



Religion, culture and the process of marginalization

Preeti Oza

St. Andrew's College, University of Mumbai, India

<preetioza1@gmail.com>

Abstract

Man is a social animal having a great sense of social inclusivity. Religion influences our perceptions of social exclusion and inclusion around the world. Due to the global expansion of religion's influence on people's lives, the global resurgence of newly imposed standards, laws, and restrictions has occurred. Demographically, and particularly in terms of its impact on societal conditioning, it has been a significant factor. Many people consider religion a critical component of who they are, what they believe, the community in which they live, and the overall purpose in their lives. Another way to say this is that as a result of its cultural foundations, the same religion has also given rise to other types of marginalisation in other cultures and nations. Everywhere you look, marginalised groups are under discussion because of their social, ethnic, economic, and cultural obstacles. Marginality must be dealt with globally, regardless of form. Religious, ethnic, linguistic, and other minority groups tend to be more marginalised in many countries. There are also counter-cultures in mainstream cultures and religions. They are generally people from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities. They are suffering from poverty, social isolation, and political disenfranchisement. Their marginalisation can vary on a continuum ranging from less to more intense. Societies are typically split into two classes: one class is very powerful, and the other class is destitute. This study explores the connection between religion, culture, and the phenomenon of marginalisation.

Keywords: religion, identity politics, culture, marginalization, Dalits in India

Introduction

Societal bias based on birth is well-known in Indian society. Caste-based marginalisation has been a historical "crime" in Indian society. Caste, on the other hand, is not exclusive to Indian

culture; it can be found throughout South Asia. In today's Muslim nations, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, untouchability, caste identity, and caste-based societal discrimination have all been reported. Untouchability is still

practised in all of South Asia's modern nation-states, even though constitutional legislation outlaws it. Certain aspects of caste identity, such as caste-based social marginalisation and the practice of untouchability, are still practised in today's Muslim-dominated communities in Pakistan and Bangladesh.[1] Hindu holy writings, as well as traditional Hindu texts and laws, have set standards and ethics for life, culture, religion, and belief. As a result, societal inequalities such as untouchability have become canonical. The four *varna* system of Hinduism divides people into four groups based on their birth *varna*: *Brahmanas* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaisyas* (traders), and *Shudras* (slaves) (laborers).

Varna is a common translation for "caste," while there is a more accurate Indian term for "caste," *jati*, which is also used. There are hundreds of *jatis* that designate group identity about the purity of food consumption (shared table) and endogamous marriage, according to Max Weber's laws of commensality and connubium. Colonial interference, particularly the rigorous ascription of certain jobs to certain castes and the results of colonial census dynamics centred on social stratification, have been related to the contemporary and exceptionally severe forms of caste behaviour. Although pre-colonial culture appeared to be more adaptable, caste-based social exclusion had existed for as long as history

records, and economic marginalisation was inextricably linked to it.[1]

People throughout the world are talking about marginalized groups' issues, including their social, ethnic, economic, and cultural concerns. Marginality, in all of its forms, is a serious global problem that must be addressed. Religious, ethnic, linguistic, and other minorities are frequently marginalised in many countries. Within mainstream cultures or religions, there are subcultures. They are frequently underprivileged members of minority groups. They are impoverished economically, socially, and politically, and they are isolated from the majority. Their marginalisation might vary in terms of breadth, scope, and intensity. On opposite ends of the spectrum, most countries and cultures have powerful and impoverished people, with varying degrees of power and poverty in the between. People with more authority have more independence, social status, and life security. Fear, uncertainty, and unfairness have no place in the lives of the poor. The degree of poverty—economic, social, or cultural—determines the form and nature of marginality.[10]

Caste, creed, religion, or race-based marginalisation is a disability or affliction. The *Dalit* Movement can be defined as a group of *Dalits* who are protesting societal exploitation based on class, caste, creed, culture, and social issues. The prejudice

practised by Hindu society's age-old caste hierarchical system is to blame for this exploitation. For millennia, this hierarchy has been the source of oppression of *Dalits* in all sectors of society. As a result, the *Dalits* have suffered from poverty and humiliation. The *Dalit* movement is a fight to end the upper castes' socio-cultural hegemony. It is a grassroots movement that seeks justice through speeches, literary works, dramas, songs, cultural groups, and other forms of expression. As a result, it may be considered a *Dalit*-led movement in Hindu society, aiming for equality with all other castes.[4] Many negative narratives have arisen as a result of this marginalisation based on culture or religion. 'Identity Politics' is one of the most essential themes. "Political arguments that focus on the interests and opinions of groups with whom people identify" is how identity politics is defined. Race, class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ideology, nation, sexual orientation, culture, information preferences, history, musical or literary choices, medical issues, vocations, or hobbies can all have an impact on people's politics. Not all members of a group engage in identity politics.[5]

Several communities have expressed concern about asserting ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural identity and autonomy. Only majoritarian groups gain from the modernisation process as a result of the majoritarian system of administration,

and they make up the bulk of the socio-political fabric. Minority groups are still marginalised, underprivileged, and on the outskirts of society. This is where the identity politics phenomenon began. The purpose of this study is to contextualise academic critical readings on identity politics in today's Globalized Asian culture. Though this is not an attempt to fill the void by chronicling the modalities of articulation of identity politics in South Asia, which is a large and complicated subject, it is an attempt to provide some insight into why identity politics became a dominant force in the region in the twenty-first century.

The Purpose

In the second part of the twentieth century, the phrase "identity politics" and movements associated with it were coined. Class movements, feminist movements, gay, lesbian, and bisexual movements, disability movements, ethnic movements, and post-colonial movements are only a few examples. Over the last two centuries, multidisciplinary studies have looked into the impact of identity politics and the many movements that have formed under its banner in South Asia. "In the modern world, two competing viewpoints of worth have often been at odds: one emerging from culturally learned ideas of groups as better or worse, and the other arising from the collapse of social hierarchies and the

advent of equality,” writes Professor Ashutosh Varshney.[6] The latter continuously strives to undermine the former by attacking the inherited structure or rhetoric of group authority. Identity politics, or what we may call the desire for recognition, is thus a politics of equal dignity and resistance at its foundation (or authenticity). It has roots in gender politics, sexual politics, ethnic politics, religious interpretations, or some combination of these in both the developing and developed worlds.”

There are numerous classifications available. There are several shades of identity politics, each defined by differing levels of societal sensitivity and sensibility. They can be divided into two categories:

1. Power dynamics and politics of dominance
2. Oppositional politics is a phrase that refers to how individuals act when they disagree with one another.

Dominance politics is the pursuit of power through the use of identity as a mobilisation tool. Internal unity is attained by the use of identification as a unifying force in resistance politics, which is a kind of rights politics. The majority religion’s identity politics belong to the former, whereas minorities’ identity politics, such as *Dalits* and Adivasis, belong to the latter. Several times in the previous two centuries, religious identity has been at the forefront of political movements in South Asian countries. Internal

contradictions, on the other hand, drove almost all of them: religion acted as a potent mobilisation tool as well as a source of political ambiguity. However, the most serious issue in this theory is that it constantly marginalises minority power. A sort of social influence in which a majority is influenced by the thoughts or behaviours of a small group of people is known as minority influence. Unlike other methods of persuasion, this usually involves a change in one’s perspective. The term “conversion” is used to describe a mental transition.

Dominance politics and religious fervour: The religious nature of the inhabitants of South Asia has been a commonly held idea about the region from the reports of mediaeval European travellers. Nothing of the people’s religious practises stood out enough to merit such a designation. The public execution of rites and followers’ annual visits to a network of pilgrimage sites may have impacted this idea. The most conspicuous of the few similar qualities shared by today’s South Asian states were their multicultural and multi-religious aspects. They established certain criteria for inter-regional linkages, guided the growth of social ties, set the outlines of cultural life, and, most importantly, shaped the demographic pattern. Government-to-government relations were characterized more by past recriminations than by prospects, resulting in mutual suspicion,

distrust, hostility, and even military conflict.

'India' is present in communal discourse in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and 'Pakistan and Bangladesh' are present in India. The Sinhala-Tamil war has a significant impact on Tamil politics in India. As a result, ethnic and religious groupings in numerous countries played an essential role in the establishment and expression of identity politics. However, identity politics have collided with national and secular politics in each of them. It can be traced back to India's anti-colonial national movement when caste and religious identities played a key role. There are numerous examples of religious identity's influence on political mobilisation in South Asian civilization. The establishment of Pakistan and the erection of a Ram mandir in Ayodhya are two such examples. The projection of the "outsider" as the "enemy" and the Hindu cultural pre-eminence in the past were the most important factors in the formation of Hindu identity politics in the post-Partition era.

It's especially intriguing to compare the state to a "salad bowl" and a "melting pot." Salad bowl ideology, sometimes known as "secular nationalism," is a term used to describe secular politics and its need for legitimacy in areas where religion and politics intersect. In such a polity, all religions would be kept at the "same distance." Hindu nationalism, which

has been a significant movement since 1989, has posed the greatest threat to this position. The concept of a "melting pot" is central to the Hindu nationalist vision of the nation. According to this narrative, other religions must assimilate into the Hindu centre. According to this storey, Hinduism is the source of India's distinct national character. India was once a Hindu country, according to tradition.

Resistance Politics and Marginalized Groups: "The process of subject choice of identities is more or less voluntary," Sarah Joseph writes in *Interrogating Culture: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Social Theory*. "Inequality of power and privilege in society also plays a role in the process." Differences in the strength of inequality across groups also influence the process of identity formation." [2] The identity politics of marginalised and oppressed peoples rely heavily on opposition and resistance. Their marginalisation defines their identity, and the politics that result in stress inclusion and equality. This type of identity politics is distinct from religious identity politics in Hinduism. Resistance characterises the former, whilst the latter seeks hegemony over marginalised communities.

What Does It Mean to Be a *Dalit*?
Dalit Identity Politics:

The caste system, which is based on Manu Smriti's four *varna* system, is regarded to be the essential identity of

persons in the Indian subcontinent. It establishes the identification of a person at the time of birth. According to Manu Smriti, it is founded on a hierarchical concept of upper and lower castes, with a matching connection based on rights and obligations. As a result, *varna*, or caste, is a continuum that spans the highest Brahmin sub-caste down to the lowest untouchable caste. The system's worst aspect is that it is impossible to determine its specific identity. Castes are hazy because of their large numbers and dynamism. Contrary to popular belief, caste is not a static group that has evolved as a result of splits and mergers, resulting in new castes with higher ritual prestige in their particular regions based on their material strength. Similarly, people's various subsistence strategies are determined by their location, resulting in social rank differences among castes.[8] As a result, caste creates a fluid life world in the Indian subcontinent. The concept that only individuals who have been subjected to a particular form of oppression can define or resist it is at the basis of "identity politics." Men are incapable of combating gender discrimination, and anti-racist actions can only be carried out by those who have been victims of racism. When Dr. Ambedkar publicly condemned V.R. Shinde's Depressed Classes Mission at a Depressed Classes Conference in Nagpur in May 1920, the concept of identity became prominent in the context of caste. This declaration,

which emphasised the necessity of an autonomous "*Dalit*" identity, immensely benefited the *Dalit* movement's self-articulation.[9] They were helped and shielded by their '*Dalit*' identity from *Dalits* who flocked to the capitalist Congress as Harijans or communists as a proletariat.'

This process has been methodically cultivated in the Indian mentality throughout history. The non-Brahmin movement led by Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra, and later the Dravidian movement led by Periyar in Tamil Nadu, exemplified this ethnicization process. The movement was fueled by new ideas spread in schools by European missionaries, which eventually culminated in the belief in an "Aryan race." William Jones remembered the idea of a single, founding race whose branches had extended to Europe and India in 1792, based on a study of the Indo-European linguistic family. German Indologists such as Albert Weber, R. Roth, A. Kuhn, and J. Mohl expanded on this concept in the mid-nineteenth century, coining the terms "Sanskritic race" and "Vedic people." When these beliefs arrived in India, Hindu revivalists like Tilak and Dayanand Saraswati immediately adopted them, convincing Hindus that they were the superior people who had dominated the world.

On the other hand, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule used the same strategies to attain the opposite goal. He

developed the Bahujan (shudra-atishudra) ethnic identity, denouncing Brahmins as intruders who subjugated the natives and giving the lower castes a reason to resist. Non-Brahmin castes were invited to unite against Brahmin dominance for the first time, based on a common ethnic origin – that of India’s early inhabitants. Despite the existence of Kshatriya symbolism in Phule’s Satyashodhak idiom, the movement avoided Sanskritization because it detested upper-caste culture and refused to accept upper-caste role models as role models.

As expressed by Pandit Ayothee Thass, [3] a similar pattern emerged in the South with the Dravidian movement, which engineered caste union by endowing the lower castes with ethnic identity, not only as original residents but also as Buddhists. By renaming prior caste-specific sabhas (organisations) Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha and Adi-Andhra Mahajan Sabha, it encouraged the “adi” (original) movement in the Madras region.

The most dramatic manifestations of identity politics have come from members of the lowest castes, who have long been ostracised from society’s mainstream. *Dalit* consciousness may be traced back to the Renaissance, except for Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, even if the Renaissance was primarily focused on concerns affecting the upper castes. Both physically and spiritually, *Dalits* were avoided. They

were denied access to basic services such as village wells, public roadways, and school admission for their children. They were compelled to dwell in various communities in various zones. Because they didn’t have access to temples, they couldn’t execute burial or birth ceremonies without the help of Brahmin priests.

Caste mobilisation employed two fundamental strategies for political purposes: one, to unify various castes under a single identity and stake a claim to a greater piece of the pie, and two, to prevent their share from being stolen by others. The upper castes used the first strategy, whereas Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s *Dalit* campaign used the second.

Political Catalysts and Cross-Border/Asian Scenarios

Various identity-based political parties try to foster cultural revolution to varying degrees. They are divided into two groups: those who use cultural banners to form broad social coalitions and acquire access to money and power, and those who prioritise cultural change over support, resources, and power to promote the norms they value. To increase the number of people who might identify with such a cultural vision, instrumental identity movements usually leave their group culture creations open-ended. Political strategies are interwoven with political forces’ creation of group cultures.

Popular ideas of Sri Lankan Tamil identity, for example, emphasised the lengthy tradition of Tamil literary production until the 1970s. This sense of Tamil identity was linked to the group's extensive involvement in western education and bureaucracy, as well as their increased political support for constitutional reforms such as federalism and more formal acknowledgement of Tamil. The Tamil Congress and the Federal Party, the first post-colonial Sri Lankan Tamil parties, had minimal success in accomplishing their goals. This includes Pakistani nationalism, Bangladeshi nationalism, Hindu nationalism, Kashmiri nationalism, and Bodo nationalism.

The countries of South Asia are a one-of-a-kind example of sociocultural diversity and discrimination, resulting in complex conflicts. Except for the Maldives, every country in South Asia has multiracial, multiethnic, multi-caste, multilingual, multireligious, and multi-religious populations. Minorities and majorities exist in terms of cultural affiliation. Sub-nationalist aspirations have been created by minority cultural groups posing a threat to the region's socioeconomic and political dominance. [7]

Pakistan's Islamic identity also served as a foundation for the country's post-independence nation-building efforts. The leaders wanted to create a nation that was "Pakistan-Islam-Urdu" based. The constituent tribes' more

organic and integral ethno-regional relationships and identities, on the other hand, proved too fragile to be sustained on this base. The formation of a new state from then-East Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the accompanying rise of ethnic nationalism among Sindhis, Pashtoons, and Balochis was a major shock to religious identity.

The disintegration of the Yugoslav federation, civil conflict and atrocities in Rwanda and Sudan, the growth of the European Union, and the rise of Islamic extremism all highlight the importance of identity politics in today's world. National identities and perspectives on national interests have been influenced by changes in political institutions, as well as internal and international events. Changes like these have thawed long-frozen Cold War tensions between China and Taiwan, as well as between the Koreas, making management much more difficult. National identities and identity crises in East Asia are frequently cited by analysts and observers as fuelling the region's conflicts.[8] The South China Sea is one of the globe's great connecting oceans, connecting Asia and the rest of the world. It has also been a source of concern due to conflict. In recent years, territorial disputes have gotten worse, culminating in violent clashes between China, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

Conclusion

Despite its importance and

popularity, the Identity Politics School of Thought is never taken lightly. Globalisation and macro/micro identity politics have been the subject of a variety of critical analyses. A few examples are as follows:

1. What effect has globalisation had on religion and caste politics?
2. Has India's rising integration into the global system, as well as the cross-border movement of capital, labor, products, services, technology, and ideas, altered how India's language and religious groups, castes, and tribes have structured their politics and made policy claims?
3. Has the inter- or intra-Diaspora had a substantial impact on the Indian subcontinent's identity politics?

Despite the lack of a direct link between globalisation and language or caste politics, it has had the most influence on how religion has been employed as a source of group identity in Indian policies, particularly in its Hindu nationalist version. Tribal politics has an impact on Hindu nationalist politics. Both reformulations emphasise the diaspora's importance in Hindu nationalist aspirations. This paper's multiple arguments may be simplified to two basic premises. While globalisation has influenced India's identity politics, they are mostly internal, and it is India's popular politics' domination over identity issues that have allowed the country to integrate with the global economy.[]

References

- [1] Wessler, Heinz. "From marginalisation to rediscovery of identity: Dalit and Adivasi voices in Hindi literature." *Studia Neophilologica* 92, no. 2 (2020): 159-174.
- [2] Joseph, Sarah. "Interrogating Culture Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Social Theory." (1998).
- [3] Kumar, R. Suresh. "The Role Of Pandit Iyothee Thass To The Elevation Of Depressed Class In Tamil Nadu." (1902).
- [4] Oza, Preeti. "Aesthetics of Sublime V/S Subliminal: Comparison and Contrast in Dalit Writings." *Dr. Vivekanand Jha* 3, no. 1 (2018): 132..
- [5] Gorringer, Hugo. "'You build your house, we'll build ours': The Attractions and Pitfalls of Dalit Identity Politics." *Social Identities* 11, no. 6 (2005): 653-672.
- [6] Pingle, Vibha, and Ashutosh Varshney. "India's Identity Politics: Then and Now." *Managing Globalisation: Lessons from China and India*, Singapore: World Scientific Book Corporation (2006): 353-386.
- [7] Subramanian, Narendra. "Political Formation of Cultures: The South Asian Experience." *Economic and Political Weekly* (2005): 3821-3827.
- [8] Upreti, B. C. "Nationalism in South Asia: trends and interpretations." *The Indian journal*

- of Political science (2006): 535-544.
- [9] https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?id=5292%3Aidentity-politics-and-the-&option=com_content&view=article
- [10] Pannikar K.N. "Identity and Politics"; Frontline (2011)