Sudarshan, "Christianity Among the Mala And Madiga in Andhra Pradesh: Trends and Issues," 81-82.

Similar trends were observed with the Pilangipura Mission of the Roman Church and the Salvation Army, showcasing the complex relationship between religion and caste in Telugu society.[79]

8. Status of Christian Dalits in the Christian Community

The Christian Dalits, a marginalized group within the Christian community, face betrayal and marginalization in various aspects. This mistreatment is glaringly evident in large denominational setups, where Christians of upper-caste origins hold dominant positions in leadership, policy formation, and resource allocation within the church. Simultaneously, the interests of the majority of Christian Dalits, residing in rural areas, are disregarded by the Christian Dalit elite, often based in urban areas. Unfortunately, these elite Christian Dalits frequently align their interests with those of the upper-caste church leaders. This scenario is pervasive in several major Protestant Christian denominations in Karnataka. The marginalization of rural Christian Dalits by this elite group is particularly oppressive.[80]

8.1. Dalit Christians Oppression by Hindu Dalit

Dalit Christians, like all Dalits, face historical discrimination and social exclusion due to their caste identity. The initial stage of identity loss is a common experience among Dalits, regardless of their religious affiliation. However, Dalits practicing Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism experience different circumstances. While they may encounter caste-based discrimination, they do not undergo the same extent of identity loss associated with religious conversion and intra-community discrimination as Dalit Christians do.[81]

8.2. Upper Caste Christian Community Oppressed Dalit Community

Dalit Christians face a unique blend of challenges stemming from caste discrimination and religious identity intersection. Despite Christianity's preachings of equality, many encounter discrimination from upper caste Christian counterparts, affecting their access to religious spaces and opportunities within the church hierarchy. This discrimination exacerbates their loss of identity and sense of belonging, as they navigate the conflicting identities of being both Dalit and Christian. The struggle for acceptance often leads to adopting aspects of the dominant culture, further distancing them from their Dalit heritage.[82] Christian Dalits encounter discrimination within their own community, reflecting societal prejudices and facing marginalization, unequal treatment, and limited opportunities due to persistent caste-based hierarchies. They may seek solace and support from fellow Dalits of different faiths, finding solidarity amid shared experiences of discrimination. In larger denominations, upper caste leaders dominate policy and resources, sidelining the interests of rural Christian Dalits, especially evident in major Protestant denominations in Telangana.[83]

Dalit intellectuals express deep concern over the double alienation experienced by converts to Christianity, despite some economic and social advancements. They feel disconnected from non-converted relatives and higher caste members of society, while also facing exclusion within the Church itself. The 1950 Presidential order denying statutory benefits perpetuates their socio-economic backwardness post-conversion. Moreover, attempts to bridge divisions within Dalit Christian sub-castes like Mala and Madiga have largely failed, weakening the Church's unity in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Governmental policies categorizing scheduled castes and granting reservation benefits exclusively to Hindu Malas and Madigas exacerbate conflicts between these groups. Additionally, the influx of Shudra and high-caste individuals into churches complicates an already complex scenario, challenging the Church's cohesion and integrity.[84]

8.3. Dalit Christians Oppression by Government

Dalit Christians face identity loss concerning *religion* due to actions by their government. Despite converting to Christianity, many Dalits continue enduring discrimination and marginalization due to government policies and a lack of effective protection for religious minorities.[85]

Post-independence, Indian government provided facilities to Hindu Dalits constitutionally, extending benefits to Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh Dalits within the Hindu religion. However, converted Dalits, not acknowledged by Hindu brethren, faced identity loss within their religion. Despite embracing Christianity,

[79]Sudarshan, "Christianity Among the Mala And Madiga in Andhra Pradesh: Trends and Issues," 81-87.
[80]Prabhakar, "Dalits," 11-13.
[81]Massey, *Dalits in India Religion as a Source of Bondage,* 130.
[82]Massey, *Dalits in India Religion as a Source of Bondage,* 130.
[83]Prabhakar, "Dalits," 11-13.
[84]Sudarshan, "Christianity Among the Mala And Madiga in Andhra Pradesh: Trends and Issues," 81-91.
[85]Massey, *Dalits in India Religion as a Source of Bondage,* 130.

many Dalits still experience discrimination and marginalization due to government policies and inadequate protection for religious minorities.[86]

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has examined the historical foundations and lived realities of Dalits, demonstrating how caste-based structures have systematically produced social, economic, political, and religious exclusion. Interpreted through the biblical concept of *dal*, oppression is affirmed not as divinely sanctioned but as the consequence of human injustice, domination, and what Dalit feminist theology names as structural and embodied sin. By centering Dalit women's experiences, the study highlights how caste patriarchy, class exploitation, and gendered violence intersect to shape their everyday lives, rendering their bodies sites of control, suffering, and resistance. The continued marginalization of Dalit Christians further exposes the failure of religious institutions to embody their professed commitments to equality and justice. Dalit feminist resistance movements reveal a growing theological and political consciousness that reclaims agency, challenges caste patriarchal norms, and asserts dignity from the underside of history. Yet the persistence of caste oppression underscores the urgent need for structural transformation grounded in a liberative, feminist reimagining of theology one that arises from Dalit women's lived experiences, confronts systemic injustice, and commits itself ethically to justice, equality, and the affirmation of full human dignity for all.

[86]Kumud Pawde, "The Position of Dalit women in Indian Society," in *Indigenous People: Dalits: Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate* ed., James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 2016), 145-147.