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Development policy and the history of Dalit movement in India

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Abstract

Dalit literature primarily acts as a human and social history record, exploring the experiences of those who have lived through centuries of economic and social exploitation in India. On the other hand, social equality is making inroads into Indian society. Activists' efforts and the revolutionary potential of Dalit literature are responsible for this encouraging trend. More and more Dalit people are speaking up and sharing their experiences, which is helping to propel conversations about social justice and equality, which is leading to a more equal and inclusive society.

Keywords: Dalit, communities, Brahmin and society

Introduction

It is a common misunderstanding that the Dalit movement is an anti-Brahmin or anti-non-Dalit movement. This movement opposes the practice of untouchability throughout all Indian castes and communities, rather than targeting any one group in particular. Certainly, the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity are foundational to the Dalit cause. Building an egalitarian society is the primary goal of the Dalit Movement. The Dalit people are fighting back against the Hindu social system that treats them as second-class citizens. Securing these indivisible goals for every human, including Dalits, is the fundamental goal of the Dalit struggle. Thus, the greater goal of the Dalit movement is to foster in all people a feeling of brotherhood or unity.

Dalit activism has a long and storied history that begins in the eleventh century. During the rule of the Western Chalukyas in the eleventh century, a cobbler-saint named Madara Chennaiah became the first Dalit writer. Many consider him the literary progenitor of Vachana poetry, which he used to advocate for brotherhood and equality. In the 12th century, the Dalit saint Kalavve presented a new philosophy and doctrine of social equality, which he used to question the upper castes system. People who consume

goats, filth, and little fish are referred to as caste people, he claimed. Outcasts are those who partake in the ritual of eating the sacred cow that gives Shiva frothy milk. According to Abedi (2010: 1),

Those that consume goats and their meat are referred to be Dalits, he is trying to convey. But what about the people? They were referred to as castes by the individuals who had eaten milk like God Shiva, in the form of Abhishek.

A renaissance of Dalit activism occurred in the 1990s. An increase in anti-Dalit violence and killings in southern India fueled social movements and Dalit political parties, while nationally, the debate over affirmative action 'reservations' in public sector jobs and universities brought caste into the spotlight beyond the village (HRW, 1999; Rawat and Satyanarayana, 2016) [8]. In the context of student, youth, and women's groups, the Dalit/caste criticism of Marxian and feminist frameworks was solidified by the writings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, which were made accessible in vernacular languages in the wake of his birth-centenary, further elevating him to the stature of a political icon.

Professional Dalits (e.g., government officials, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and ex-servicemen), members of the Scheduled Caste (SC) who worked for the government in industries like railways, banks, and food corporations, as

well as Dalit lawmakers from different parties, leaders of the Left movement, and the dynamic minds behind new Dalit political parties, were at the forefront of Dalit activism (Gorringe, 2005). In the decades after India's independence, the political space that had been blocked off to Dalits started to open up. Churches and non-governmental organizations in Tamil Nadu forged hitherto unexplored ties to the diverse Dalit political scene (Mosse, 2012a: 193-97, 208-32).

There was a web of interconnected actor types by the 1990s: NGOs, whether they were founded or educated by churches, had cadres who spread awareness of causes, which in turn had connections to NGOs for funding and support, which in turn had connections to political leaders whose parties the NGOs' employees had joined. Christian priests in student groups (primarily Christians, see Arun, 2012) educated and mentored the first generation of Dalits to become leaders in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1970s. This generation was liberated from agrarian subordination because their fathers (and, less often, mothers) worked as teachers, in the army, or on railways. In the 1980s and 1990s, on top of these few, there were a lot of Dalits who had been "burned by the fire of discrimination" while working as community animators for non-Dalit NGOs and Left groups; they had also experienced rural untouchability. At temples, churches, and burial sites, they participated in vernacular struggles for caste dignity and founded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to fight for Dalit access to common property, public spaces, water, roads, electricity, and house-site titles.

Literature Review

Sami Ullah Bhat *et al.* (2022) ^[1] As a result of casteism, the Dalits, also known as the untouchables or Shudras, have endured immense hardship in Indian civilization. The Dalits continue to endure severe persecution in many Indian states from members of higher castes, even though the country has been independent for almost 70 years. Being born into lower castes makes Dalits an easy target for stigma, humiliation, cruelty, and prejudice. Their whole sense of self has been crushed beneath the weight of the brutality with which they have been physically or psychologically abused. Over the course of many centuries, they have endured a series of horrific events. People from higher castes, who would usually treat them like animals, begged them to stay alive. Since the Dalits had no legal claim to hope for a better future, their aspirations were meaningless. As time went on, members of the Dalit community came to terms with the horrific circumstances and hardships endured by their fellow members, and they chose to express themselves via writing by describing the most horrific atrocities they had to face. The idea that Dalits were expected to endure the degradation and mistreatment in silence is shocking and hurtful. The immense suffering described in Dalit literature is palpable upon reading its horrific narratives of suffering. Their suffering is shown to the readers in a thinly disguised way so that they might empathize with their plight should they ever find themselves in a similar situation.

Prashant Ingole *et al.* (2020) ^[3] In this work, we make an effort to bring together Dalit studies and cultural studies in the hopes of establishing a new field called Dalit Cultural Studies. This paper explores the anti-caste discourse and cultural resistance of Dalits from colonial and postcolonial

times, which continues to take various forms. It does this by referencing the various claims of dominant epistemologies re-articulated by dalit intellectuals at different points in history and by locating the cultural past of Dalit humiliation. This study brings together Dalit and cultural studies to argue that the 'politics of difference' challenges the power-knowledge relation by drawing a line between Brahmin and non-Brahmin aesthetics. By de-brahmanizing the existing academic space and introducing the rhetoric of the experience of caste and humiliation into mainstream academia, the non-brahmin aesthetic decenters the cultural production and circulation of the great narratives. When conventional wisdom in India's social and humanities institutions fails to adequately address Dalits' lived experiences of oppression, intersections between Dalit and cultural studies provide a way to de-Brahmanize the field and gain a better understanding of Dalit society.

Dr. Riad Azam (2022) ^[3] Both the autobiography Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki and the book Koogai: The Owl by Cho. Dharman are Dalit writings, and this article examines their storytelling methods. Using this framework, the article describes how the Dalits' social and political circumstances evolved in India after independence. The paper uses narratology as a theoretical framework to argue that the two texts' contrasting narrative styles reflect the social and political climates of the time and the circumstances of the writers' lives, as well as the broader issues surrounding the Dalit emancipation movement. Moreover, the article delves into how these two writings illustrate the fundamental paradoxes and inconsistencies of Dalit identity. After that, it poses the issue of whether these inconsistencies should be omitted in order to portray a more uniform understanding of Dalit identity or whether they should be imagined in tandem with them.

Sudhir Maske *et al.* (2023) ^[4] Many scholars throughout the world now devote considerable time and energy to studying Dalit and subaltern literature. Literary, cultural, and linguistic studies in universities across the world make extensive use of this material. There is a dearth of literature on the topic of literary works' use in social work education, practice, and research, including autobiographical tales. Educators, students, and practitioners of social work might benefit from drawing on Dalit autobiographies as an indigenous knowledge source to promote anti-caste and anti-oppressive viewpoints, as the author of this piece has pointed out. In order to realize social justice and human rights, which are the cornerstones of the social work profession, this liberatory framework might also aid in addressing structural and micro-macro level concerns.

Suratha Kumar Malik (2019) ^[5] It is well-known that Varna and Jati were the cornerstones of traditional Indian society. Even after seventy-five years of India's freedom, the caste system is deeply ingrained in our religious, political, and social systems, despite its lengthy history and many revisions. To this day, the concept of untouchability remains the caste system's most baffling and problematic feature. After independence from British rule, Dalit groups in India sought to rebuild the pan-Indian Dalit identity via various forms of social and political activism, in contrast to their colonial-era counterparts, who sought to deconstruct the elite history of the upper castes by focusing on Dalit history, heritage, epistemology, and worldview. In light of the

foregoing, this article seeks to investigate a few of India's current Dalit movements, delving into their connections to events like the Bhim Army, the Rohith Vemula case, and the Koregaon Bhima incident, all of which have had an impact on these movements and helped stimulate Dalit awareness in the pursuit of a pan-Indian dalit identity, organization, and movement. Additionally, the article delves deeply into the problems and obstacles faced by Dalit movements in the twenty-first century as a result of neoliberal globalization.

Contribution of Dalit movement

Contribution of Bhakti movement to Dalit Movement

The twelfth century was a watershed moment in the history of caste-ridden society and Indian culture. At this period of reformation, Brahmins were sowing the seeds of deities all over the place. But in Punjab Gurunanak, Kabir in northern India, Changdev Raval in Gujarat, Chakrardhar Swami in Maharashtra, and Basveshwar in Karnataka were fighting against caste system and trying to wipe out gender discrimination and caste distinctions. There were uprisings against untouchability and fights for equality.

Muslim regiments used the Khaibar Khind to conquer India before the twentieth century. In the end, the Muslim empire controlled northern India, but reformers like Basveshwar and Chakrardhar Swami, together with religiously conservative Hindu Brahmins, prevented them from establishing dominion over the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. In contrast, the Buddhist and Jain conquests of Maharashtra and Karnataka were also unsuccessful. Both faiths were non-vaedic because of these reasons. Therefore, they disagree with the Hindu concept of Varna. At that point in time, a person's greatness is dependent on his or her birth rather than their qualities. Despite the propagation of traditional cultural thought, the society was founded on the Varna system.

In ancient times, several cults, each with its own doctrine, arose with the goal of reforming Hindu society. Several revered figures-including Basveshwar, Chakradhar Swami, Kabir, Dnyaneshwar, and Tukaram-scored for social equality. Saints (poets) like Namdev, Eknath, and Chokha Mela laid the groundwork for Dalit awareness with their medieval works on the importance of brotherhood and equality.

In an effort to promote social equality and liberalism, Basveshwar founded a new religion in Karnataka called Virshaiv Lingayat. The Mahanubhava Sampradaya was established by the contemporary Chakrardhar Swami. The too conservative Hindu faith was meant to be softened by these two cults. Gurunanak, Kabir, and Bassava were among the many famous Indian saints who despised untouchability. In Panjab, Gurunanak founded the Shikh religion, which places a premium on hard effort, after rising up in rebellion against the Varna system. He claimed no affiliation with either Hinduism or Islam, instead identifying as a Shikh, a new faith that combines the best of both traditions. Menese, 2009, p. 9.

He has preached the value of labor, as have other saints. Saint Kabir, a modern Indian, has also done similar work in northern India. He revealed the sins of both Hindu civilization and Islamic culture at the same time, and he was the first in India to do so. After living in Gujarat and

Rajasthan for close to twenty years, Sanit Namdavi leaves Maharashtra for Panjab with the goal of spreading liberty and equality. He crossed paths with the holy men Gurunanak and Kabir as the Varkari religion was sweeping over Punjab. A new religion based on human dignity has been bestowed to the country at last. In the Middle Ages, there were several saints who preached Bhakti, love, equality, and compassion.

Annotated as Dnyaneshwari in 1290, Saint Dnyaneshwar was banished to Dalit status in the 13th century. Along with the common people and the untouchables in Maharashtra, he founded the Varkari Sampradaya, a religious order that practises frequent pilgrimage, and infused it with a strong spiritual concept of humanity. He has disseminated his ideas of equality and Varkari Sampradaya. "This universe is my home," he finally said. As stated by Kulkarni (1992: 29), This altruistic ideology was propagated throughout India by Dnyaneshwar. During the Bhakti era, Saint Eknath-another expelled Brahmin-fought for the rights of the common people and the untouchables. During the Bhakti era, Eknath composed the folk ballad Bharud for the dual purposes of social change and amusement. It takes a hard stance against traditional occupations including barbering, fortune telling, beggary, farming, bhagat, and shoemaking. I found Saint Eknath's Bharud, in which he vehemently opposed communalism and castism, to be a really thought-provoking work of literature.

Everyone who was not a Brahman was considered a Shudra in the Brahmanical caste system. According to Tukaram (1990: 65), Saint Tukaram, who identifies as a Shudra poet and farmer, was an outcast who continued to persecute patriarchal and orthodox societies by denouncing the caste system and its inflexibility in the name of God's most devout devotee.

The following is an excerpt from an Abhanga (a hymn or lyrical poetry) in which Saint Tukaram defines real and Dalit saints:

It was a great victory! I am really grateful!!

My heart is heavy with grief. Janava, Dev tethechi! *[Ibid: 66]

He had sought this heavenly condition in relation to earthly concerns. As a result, the ordinary people of Maharashtra hold him with the utmost respect and affection. Any kind of prejudice or social injustice he denounced with vehemence. He was against social stratification based on caste and the oppression that the Dalit (Untouchables) faced from the upper class. But Varkari Samaj's Bhakti religion was people-focused. Saint Kanhopatra (The Prostitute) and Saint Janabai (Woman Slave), two medieval figures, battled for the rights of untouchables. Following Saint Dnyaneshwar's solid foundation, Saint Tukaram becomes the brilliant pinnacle of Bhagavat Dharma.

As a Dalit poet, Saint Chokha Mela was the first to put his thoughts and emotions into words via his devotional songs, or Abhangas. Thus, he is rightfully hailed as the forerunner of Dalit poetry. Aptly, he wonders in his renowned Abhanga why people are enticed by a man's external appearance:

The sugarcane is tough, but the juice it produces isn't.

Why are you enticed by deceitful looks? Kamdam (1969:25) Many of these holy men and women were followers of the

medieval caste-rejecting Bhakti schools of Hinduism. It would be a mistake to see the Varkari movement only through a religious lens, however, as its leaders were also deeply concerned with rooting out societal problems. However, social reformers attempted to advance Dalit and untouchability causes in India after the Bhakti movement's collapse.

Contribution of Social Reformers to Dalit Movement

Many famous Indian philosophers and social reformers laid the groundwork for contemporary India. Although they weren't directly involved, social reformers fulfilled societal needs that the Dalit movement had. As a result, any discussion or study of the Dalit movement in India must include the social reformers. One of the most prominent nineteenth-century social reformers in Maharashtra was Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule. He was an activist for social change in India who used his initials to provide knowledge to the oppressed and women. He rose up in rebellion against the unfair caste system that had persisted for generations and had caused misery to millions of people. Specifically, he fearlessly championed the untouchables' cause and rallied behind the oppressed peasants by picking up the cudgels. Indian Shetji and Bhatji, however, have caught his eye. In the midst of his conflicts with the higher caste, he was also raising awareness among the untouchables about their past as rulers of this country and the evils of slavery via his teachings and lectures. The untouchables, having come to terms with their enslavement, banded together in an effort to end the practice and joined forces with Mahatma Phule in their pursuit of a more equitable society free from injustice and inequity.

Contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to Dalit Movement

In India, Babasaheb Ambedkar is known for his groundbreaking work in ending caste discrimination. He fought against prejudice and for the rights of the Dalits and other oppressed groups throughout his life. He was a world-renowned academic in addition to being an outstanding national leader. His academic writings on caste, religion, culture, constitutional law, and economic growth added to our knowledge of India's socio-economic and political issues, and he also spearheaded several social initiatives aimed at helping the downtrodden. When it came time to draft the Indian Constitution, he was instrumental. As a result, he was a staunch supporter of the Dalit cause in India.

Babasaheb Ambedkar opted to take Sanskrit when he was a student at Satara School. "I will not teach Sanskrit to the pupil belonging to the Mahar caste," the Sanskrit instructor said, humiliating and insulting the student. [Reference, Kulkarni: 305] We can only begin to fathom the immense suffering that Babasaheb's delicate psyche endured throughout his formative years. He decided to take matters into his own hands after this occurrence and started fighting untouchability. He was attempting to do this in many ways. He devoted his whole life to challenging caste prejudice, the Hindu system of castes, and the Chaturvarna system, which divided Hindu society into four Varnas. The societal ills of untouchability and the caste system have troubled Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar ever since he was a little boy.

In his weekly newspaper Mooknayak, Dr. Babasaheb

Ambedkar began to voice his disapproval of the society's prevailing orthodox structure. The blatant prejudice and humiliation that members of lower castes had to face and suffer was something he spoke about freely. He had also cast a ballot in favor of establishing distinct voting districts for society's most disadvantaged members. Babasaheb Ambedkar also called for religious minority reservations and reservations for the Dalits. For the benefit of the impoverished and disadvantaged, he also established the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha. In an effort to better their socioeconomic status, he organized the dissemination of education to these groups.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar started the first anti-touch ability campaign in Maharashtra in the 1920s. Through political methods, he saw a chance for the untouchables to develop and attain economic and social parity with the most privileged segments of contemporary society. A major focus of the Dalit movement is the demand for Dalit identity. India was the birthplace of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's historic fight for the economic, social, and cultural equality of India's Dalits. Entering into a confrontation with Gandhi on the crucial matter of the Dalit's position within the Hindu social milieu, he bravely thwarted Gandhi's Freedom movement. I fear that the Dalits' deplorable situation would remain unchanged even after India gains its independence. The Social and Cultural Revolution were firmly proclaimed by him. Although Mahatma Gandhi disagreed with Babasaheb Ambedkar on several points, he shared Ambedkar's commitment to social justice for the Dalits. While Mahatma Gandhi sought to accomplish their goals without upsetting the established social order, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar sought to do so by destroying the caste system. Here and now, the appeal of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar:

His guiding principles of "Educate, Organize, and Agitate" galvanized the Dalits, who rallied behind him wholeheartedly. Most importantly, Dr. Ambedkar instilled in the Dalits a feeling of dignity and self-assurance. According to Ambedkar (1945: 54), Prior to independence, the untouchables' situation was terrible and pitiful. The lake or well was reserved for the higher classes, and they were not permitted to take water from it. Hence, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar began the Satyagrah to drain the upper-class-only Chavdar Lake at Mahad, a tahsil location in Maharashtra's Raigad District. He and his legions of devotees carried out the Bonfire of Manusmriti ritual on December 25, 1927, at that location. Ambedkar began attending the Kalaram Mandir at Nasik as a protest against the fact that untouchables were not permitted to enter the Hindu temples. In the annals of India's Dalit struggle, these acts stand as benchmarks.

NGOs and the Rise of Dalit Activism

The INGO donors that Dalit-led NGOs approached at the time did not consider this kind of work to be "development," therefore the NGOs had to classify it as a different policy priority in their reports and proposals. As an example, Oxfam's approach to caste was seen as 'best dealt with indirectly in ways which diffuse rather than amplify conflict,' rather than as an organizing principle underlying their program to deepen agrarian poverty and inequality (Natrajan, 2011; see also Mosse, 2020). 7 Project

beneficiaries were mostly Dalits, who were either landless workers or marginal farmers; nonetheless, the need of literacy, training, or Freirean awareness raising was not explained in terms of caste. Gender, environmental, and drought vulnerability concerns, rather than caste inequality, emerged as prominent categories when requests for more strategic coherence in grant-making policy originated from headquarters, as they undoubtedly did (for instance, in 1989–1990). Notes that the language of participation, local institution development, user organizations, or microfinance Self-Help Groups was introduced as a replacement "technology" for people's mobilization in the early 1990s by neoliberal institutionalist policy tendencies. In order to sidestep the caste issue, the 8th Five-Year Plan of the Indian government attempted to include NGOs in reorganizing rural development under certain conditions.

Things were drastically different in the early 2000s. The 'Dalit rights' agenda has become a major source of funding for Tamil Nadu's non-governmental organizations. Into the realm of global NGOs came a vernacular politics. But this was not grassroots globalization. First, the domain of international human rights; second, the institutional interests of INGO donors; we examine each in turn; indeed, the "Dalitization" of development started in transnational institutional domains.

International Human Rights and 'Dalit Rights' Discourse

Recasting caste as a development issue was made possible by a series of pre-existing institutional ties in the field of international human rights. It was not Dalit advocacy organizations that succeeded in getting caste discrimination recognized as a human rights violation at the UN beginning in 1996; rather, it was an interplay between the agendas of UN experts and state delegates (Aranguren, 2011) ^[7]. From its inception in 1970 until its 1996 dissolution, India continued to report on the status of its Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SCs/STs) or Dalits to CERD (the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination), the expert monitoring committee for the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). However, in 1996, India stopped reporting because it argued that caste did not qualify under CERD's provisions, given the complete absence of racial discrimination within its territories. The consequences of India's 1989 Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) Prevention of Atrocities Act (PoA) were linked by Aranguren (2011) ^[7] to this refusal to report to CERD. The PoA was the first to produce numerical data on legally defined violations (or 'atrocities') against Dalits, and it revealed both the high volume and the increasing rate of what would be indicators of poor human rights performance under CERD.

According to Aranguren, CERD experts took it upon themselves to insist on a broader understanding of race beyond a biological/phenotype concept and into broader social discrimination in response to this state's refusal to acknowledge it. When the Indian government failed to report on the issue, a non-official (Canadian) Dalit diaspora NGO reported on caste discrimination in India, marking the first time this was done. In addition to being a major change in CERD in 1996, this also made the international

human rights treaty apparatus accessible to Dalit activists by explicitly including caste in the concept of "descent" as a prohibited basis of discrimination under ICERD (officially by 2002, despite the Indian government's rejection of this). International church networks began to focus more on the suffering of their majority Dalit Christian populations in India, while Human Rights Watch and other organizations focused on India and discrimination against Dalits in their 1999 report, *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's 'Un-touchables'* (HRW, 1999). This followed the success of campaigns against apartheid in South Africa by 1994.

Non-governmental organization (NGO) Dalit activists in India may argue that their fight was not limited to India, Hinduism, or Brahmanic dominance, but rather was a part of a global movement against human rights violations. As pointed out by Mehta (2013) ^[9], the Indian state apparatus was criticized from the outside for its neglect of its obligations to the Dalits. This neglect manifests in development disparities (poverty, illiteracy, infant mortality), land dispossession, and the failure to spend the mandated proportional development budget allocations. Additionally, there was a failure to protect the Dalits from untouchability and anti-Dalit violence.¹⁰ In December 1998, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR, 1999)—a group of southern Indian Dalit non-governmental organization (NGO) leaders—released a "Black Paper" outlining these issues in relation to caste inequality and development. The NCDHR arose from a 1997–1998 national coordination of Dalit organizations around concerns brought up in the HRW *Broken People* report, which had been commissioned and supported by the Ford Foundation.

The fight for Dalit human rights also served as a challenge to liberals, who should see the right-bearers not just as individuals but as a distinct group—victims of untouchability and historical exploitation—to whom the Indian government is obligated under the Constitution (Mehta, 2013: 153) ^[9]. The introduction of the Black Paper brought together non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Dalit movements/parties, including the Liberation Panthers, Putiya Tamilar, and the Republican Party of India (Gorringe, 2005: 76). At international forums like the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban, hundreds of Dalit activists (both political and non-governmental) marched with slogans like "caste is race" and "India's hidden apartheid" to have caste acknowledged as a worldwide form of discrimination, in an effort to shame the Indian public and prompt the government to take action (Mehta, 2013: 157) ^[9].

Although the Indian government and competing interest coalitions prevented the Dalit campaign and advocacy coalition from including caste on the multilateral agenda that defines governmental policy making and monitoring (Aranguren, 2011) ^[7], the emerging global discourse on Dalit rights did open the door for other development-oriented institutional agendas to include caste.

An INGO Policy Process

Due in large part to the adoption of the transnationally formed Dalit human rights narrative by INGO funders, it became embedded in Tamil Nadu NGO practice in the late 1990s. The rise of the vaguely defined "rights-based

approach" that centers on discrimination, inequality, and state claims brought caste and Dalit concerns to the forefront, elevating them from the margins of development objectives (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004) ^[11]. 11 Anandhi (2017) ^[12] argued that the concept of "rights" suggested that INGO donors and their partners needed to take action on a global scale to combat human rights abuses and achieve transformative change, rather than focusing on local initiatives. To be sure, companies don't implement new policies based on ideas alone; rather, they do so because ideas help them overcome their own problems. We will now look at how a new Dalit rights agenda brought about two significant outcomes in the instance of Ox-fam: success through failure and continuity through rupture.

Initially, achieving achievement after experiencing setbacks. Some international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in southern India, including Oxfam, had difficulties in the 1990s. David remembers from his time working in the Oxfam field office that the notion of "people's empowerment" via sangams, which were village/neighborhood groups advocated by NGOs, was seen as ineffective. According to field reports that were sent to Oxfam and other donor offices, the following was found: instead of encouraging autonomous grassroots action (for land, services, etc.), sangams, which were now standardized, became beneficiary clients expecting de-liverable schemes and inputs from their NGO patrons, who were institutionalized through donor support. Donor personnel started seeing NGOs as the issue and dividing federated associations or "people's organizations" (the worthwhile objective) from donor-funded NGOs (the transitory means) after adopting the self-critical discourse on NGOization in a variety of publications, policy seminars, and strategy reviews. A moral discourse on responsible non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and good social movements shaped this portrayal (Bornstein and Sharma, 2016: 82) ^[13], but it was at odds with the clientelist interactions that donors were really a part of.

Since the 1990s, when Dalit rights issues were at their peak, Oxfam has had a distinct perspective on NGO work and the sangam process. A rearranging of categories was required to reframe program goals in relation to the Dalit claim of social-political rights, as was done in a 1997 report (Parasuraman and Vimalanathan, 1997) ^[14]. You may say that the increasing number of little non-governmental organizations (NGOs) run by Dalits and staffed by individuals from their own communities are really people's organizations. Their caste-based activity, which included fights over land and temples as well as social boycotts and anti-Dalit violence, was now seen as a self-organizing movement for structural change, having begun locally but become regionally and globally prominent via the growth of Dalit NGO networks. Our interviews demonstrated that even the most hardened European agencies could find common ground with this comprehensive (material, social, spiritual) concept of human dignity and growth beyond programs. It solved the problems with the sangam paradigm and made progress toward the nebulous aim of "empowerment" possible. Rather than altering practice, a Dalit rights policy opened up new avenues of interpretation, which in turn sparked fresh flows of resources, re-centering a number of long-standing but previously ignored social

movements within a revitalized framework of development objectives.

Reconciling broken relationships was the second goal of the Dalit rights movement. In an effort to streamline operations, reduce overhead expenses, and redirect resources to the comparatively impoverished northern Indian states, Oxfam's new vision of Dalit-led development came to light just as the organization's major decision to terminate its south India program-the longest running program, which began in 1962-came into effect. As a simple explanation, the idea of development as an ongoing fight for Dalit rights provided an ethical framework within which to deal with the bitterness and opposition of around forty-eight non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that had staked claims to partnership and the institutional abandonment that came with it. Under the guise of the New Entity for Social Action (NESA), which was partially a donor organization (Oxfam, then Novib) and partly a membership body committed to a "rights-based approach" that now expressed the cultural-political claims of Dalits, Oxfam was able to negotiate its departure in March 1998 by handing over its program and assets to 42 NGOs, the majority of which were led by Dalits. The name of the organization was vague.

The first elections for local councils (Panchayats) were held at that time, following the 1993 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act's requirement to reserve seats for women and Dalits. The extreme violence that Dalits faced when running for office, such as the infamous massacre of six Dalits near Madurai and the beheading of the elected president in June 1997, further reinforced this view that this was a shift in power and that development funds would be better allocated to Panchayat leaders from the Dalit community (HRW, 1999). Maintaining momentum was crucial, since NGOs have never had more to offer. Stopping a rights-based development initiative at this juncture would have been a mistake.

Conclusion

Throughout history, the Dalits have been oppressed and marginalized by the higher castes, leading them to live in a subaltern state. By giving a voice to society's voiceless and underprivileged sections, their fight for equality and dignity shapes the story of Dalit literature. Recent years have seen an increasing number of Dalit authors' contributions that have enriched both Dalit literature and Indian literature generally.

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