THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Philosophy of Exclusion: Cognitive Contaminations

Reena Patra
Punjab University, Chandigarh, Department of Philosophy, India
Sebastian Velassery
Punjab University, Chandigarh, Department of Philosophy, India

Abstract:
This paper provides a condensed information about the various philosophical schools of thought that have provided epistemological, metaphysical ontological and axiological foundations of Indian philosophy which has unfortunately said to engineer certain general orientations toward a framework that was able to catalyze a way of life that outlined philosophy of exclusion. It is purported to state that certain elements of philosophical speculations and the resultant deviant attitudes to certain sections of people were considered to be pollutant had created an ideology of exclusion which was later sanctified by theological pundits. Hence, the present study is intended to trace the historical trajectory of the issue of untouchability and its implicit philosophy of exclusion by providing a epistemological framework of the systems of Indian philosophy and then pointing out where the contending theories of these systems tend to divide in terms of the issues of untouchability and exclusion.

Keywords: epistemology, casteism, dalit, cognitive, exclusion, Indian philosophy

1. Introduction

Traditionally, there are six schools of philosophy within the Indian philosophical tradition that represent different view points on the nature of reality. The important aspect that is particularly visible in this system of thought is the particular technique that was used in carrying on a particular philosophical thinking without compromising the view point of the other. That is to say that various systems of philosophical thought were able to inscribe commentaries and sub-commentaries on the philosophical *Sutras*. In other words, there were different kinds of thought patterns which were co-existing side-by-side and were able to assert its existence as a logical and legitimate reality. Hence, the philosophical thinking in India was traditionally known by the position it takes in accordance with a particular vision of reality based on the *Vedas* which is said to reveal the truth. They received their name meaning knowledge because they embody the highest Truth. The Hindus trace the original source of their cultural life to the *Vedas* which they hold to be divine truth revealed from time to time to the *Rishis*, or *Seers* in their supreme state of consciousness. Their religion, philosophy, ritualistic practices, civic conduct, and even social relations were guided by certain codes which were known as *Smritis;* but all of them are based upon the scared sanction of *Vedic* authority.

2. Epistemological Issues in Indian Thought

As it is the case with any other major philosophical system of the world, philosophy in India too was interested in the theoretical problem of knowledge. It also even seem to us that Indian Philosophy's preoccupation with the problem of knowledge was greater, more exhausting and penetrating when we compare it with the other systems of the world. A good deal of philosophical problem is a common problem to all schools of philosophy. What, then, is the problem of knowledge *Vis-a- Vis* consciousness? If we reflect upon the fact of our awareness of cognition, we come to notice that there are at least three factors: (1) the objects of the external world "*vishayas*". (2) The organs or faculties of knowledge (*indriyas*); (3) the agent or the cognizer (*atman*). Consciousness or *Samvit*, therefore, implies a capacity to be a subject that points towards the presence of a cognitive relation between a *grahya* (known) and a *grahaka* (knower). It is the peculiar illumination of *Jnana* or awareness which reveals the subject, the object and itself in an act of knowledge.

3. The systematic speculations

There were, in fact, many attempts in India after the *Upanishadic* period, to answer the question of the validity of knowledge. The *Nihilists* of the *Madhyamika* School and the *Skeptics* like *Ajita* denied the very existence of consciousness as a reality. It may be noted also that these schools, as well as the materialistic school of the *Carvakas* and the *Ajivikas*, which believed merely in the empirical world and accept only '*pratyaksa*' (direct experience) as their *Pramana* (criterion) of truth, did not thrive for long in India. The *Carvakas* explained consciousness as produced by the conjunction of the material substances in the same way as red colour is produced by the combination of the betel leaf, nut and lime.

The great majority of the Indian thinkers, however, believed in the transcendental value of cognition, without at the same time, denying the relative validity of our ordinary experience and knowledge. All of them admit that from this imperfect state of knowledge, mixed with illusion and ignorance, we have to rise to the standard of absolute consciousness of *Brahman* which is characterized as the '*Saccittananda*'. But in establishing the absolute validity of knowledge, the Indian systems have followed different courses, all of which we may reduce to two standard conceptions, i.e. the Absolutist view of *Sankara* and the Synthetic view of *Ramanuja*.

4. The absolute view of knowledge
The absolute view of knowledge has its roots in the *Upanishads*. According to the *Upanishads*, absolute reality is characterized as *Satyam-Jnanam-Anantam*: That is Infinite Reality, Infinite Intelligence and Infinite Bliss. This absolute reality is called *Brahman* in which intelligence and reality are but different aspects of one and the same essence. It is the plenitude of Supreme Reality (*Satyasya Satyam*) and self-luminous (*Svayam-jythih*) through the light of which all else shines. Hence knowledge and intelligence are not something relative in *Brahman*, but it shines by itself. Consequently, true and immutable knowledge is the direct realization of the transcendental reality (*Paramarthika*) through *Paravidya* (*Brahaman*-knowldege), and our practical or empirical (*vyavaharika*) knowledge has got only a relative truthfulness and reality.
The *Mimamsakas* and the *Sankarites* were the predominant people who developed the *Upanishadic* approach in the theory of knowledge. Basing its epistemology on the *Upanishadic* view of knowledge, *Mimamsa* identifies reality with the pure intelligence of *Brahman*, which manifests itself as the self of everything. Valid knowledge is an intuition of this distinction of the absolute reality. It is true that in *Mimamsa* theory, valid knowledge implies the subject-object distinction. Yet in knowledge the subject and object are revealed at the same time, like the lamp and the light is perceived simultaneously.

5. The Synthetic View of Knowledge
Against the *Svataprakasatva* doctrine, there is the doctrine of *Paraprakasatva* which advocates that knowledge is a relation between atman and consciousness or between subject and object. It is a spiritual reality belonging to the self or atman by the relation of inherence called '*samavaya*'. *Samavaya* is an intimate relation between inseparables such as substance and quality, substance and activity, particular and generality, whole and parts. To the question if self is essentially unconscious, why should consciousness inhere in these and not in any other of the collocation of *Manas*, *Indriyas* and V*ishayas*? *Sridhara* answers that consciousness inheres to self, and not to the other three due to the *svabhavaniyama*. This is illustrated by the analog of cloth which, though produced by the thread and shuttle, inheres to the thread alone. Such a view on the synthetic character of knowledge by *Nyaya* makes it intelligible for us by placing great emphasis on the *Pramanas* or means of right knowledge.
Next to *Nyaya*, *Samkhya* defends dualism in knowledge. Unlike the essentially non-intelligent self of the *Naiyayikas*, the *Samkhyavadins* postulate a pure intelligence, *Purusha*, in each individual being. Objects, both internal and external, act on *Citta* which is the '*satvic*' aspect of *Prakriti*. *Citta* then assumes the form of the image of the object which has impressed it. But *Citta*, being non-intelligent, cannot perceive or recognize those forms of impression. It is, then, illumined by *Purusha*, and is thus rendered conscious or intelligent. It is, therefore, the reflection of the spirit acting on *Citta*. That makes it distinguish and perceive. Since knowledge is a reflection of the light that proceeds from *Purusha*, its validity consists in being a true copy of the thing.
The theory of the synthetic character of knowledge meets its typical representative in *Ramanuja*. For him *Atman* is made up of consciousness, which is both the *svarupa* (essence) and *guna* (attribute) of it. Knowledge is distinct from the knowing subject whose quality it is, as smell which is perceived as a quality of the earth is distinct from earth. This is clear from the testimony of our experience, from the fact of existence of the different *Pramanas* of knowledge and also from the fact that different words signify different realities. According to *Ramanuja*, one has to admit the self-validity of knowledge in order to avoid the difficulty of the infinite series of mediums so far as knowledge is the cognition of the objects as they are. There is an element of reality even in illusion, as the silver element that exists in the conch shell. But in our ordinary forms of knowledge we never attain the pure being because, our consciousness is always limited and thereby it implies multiplicity and difference. We are impeded from the contemplation of the *Supreme Being* by these limitations or nescience of our knowledge. According to *Ramanuja*, it means that realization of *Brahman* is possible through a pure heart obtained by meditation.
As such, we may say that the Indian approach to the problem of knowledge reveals many positive points, which may be enlisted as the following:
- All systems of Indian philosophy start from the general supposition of the relative validity of experience.
- They point to the existence of intelligence, existent by itself, which implies either limitation or distinction. It may be noted that for a limited perfection it is an anomaly, which demands the existence of such perfection in its absolute form.
- Our present imperfect stage of knowledge has to reach its perfection in a direct perfection of the Supreme Intelligence attained by a direct communication from the Supreme.

Despite these positive values, Indian analysis of knowledge has its own draw-backs. The **Absolute conception of *Sankara*** does not clarify as to how to conceive knowledge of the finite beings in a way other than mere illusory knowledge. It also fails to appreciate adequately the perfection implied even in the finiteness of being, just as the imitation of gold in a particular shape and fashion, is itself the perfection of the ornament. The **Synthetic view of Ramanuja,** on the other hand, by taking conceptual knowledge as the pattern of all knowledge, has failed to bring out the absolute transcendence and autonomy of God's consciousness. Yet these defects are remediable, and they provide elements for a sound epistemology.

6. Epistemological Issues

Can we reasonably argue that Indian philosophy was interested in reason and rationality was considered as a weapon to emancipate the mythical and mysterious powers of human psyche? The first thing that Indian philosophy generally assumes is that knowledge is a kind of relation and it is an irreducible relation. It cannot be reduced to, or analyzed to anything else: this is what the philosophers of *Nyaya* School would term the *Visaya-Visayi-Bhava* or the epistemic relation between the subject and the object (Barlingay, 1975: 149). Knowledge of *Brahman*, which is the purpose of philosophical inquiry, is different from ordinary knowledge, the subject matter of epistemology, wherein the subject-object polarity or the *triputi* (trinity) knower-known-knowledge is involved and which is entirely conceived, based and expressed in language (Talghatti, 1975: 53).

7. *Brahmin* Monopoly of Thought

Brahmin monopoly of thought made the upper castes people to think that their duties are more privileged and bestowed upon them by the creator himself. It made the *Brahmins* to assume that they should be served by all and by all means including the King and serving them were also understood as a kind of privilege for the rest of the community. What is evident in these dispositions is the implicit truth that there was a methodical device by the *Brahmins* to deprive education for the bulk of the society and deprive them even to study a language which is said to be of Gods' *Sanskrit*. As a result, epistemological pursuit in India could not deliver the desired results in the fields of cognition, education and emancipation. Epistemological pursuit in India was predominantly points of view of certain philosophers acknowledging that the human world is a pluralistic world and that there are multiple points of departure from which understanding of human experience can be approached. Though, we had philosophers who talk about the highest value of knowledge whereby the person's self participates in the highest form of being, yet the culmination of such a philosophy and world-view could not take the majority group with them. Thus, the philosophies that talk about the absolute connectivity between knowing and being and thereby the inquiry into the epistemological foundations for an ontology did not make much of significance in the social and cultural life of India. It overtly suggests the idea that the personhood in Indian philosophy is epistemically ascribed to a certain section of people who are categorized as *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, and *Vaishyas*. The rest of the community, the *Shudra* or the *Adivasis* etc. come under the banner of pollutants and hence untouchables. In sum, our epistemological pursuits lacked a philosophical culture that was able to actualize reason and thereby questioning the social inequalities.

Sanskrit was the language of the *Brahmins* and knowledge their sole domain. The discourse on rights was important in terms of defining the *Dalit* being. In other words it was not possible to define the Dalit being without the discourse on rights, which came up along with the process of modernization and new ideology of liberalism. Sanskrit as its meaning indicates was never a spoken language and that it was only a purified version of the language that was in popular usage (Nair, 1959: 67). Even strong protagonists like Pandit Mishra states that it was a spoken language but the "*spoken*" means, it was spoken by '*shishtas'* i.e. elite (means Brahmins) alone, (Mishra, 1993: 376). Even in late Sanskrit dramas, as is well known, the characters of higher castes speak Sanskrit. Thus speech was depended on the caste. The so called "*purity*" of *Sanskrit* makes it a dead language may be true, but that was the intention of the users in order to safeguard their own supremacy over the masses. Nair exclaims: the maintenance of the purity of Sanskrit language since the days of *Panini* until the present day is explained by the tenacity of the *Brahmin* to preserve it as such as sacred language of status group even though their spoken language was, by and large, the local languages or a mixture of the two (Nair, 1959: 68).

8. The Language of *Dalit-Bahujan*

In the political arena, categories have a trajectory of their own. They travel along a path full of challenges, counter-challenges, contradictions and transformations. That is why these categories and their labels change their meaning, connotation and significance from time to time and place to place depending upon the specific socio-economic and ideological context and the politics of the users who formulate them. It is this rooted-ness of categories in the users who formulate them, their specific contexts and in the people's consciousness that decides their nature. Since such a consciousness involves progress and regression, the categories cannot be thought to be concrete and given, permanent and exclusive or inclusive. The category of '*Dalit'* has become a part of political as well as academic agenda in the national and global area is getting articulated across the socio-cultural spectrum and has, become polemics or even condemned by certain quarters of Dalit society.

In recent years, some politicians in the country have also discarded the Dalit category as a socially reactionary, negative one and sought to replace it with the '*Bahujan'* category (Bagul, 1981: 221-23). The category of Dalit is used in multiple ways and often in a contradictory fashion. There is also some kind of conceptual hierarchy in this use of the Dalit category so that they keep rivaling each other without any internal affinity in terms of their political meaning and function. It is interesting to note that the category of Dalit was used by no less a person than Dr. Ambedkar. It was not a mere linguistic expression, but was defined by him in a most comprehensive way. According to him, "Dalithood is a kind of life conditions which characterize the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalits by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper castes *Brahminical* ideology" (Kasbe 1985 and Omvedt 1994). Ambedkar, however, did not use this category very often in his writings. In fact, he used a number of categories depending upon the context. **For example,** if he was dealing with the imperial state, he would use a number of categories depending upon the context (Government of Maharashtra, 1991: 216). If he was addressing high-caste Hindu adversaries, he would use the term "*Bahishkrut*", meaning one who is an outcaste "*scheduled caste*". This was evident when he would use the term Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942. Finally, when addressing his own social constituency, he preferred to use the term "*Pad Dalit*", meaning those who are crushed under the feet of the Hindu system (Guru, 2001: 97-102).

Thus, to locate the relevance of the Dalit category in terms of its hermeneutic functions, we need to look its epistemic roots and its ontological basis. We have observed that this category is not a given one which can be pigeon-holed into a specific social group.

At the empirical level, there is a need to find out whether the Dalit category has become implicit. In other words, this category finds expression only in the country. It means that it is superficially being grafted on to the deep levels of Dalit consciousness which is channeled through multiple identities found among the Dalits of the country (Guru, 2001: 105). Hence, we have different categories representing multiple identities in the context of Dalits. In fact, these categories belong to the same logical class inasmuch as they share the same positive utopia creating a society free from coercion, exploitation and dehumanization. All these categories have the same function of restoring the normative social order. Thus, the Dalit category is historically arrived at, sociologically presented and discursively constituted.

9. Dalit Category as *Ontology*

Refusing the reality of racial categories as elements within our current social ontology only exacerbates Casteism because it helps conceal the numerous effects that caste practices have had and continue to have on Indian social life. In claiming that caste is an ontological category, we do not mean to say that we should begin by treating it as such, but that we must begin acknowledging the fact that caste has been 'real' in the socio-cultural and political life of Indians for a long time. It could be considered as a truth claim as this 'truth' has undergone the experiential life of the majority of Indian population from time immemorial.

When we analyze the visible 'signs' of a Dalit or the untouchable, what is significantly noticeable is the characteristic features which are being ascribed to a Dalit. In the normal Indian situation, Dalit is the one who is dark in colour, untidy in his dressing sense, poor in look, loss of an identity etc. It means to state that Dalits have been ascribed to be untidy, dark, and are 'animalistic' which are the qualities that can be added to this category of people. It also points to the idea that caste identities proclaim something about oneself, either as a person with an identity or the one who can never claim an identity as a person. This visual registry cannot be fully or adequately described except in ontological terms because the difference that caste identities has made is an ontologizing difference, that is, a difference at the most basic level concerning knowledge, subjectivity, being, and thinking. If we say that caste is not an ontological category, we risk losing sight of how significant the effects of caste identities have been, and how those effects have permeated every philosophical idea in the culture and thought patterns of India.

Philosophically understood, caste is a particular, historically and culturally located form of human categorization involving visual determinants marked on the body through the interplay of perceptual practices and bodily appearances. Caste has not had one meaning or a single essential criterion, but its meanings have always been mediated through visual appearances. The criteria determining caste identity have included ancestry, experience, outside perception, internal perception, coded visibility, habits and practices-all these and more are variously invoked for both individuals and groups. Phenomenological description of the experience of caste designations would be useful in achieving a better understanding of the lived reality of caste and Casteism. But such an approach shall not be able to provide the underlying essence of Casteism as a lived reality.

10. *Dharma* and the Consideration of the Other

Our discussion thus far on the concept of *Dalit as a category of ontology* has attempted to offer certain manifested realities on the problems entailed by the question "who is the other? The ontological category of Dalit as the other is certainly a concept that has implications on the age-old Indian concept of *Dharma* and the concept of identity. Dalit as the other does not refer to simply as an isolated and discarded self provided that such a self is even possible. On the contrary, the question presupposes and refers to the whole field of inter-subjectivity because *Dalit as the other* is situated on the ethics of social, cultural and moral life of individuals. The issue is this. How are we to understand the placement of the individual in *dharma – dharma* as lived/practiced by individuals in their everyday lives? More exactly, the issues contained in the question as to how do *"I"* relate *"myself"* with *"the other"* involves the need for and the essential interrelatedness with *"the other"* and hence are equally about the person who asks the question.

To approximate the issue in its logical end, let us examine and re-discover the meaning of the other with caste identity in India's cultural and social ways. Caste identity as it is practiced and approved by Indian societies is the doctrine that asserts the condemnation of a section of people due to their origin in a particular caste. It demands that they should live a life of subordination in the social settings of this country as it is fated by nature, the natural world and its surroundings. They are otherwise should be considered as an inferior group who are supposed to perform only the duties of a labour class because they are theologically conditioned as the impure people. It is a doctrine that suggests the hierarchy of class that defines the social settings and the lowest class of that setting is the *Sudra* (presently they are mostly the Dalits) who cannot be accounted in the history of things and events as they are destined to be the undesired and unwanted. Such an understanding on the conception of a Dalit, we may notice, is a form of naturalism in this country. Man, in fact, owes his existence to the nature, and nature in turn, controls his destiny. In the history of India, right from the *Vedas* to the present times, nature has condemned the inferior castes/class and blessed the superior castes/class. It amounts to saying that the fundamental thing about a man in our culture and society, which is recognized as valuable and meritorious is his caste. In other words, one's caste is the only identity that one possesses and separates him from others. Mental and spiritual qualities too depend upon the origin of one's birth and are, in fact, expressions of one's being.

Such a conception of identity that is based on one's caste identity brings us to our first theoretic point of reference towards the relationship between the topics of otherness (the conception of alteration) and of semiotic behavior (both in their reception and production of symbols) which takes place in facing otherness. Taking the theological interpretations given by the Indian philosophers as a point of departure, we can build a bipolar scale which provides an account of the encounter and of the different positions which caste identity could take for granted. The superior castes such as *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaisyas* could approximate as equals and hence as like oneself. In this case, the other's caste identity is denied either at the level of existence or at that of cultural practices. Thus, in our culture and civilization, the superior castes had formed an identity in their existential and

cultural practices. Here, subjection and assimilation of the superior castes among themselves reflect the same consideration toward the other, so to say the *Sudra* or the Dalit as Other-as Object. On the other hand, each of the superior caste considered themselves as the Other-as-Subject, which is '*alike but unlike me*', thereby rendering each caste capable of a superfluous unity and dialogue. We would like to argue that these caste identities and its socio-cultural determinations have occurred at three levels according to their historical emergence.

- An axiological or valuational level according to whether the other is my equal, my superior or my inferior.
- A praxiological level distancing or approaching the other, going from submission to the other to other's submission or fall into undifferentiated neutrality.
- An epistemic level with endless gradation between the lower and highest states of knowledge regarding the other's identity.

An examination of the theoretical specificities of caste identity and its resultant axiological and epistemological considerations draw our attention to its faith and meaning character; it is predominantly based on an ideology of 'exclusion' where the human *self* constructs its own hierarchy and differences between an '*us*' and a '*them*'. The problem of the realistic image of a lower caste person and his alienation in a caste ridden society like ours provokes problems in his relation to the human community which imposes itself as one of the central questions concerning the Indian society. More often than not, our countrymen as public persons/citizens assign priority to their identities not as free and equal individuals but on a solidarity which is built out of an awareness of distinction where an '*us*' is opposed to a '*them*'. Therefore, when we look at the concept of other from the moral point of *Dharma*, we understand that *the other has undergone* solid and systematic kinds of violence against all possible rooms for human life in general; that is *dharma* has never been considered as the yardstick in order for human dignity and sought possibilities for conditions that are more favourable for their realization.

In the Indian social and philosophical thought, all moral laws were treated as part of *Dharma*- an omnibus concept with multiple shades of meaning. *Dharma* is said to be the nature of things and the law of their being and relationships, a cosmic order permeating the universe, rules of social and individual conduct, moral righteousness and religious duty. There are diverse ways in which this term has been used both in the Indian philosophical systems and day-to-day life experiences. It stood for religious observance, justice in the societal living, righteousness in one's conception and perception of things and ideals, conformity to law, obedience to the present social order, sense of duty in human beings etc. and hence, this concept has not only a religious and moral standing in the average Indians but it has an ethical and legal significance in the cultural sensitivity of this country. Accordingly, all human values, norms, duties and rights, individual and social, were explained by referring them back to this concept. It seems that presence of *dharma* in the universe, underpinning the right functioning of things, sometimes thought of as their norm, sometimes simply as their nature, was taken for granted in ancient India, and this was so not only for the Hindus but also for the Buddhists and Jains, even if they interpreted *dharma* in different terms. Mahony summarizes the whole content of *dharma* in the following way: "The aggregate connation here suggests that in the south Asian cultures dharma represents 'correctness', both in a descriptive sense (the way things are) and in a prescriptive one (the way things should be), and reflects the inextricable connection in the religious thought of India between ontology, ritual ideology, social philosophy, ethics and canon law" (Mahony, 1987: 329).

11. Cognitive Contaminations: Perceptible Factors

Historically, the caste system has formed the social and economic framework for the life of the people of India. In its essential form, the caste system involves the division of people into a hierarchy of unequal social groups where basic rights and duties are assigned based on birth and are not subject to change. In the Indian caste system, Dalits were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, considered *Ati-Shudras* or *Avarna,* and are treated as untouchables or *achuta*, or an outcaste. He is a person who according to traditional Hindu order, is '*shudra*'; the lowest of the four castes. They are leather-workers (called *chamar*), scavengers (called *bhangi* or *chura*), street handcrafters, poor farmers and laborers. In the past, the Dalits suffered from social segregation and restrictions in addition to extreme poverty. They were not allowed temple worship with others, nor were allowed to draw water from the same sources. Persons of higher castes would not interact with them. If somehow a member of a higher caste came into physical or social contact with an untouchable, the member of the higher caste was defiled and had to bathe thoroughly to clean themselves of the impurity. These kinds of social discrimination developed even among the Dalits. Upper sub-castes among Dalits like *dhobi*, *nai* etc. would not interact with lower-order *Bhangis*. Dalit status had often been historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure such as any occupation which involves killing or handling of animal dead bodies. Engaging in these activities was considered to be polluting the individual who performed them. As a result, Dalits were commonly banned and separated from full participation in Hindu social life while elaborate precautions were sometimes observed to prevent incidental contact between Dalits and other Hindus.

Caste prejudices often contribute, but are not solely responsible for the atrocities against Dalits. Conflicts over material interests and political power contribute a great deal to such incidents. Thus, a very vast majority of SCs (scheduled castes) despite the diversification of occupation rise in literacy rate and urban migration, and at the same time a small section of them have improved their economic condition. They compete with the non Dalit middle class and in the process, assert their dignity and share in political offices (Shah, 2001: 20). Dalits thus aims at the discourse of human right, which stands for equality and social justice, consists in fighting freedom, and dignity which is guaranteed by the state and all of its organizations. Its positive expression is making life possible and meaningful and thereby enlarging its possibilities so that each individual is respected as a human person in which the various forms of human freedom, namely, association, thought, religious belief, free speech, movement, work etc. converge (Velassery, 2005:196). Such a culture and attitude may be called the culture of equality.

Does India have a culture of equality and a liberal political philosophy which is based upon an epistemology that highlights the *Dalit- Sudras* modes of knowing and articulating a comprehensive and cohesive ideology of equality and social justice? More often than not, our answer may be put in the negative. What is necessary for a moral healthy society that cherishes the ideologies of equality and social justice are is to develop and flourish itself and its members should recognize two different ways in which they may exhibit respect for their fellow men. On the one hand, respect for their social rights; here we should be thoroughly egalitarian. As long as we are delimiting ourselves within this aspect of the issue we are acting as though happiness were the only good. On the other hand, the respect we show to our fellow men as cooperators in the service of ideals that are in essence impersonal. Service of this sort has nothing to do with the rights, justice, equality or inequality. It is nevertheless essential to the culture and dignity of the moral and healthy society which is based on what we may call the philosophical culture that augments the idea of equality. Thus, social equality and thereby social justice is valid as an ideal but only as one ideal among others and that the ideal of culture of equality is quite distinct, important, and essential to the flourishing of the society. Hence, the culture of equality demands an ideal standpoint, which requires persons to develop a capacity to define themselves and the other effectively. For groups or for individuals, roots, identity, self-image and public image are closely intertwined. When the *Dalit- Sudra* group realized that their life affirmations are strangulated within the present social order, their identities will be shaped by certain particularistic cultural conceptions which normally based on ethnic, caste, or class considerations. Looked at from this perspective, the modernist liberal conception of democratic citizenship demands an ideal standpoint, which shall not be exclusively conditioned by the existing caste hierarchies; rather it should be based on a rationality that enables the Dalits to feel that they are the co-humans with others. Unfortunately, Indian political leadership is patterned and structured in those considerations where the individual virtues are measured and understood in terms of caste and other factors (Velassery, 2005: 208).

12. Cognitive Contaminations

A comparative account of the economic position of the deprived castes (low-castes, and untouchables) and other castes, covering relevant economic indicators of the levels of living, such as access to agricultural land and other capital assets, incidence of wage labour, employment rates, and consumption and poverty levels, provides a very convincing evidence on the continuing economic inequalities associated with caste. After sixty decades of independence, it is evident that the roots of this system encompass the economic structure of the society. With respect to each of these economic variables, the deprived castes are far behind the other sections of Indian society. The proportion of self-employed persons among SCs is extremely low and as a result the level of unskilled (manual) wage labour is high. Added to this, the daily wage earning generally tends to be slightly on a lower side, particularly in the rural non-farm sector. With a high level of dependence on wage labour, coupled with higher unemployment rates and lower daily wages, low consumption expenditure is an obvious outcome, and hence the poverty level is very high compared to the rest of population in the country. This is particularly the case among the wage labour that constitutes the bulk of workers among the deprived castes (low-caste untouchables). This, it is beyond doubt that the historical impact of traditional caste-based restrictions on the ownership of property, access to employment opportunities and freedom of occupation are visible in significant measures even after six decades of political freedom. The access of the deprived castes to income-earning capital assets and employment is extremely limited, and their segregation into unskilled manual labour is overwhelmingly high, which are said to be the two prime economic attributes of the caste system seem to be present as a stark reality.

While caste circumscribes the social and cultural life of the individual, it also provides economic security by allowing a monopoly over occupation and eliminating competition. The ideal of social system offers an eternal hope of social mobility and salvation to those presently having a low status. Those who are more sensitive to the authoritarian ways of caste and are ready to forego the advantages of the caste find a socio- cultural safety valve in the *sannyasa* or in the ideology of society or in both, and even more so if they become motivated to take up the role of religio-social reformer like Buddha, Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda and Gandhi. In the dynamics of Indian social thought, it has grown, and even now is, the ideal philosophy of social stratification. It is the traditional ideal to be upheld against the reality of caste which socially circumscribes individuals and groups, which is rigid and authoritarian and divides man from man on the basis of birth (Bhatt, 1975: 216). In view of that, trampling on women and grinding the poor through caste, class or same *gotra* restrictions are some social evils of India, which are systematically practiced by advocating an epistemological and theological content in it.

13. Conclusion

India has been surviving as a nation for millennia with closed groups divided by caste, creed and language. The Indian societies develop a philosophy of exclusion and made a section of people as untouchables and deny them the rights as persons and very often their existence as individuals. The traditional social value of *Varna dharma*, which has been operating the social consciousness of this country, resulted to a segregation of the majority of people in the hierarchic pattern of social arrangement restricted the interaction between individuals belonging to various groups. Since the status and opportunities of the individual were coupled with the *Jati* (caste) that he or she belongs to by birth and one's birth itself is theologically conditioned by the past karmas that one performed in the previous births, oppression towards these groups were made easy and theologically found correct. The age-old Indian concept of *Dharma* which was interpreted in terms of *Varnashramadharma* by *Manu* and *Kautilya* seldom provided a place for the majority group of people, who were called *Sudras* and later metamorphosed as Dalits. In terms of cognitive endeavors and accomplishments, this has been reflected in the various Hindu literatures (*Sanskrit*), which had denied accessibility to this group of people. The effect was decline of *Anvikshaki* (philosophy) to the higher castes or the *Brahmins* who had been able to systematically reject reason that is philosophy including any deeper and authentic sense of human freedom and humanization of a society.

The universalism and essentialism of the *Manu* period has served all through these years as a cultural and religious license for the up keeping of social inequality. Accordingly, the upper castes were claimed to possess a privileged social, moral, and cognitive standpoint, which in turn bestowed upon them a privileged insight into the metaphysical and religious truths. The ideal of social equality and social justice assure that one's caste and religion should not be considered as factors, which provide as norms or criteria for the distribution of jobs in an egalitarian society. Looked at from this perspective, the quantum of discrimination meted out to these underprivileged groups in India poses an existential and cognitive problem of meaninglessness and helplessness.

The proper functioning of free institutions requires every citizen to have actually developed certain normative attitudes, dispositions and values proper to the standpoint of equal citizenship. To produce and reproduce such citizens, we must have the social and cultural means of representing the liberal democratic norms of freedom and equality in a coherent and persuasive way, which are devoid of casteist and theological considerations. Accordingly, the question of whether liberal democracy, as a form of political association can provide a conception of social equality and social justice is a question which is based on the fact whether we can succeed in inventing a new, post modern form of civic culture which can render intelligible the norms of a civic life which no longer requires considerations in terms of one's caste, religion, ethnicity and other factors.

Hence, the treatment of fellow citizens as equal is not merely a formal procedural matter, but to be fully effective, requires its own special bond of affection. We call this civic friendship. The bond of civic friendship unites persons who share the same relationship to the basic institutional structure of a liberal democratic society. They may share nothing else, but share membership in a particularistic cultural or religious community and thereby ties of communitarian solidarity. Thus, presently in India, we can see hundreds and hundreds of social and cultural groups that vie each other to get their footings in the political life. Many of these groups are formed in terms of Dalit versus non-Dalits, *Brahmin* versus *non-Brahmins*, Christian, Muslim and also in the name of certain groups that have the labels of sub-castes. Though every citizen in India is related to the other either as a member of a cultural or religious group or as a fellow-citizen, yet our treating of the other is not based on the notion of equality but on the hierarchical bond of caste considerations. This is happened due to the cognitive contaminations that were ingrained in the Hindu categorization of human person in terms of caste and its implicit thought patterns.

14. References

1. Bagul, B. (ed.) (1981). Dalit Sahitya Ajche Kranti Vidnayan (Marathi). Nagpur: The Buddhist Publishing House.
2. Barlingay, S. S. (1975). Indian Epistemology and Logic. In: Indian thought: An Introduction, edited by Donald H. Bishop, New York: Wiley.
3. Bhatt, G. S. (1975). Social Philosophy. In: Indian thought: an introduction, edited by Donald H. Bishop, New York: Wiley.
4. Bowes, P. (1977). Hindu Intellectual Tradition, Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt Ltd.
5. Guru, G. (2001). The Language of Dalit-Bahujan Political Discourse. In: Dalit Identity and Politics, (ed.) G. Shah. 2: 97-107. New Delhi: Sage.
6. Kasbe, R. (1985). Ambedkar Ani Marx, Pune: Sugava Prakashan.
7. Mahony, W. (1987). Karman. In Mircea Eliade, ed., Encyclopedia of Religion, 8:261-66. New York: The Macmillan Publishing Co.
8. Misra, A. (1993). Dalit Assertion: Possibilities and Limits, Economic and Political weekly, 28(50) (December): 2701-2.
9. Nair, B. N. (1959). The Dynamic Brahmin. Bombay: Popular Book Depot.
10. Omvedt, G. (1994). Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
11. Schumann, K. (1988). Husserl and Indian Thought, a paper read at the international conference on "phenomenology and Indian philosophy, New Delhi.
12. Shah, G. (2001). Dalit Identity and Natural Politics. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
13. Talghatti, S. R. (1975). The Upanisads and Upanisadic Thought. In: Indian thought: An Introduction, edited by Donald H. Bishop, New York: Wiley.
14. Velassery, S. (2010). Metaphysical Approach to Human Rights: Concept of Dharma Reconsidered. Journal of History and Social Sciences. Vol: 1, Issue: 1, Allahabad University.
15. Velassery, S. (2005). Casteism and Human Rights: Toward Ontology of the Social Order, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International (Academic).