

## Assignment – 7

### MPYE – 006: Dalit Philosophy

#### Notes:

- i) Answer all five questions
- ii) All questions carry equal marks
- iii) For every question, refer to the texts and write down the assignment-responses in your own words.
- iv) Answers to question no.1 and 2 should be in about **500 words** each

1. Explain how the dalits are dehumanized through denial of due space in a caste-ridden society. 20

Answer: In India's economic progress, wealth and prosperity, the country has one third of the world's poorest billion people. Most are Dalits. Taking into account education, health and living standards, over half of India's population are considered to be in poverty. Although the situation is improving, many Dalits feel excluded. Some still find it difficult to access education, healthcare and justice. In some parts of India Dalits may still be prevented from entering public parks, temples or even getting drinking water from the village pump. Historically, Dalits have found themselves at the bottom of society, outside of a traditional hierarchical structure in Indian society (known as the caste system). This determined their religious purity, their work and their social standing and relationships.

Dalits would often have the most menial, dehumanising jobs. Others would avoid contact with them because of their religious impurity – this is why they used to be known as Untouchables. Untouchability was outlawed by the Indian constitution, but the practice persists in some parts of India.

*Dalit* is mostly used to describe communities that have been subjected to untouchability. Such people were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and thought of themselves as forming a fifth varna, describing themselves as *Panchama*. The traditional divide between the 'higher' caste as clean and the 'lower' as unclean segregates the Dalits from the rest of the society as the untouchables. This has to be seen against the backdrop of the idea of religious impurity.

Example: 1

*A learned judge of the Allahabad High Court had his chambers "purified" with the sacred water from the River Ganges, because they had earlier been occupied by a Dalit judge (cf. "LS Concerned at 'purifying' act by HC judge", The Times of India, Bombay, July 23, 1998).*

Above example states that the caste, as a system, does not include the Dalits as part of its whole. They are divided from the rest of the society and condemned to live outside the borders of villages, in *cheris*, colonies and slums. This geographical, social and political ostracisation creates in them a sense of alienation from the rest of the humanity except through the menial jobs violently or subtly assigned to them through certain cultural norms. Being divided by the ulterior motives of the caste people for maintaining their status quo, a mutual sense of distrust and suspicion is created within the Dalits. It expresses itself in terms of divided allegiance to the caste groups even for

minimum incentives. This process of being divided among themselves is rather a serious menace in eliciting the Dalit liberative potentials as a unified front to fight against all the dehumanising forces. This constant experience of mutual distrust and intra- divisions injected into the Dalit psyche, makes them vulnerable as split personalities with the resultant dependence on alcohol, the mega images of the cine actors and actresses and political leaders.

Exclusion is thrust upon the Dalits both by casteism in collusion with the globalisation, liberalization and privatization. Now the Dalit situation has become worse by reason of the onslaught of the Trans national Capitalist process of globalisation in the contemporary scenario. The paltry sum given to their hard manual labour imposed on them is often justified under the claim that they are unskilled. Of all the types of manual labour imposed on the Dalits, the most abominable one is the manual scavenging.

Example: 2

**Backlog Vacancies Meant for the SCs and STs**

	<b>Services</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A.	Central Government		
	Group A	369	74.84
	Group B	438	51.34
	Group C	3133	55.87
	Group D	873	45.70
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4811</b>	<b>54.30</b>
B.	Banks	272	45.10
C.	Public Sector	2642	88.18

From above example we can conclude that the political reservation and job reservation for the Dalits have helped a minority among the Dalits in certain quarters. But, by and large, the experience of the politico-economic and socio-cultural disabilities by the Dalits are basically the same. And especially in the case of those converted to the other religions, it is even worse than that of those under the label of Hinduism.

Dalits are defaced by being kept in a state of illiteracy, subservience and insecurity. The dynamics operative behind the process of defacement of Dalits is explained as follows: “If the proletarian consciousness is essentially rooted in material deprivation, and caste consciousness is rooted in status deprivation. Dalit consciousness is a complex consciousness which encapsulates deprivations stemming from inhuman conditions of material existence, powerlessness and ideological hegemony”.

To sum up it can be said that the Dalit reality is a painful existence. In India Dalits are social outcasts, economically impoverished, politically powerless.

2. Enumerate the bases for Dalit Eschatology and discuss elaborately its materialist features. 20

OR

Explain the characteristics of Dalit religious philosophy and examine Ambedkar’s philosophical analysis of religion from this perspective. 20

Answer: Dalits are an oppressed people for many generations due to the caste system of India. Dalits are the worst victims of the caste system. In the name of caste, they are often degraded, discriminated, humiliated, insulted and exploited. Caste is an elaborate social system that influences all other institutions of the society. It is an important marker of traditional Indian society. Caste is carried through religion. In India, the caste system and the Hindu religion are interlinked and inseparable. There were various attempts to reform or transform the Indian society to make it humane, democratic and modern. The dalits have their own system of belief which is known as dalit philosophy. It has the following features:

- a) For a Dalit religious philosophy, hair splitting self-imposed arguments in defence of God or to provide sufficient reasons to justify the problem of evil on the pre-conceived idea that God is All-Good is not the primary crucial concern since these are ontologically pre-construed notions that side-line or misdirect social involvement and ethical regard/scrutiny of religion.
- b) Dalit religious philosophy is not the philosophy of religion in the sense of dealing with nature, existence and the problem of defining God in particular ontological or metaphysical categories or an attempt to provide elaborate defence or offense of positioning God. It is to evolve a religious philosophy based on two principles of rationality and morality (ethic of liberation) as to check the validity of religious foundations and practices to promote a humane society based on justice and equality.
- c) Dalit religious philosophy examines and critiques the epistemological, logical, aesthetic and ethical foundations inherent in the claims of various religions and check its sustainability to advance a society based on justice and equality.
- d) Its chief aim is to evolve philosophy of religion, regardless of specific religious claims, the rational ground that provide a moral standard for harmonious social living. Dalit engagement of religion or Dalit religious philosophy intends to elucidate a content analysis of religions in terms of its authenticity to sustain the Dalit people as against the vulnerabilities of casteism.
- e) From the point of view of Dalit religious philosophy or Dalit philosophy of religion, the traditional problems of natural theology is a failed social philosophy because it does not amount to involve the social content of religion rather it purports to reinforce dogmatic tenets of particular religious claims in an ontologically preconditioned manner.

Ambedkar is not a denier of the need of religion. For him, religion is necessary; it is a social necessity to provide a moral unity. 'Religion is a social force ...religion stands for a scheme of divine governance. The scheme becomes an ideal for the society to follow. The norm of utility in religion would promote unity of society as a whole.' Ambedkar points out, "The Hindu is not prepared to face any inquiry" and he is not ready to change from his Vedic belief system. The Hindu way of life is deterministic; it is against the principle of any change or revolution or freedom. According to Ambedkar, the philosophy of Hinduism does not practice or even conceive the possibility of any revolution. In contrast to Hinduism, the very basis or the philosophical foundation of Buddhism lies on the acceptance of the reality of Change as the ultimate fact of reality. Religion could function as an instrument of oppression or liberation depending upon its worldview and its social practices. If religion is based on the notion of revolution or change then it is lacerative and if religion propagates infallibility and total surrender to its totalitarian perspective then, it would be oppressive.

Religion needs to be dynamic for Ambedkar, because it is concerned with love of truth. Concept of Justice is a compendious one and is the foundation of a moral order. Justice has always evoked the ideas of equality, of proportion of "compensation." Ambedkar conceives the principle of Justice as containing the notions of liberty, equality and fraternity. The principle of Justice according to Ambedkar is one of the essential criteria for an authenticity of a religion. Religion is to promote economic security and viability on an equal basis, to every member of the society. Fraternity is fellow feeling. It is empathy to identify oneself with the-other in the society. It is 'rationality' and against individualism. It is brotherhood. It helps to sustain the moral order in the society. It is a natural sentiment.

3. Answer **any two** of the following questions in about **250 words** each:

- a) Analyse the distinction between the features of Dalit and non-Dalit myths and cultural symbols. 10

Answer: The basic elements of cultural expressions are thought to be concepts (myth), acts (rituals) places and objects (symbols). Both sacred and secular myths, rituals, and symbols of a culture is said to be the Symbol System of that culture. Myth, ritual and symbols are integrally inter-related; there is a myth behind every ritual as well as symbol. The models and messages generated by the symbol system defines the personality trait of a culture which in turn determines the behaviour pattern of persons of a culture. Myth is a way of perceiving the reality, it is the specific emotional horizon within which one interprets the perceived objects. Humans are basically a story telling being, in fact, it is only in the story form humans can express themselves. Myth is a story which is capable of producing any one or all the shades of emotions. Heart is the realm of myth and the capability to create myth is the distinguishing mark of humans.

### FEATURES OF DALIT MYTHS NON-DALIT MYTHS

DALIT MYTHS	NON-DALIT MYTHS
Females is superior to male	Male is superior to female
Sex is permissive	Sex is restricted
Women are born to be free	Women are born to be controlled
Politics, on the basis of democratic principles	Politics, on the basis of authoritarian principles
Life is innovative	Life is traditional
Spontaneity and display is human	Secretiveness and fear of spontaneity
Equality between man and woman gives joy to life	No equality between man and women in life
Motherhood is worshipable	Fatherhood is worshipable
Life is not order	Life is order
Life is passive and relaxed	Life is aggressively approached to achieve the goal
Appearance is unimportant	Appearance is important
Relaxed moral code	Strict moral norms

b) Why is philosophizing from dalit perspectives important today? 10

c) Write a short essay on Periyar's Critique of Religion. 10

Answer: The religious views of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy resulted in him being considered the Voltaire of South India. Both opposed religion virulently because, in their views, the so-called men of religion invented myths and superstitions to keep the innocent and ignorant people in darkness and to go on exploiting them. Periyar has been a harsh critic of the Aryan influenced Hinduism in Tamil Nadu, more than the faiths of Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. He has spoken appreciatively of these other faiths in India finding in their ethics principles of equality and justice, thus advocating them if they can prove an alternative to Brahmanic Hinduism. With regards to institutionalized religion being used for personal gain, Periyar stated that "religion goes hand in hand with superstition and fear. Religion prevents progress and suppresses man. Religion exploits the suppressed classes." As religions, however, they are prone to be hit by accusation of superstition, exploitation and irrationalism. In periyar's school of thought, there was no religion by name Vedic Hinduism derived from the name of a place. With no distinct doctrines and no particular sacred book, it was said to be an imaginary religion preaching the superiority of the Brahmin the inferiority of the Shudra, and the untouchability of the Panchama.

Through the Self-Respect Movement, Periyar preached that compared to other religions, Hinduism placed many restrictions on men by prohibiting all except a small minority of Brahmins from reading the religious

texts or discussing religious matters and by evolving a caste system in the name of divine law, and by creating several gods and festivals to provide an assured income and prosperity to the small Brahmin group at the expense of all others.

Vaikkam Periyar Ramasamy was on a mission to destroy the essential practices perpetuated under Hinduism and the latter on a mission to protect, safeguard and rejuvenate the essence of Hindu religion—agreed on the basic point of the need to remove many evils practiced in the form of religion. He believed that the Hindus should realize that Hinduism was not a religion and whatever they practiced in the name of Hindu religion had no religious basis or sanction. Both were of the opinion that religious faith was used to perpetuate inequalities on the basis of birth and ideas of purity and pollution.

Ramasamy said "Bane of Tamils is Brahmins, Muslims and Christians consider themselves to Tamilians". In his book "Vedangalin Vandavalangal", he had separate chapters where he criticized Quran and Bible.

In the early days of the Self-Respect Movement when Periyar was vociferous that Hindu religion, Manudharma and the Congress should be destroyed, he was inclined to play a political game by expressing an opinion that Islam alone was the religion that carried political weight and those depressed in the Hindu order could consider conversion to Islam.

Periyar found in Buddhism a basis for his philosophy though he did not accept that religion as self-respect movement. The search for basis began in the course of the movement and was intensified soon after independence. It was again an experiment in the search for self-respect and the object was to get liberation from the shudrahood of Hinduism.

Christianity was viewed by Periyar similar to monotheistic faith of Islam. He stated that, "So far as god is concerned we find the Christians and Muslims, somewhat reformed from the olden days of barbarians. They say that there can be only one God. They say that it is beyond human comprehension. They say that God does good to those who are good and punishes those who are bad. They say that God has no name or shape. They talk of good qualities".

4. Answer *any four* of the following in about *150 words* each:

a) What do you know about the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate in the dalit context?

Answer: Ambedkar was Gandhi's most stiff opponent politically, intellectually and morally. Ambedkar was also criticized by the Gandhian intellectuals. They called him an "opportunist" because he served as labour member of British viceroy's executive council between 1942 and 1946. He was called a "British stooge" because he accepted British invitation to the first round table conference, in 1930, when many congressmen were imprisoned for breaking salt laws. He was further called a "separatist", because he wanted separate electorate for untouchables. He was characterized as "anti-national" because he suggested that Jammu and Kashmir can be trifurcated (divided into three) and he supported Muslim league's case for Pakistan (ibid., P.2).

Ambedkar himself had originally felt that with universal suffrage, reserved seats would be sufficient. But universal suffrage was not given, and the issues at the conference revolved around separate electorates. Gandhi was reconciled to giving these to Muslims; he had already accepted their identity as a separate community. Not so for Dalits.

b) What are the Dalit expressions of self-assertion? 5

c) What do you understand by a philosophy of liberation? 5

Philosophy of Liberation is the collective name for a philosophical movement and method of doing philosophy that emerged at first in Argentina during the late sixties, but that went on to spread throughout Latin America during the early seventies. It belongs to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Marxism, or more generally, historical materialism. In fact, because many philosophers of liberation came out of these different traditions, the philosophy of liberation was and remains from the outset an internally heterogeneous movement.

The philosophy of liberation aims to think the distinct world historical character of Latin America, using what are argued to be autochthonous intellectual resources, from out of a situation of economic, cultural, political dependency. It has a practical aim: liberation. It defines itself as a counter-philosophical discourse, whether it be as a critique of colonialism, imperialism, globalization, racism, and sexism, which is articulated from out of the experience of exploitation, destitution, alienation and reification, in the name of the projects of liberation, autonomy and authenticity. That is, the philosophy of liberation has presented itself as an “epistemic rupture” that aims to critique and challenge not only basic assumptions and themes of Euro-American philosophy, but also to make philosophy more responsible and responsible for the socio-political situation. It meant to emphasize a heightened degree of reflexivity or self-awareness in their theorizing. Positively, the philosophy of liberation affirms cultural diversity, gender and racial equality, and political sovereignty. The philosophy of liberation’s philosophical orbit is defined by the axes of critique, commitment, engagement, and liberation.

d) How do the dalits approach the problem of evil? 5

e) How does a dalit approach death? 5

The difference between the Hindu Brahminic death and Dalit death lies in the very concept of death itself. What is the Brahmin’s notion of life and death? A Brahmin believes that life must be lived for the sake of death which will make him eternal. To live this way is to live a life that constantly thinks about death. Life in this universe must ensure a perennial life in the other world, that is, in heaven. The Gods that he/she propitiates, time and again are to provide two things. One, a happy life here on this earth, which in philosophical terms is a kshanabhanguram (a life that survives only a minute). At the same time, however, this short span on this earth must also be made to ensure a permanent life of privilege and pleasure. So, for a hindu, death is a transition from this kshanabhanguram to eternity. Death for a Dalit is end of everything. Hence he gives the best and most extravagant ceremony to bid goodbye to his/her beloved who departs this world. It is also a joyful occasion as death is the cessation of all pain from this world. Though the relatives will mourn the death, they know that all his/her pain and suffering stops with death and so feel happy and satisfied.

Today conversion to religion for a Dalit is a vehicle to social equality and mobility. They feel free to convert to any other religion like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, etc. to climb up the social ladder. Hence they don’t believe in the life after death. In Dalit philosophy of life, we find the absence of eschatological transition from life miserable here on earth to a blissful life after death.

f) Does caste cut across barriers of Religions? 5

**The caste system** has exercised a profound influence on the economic activities of the people of India. There were four original functional castes, which followed different occupations, namely – the Brahmins (the priestly class), the Kshatriyas (the fighting caste), the Vaisyas (the trading class) and the Sudras (the serfs). However, in course of time, these castes have lost their rigidity and many sub-castes have come into existence. Such caste divisions have had a far-reaching effect on the forms of socio-economic activities pursued in the country.

**Positive effects:**

1. **Fixed occupation:** The caste system has promoted contentment and the stability of Indian society. The birth of a man fixes his career for him and thus he has not to worry about the choice of an occupation.

2. **Preservation of hereditary skill:** It preserves the advantages of hereditary skill. The son in early life picks up the trade of his father and becomes skilled.
3. **Trade guilds:** The caste organizations served as Trade Guilds. They regulated production and prices and settled trade disputes.

**Negative effects:**

1. Caste system prevents the choice of occupations according to one's personal taste and ability.
2. Since change of occupations is debarred by the caste system, mobility of labor is not possible.
3. Caste system hinders the growth of large-scale enterprises. In large-scale enterprises intellect, capital and labor require to be brought together; but since the caste system allocates these two different castes, any large-scale enterprise is out of the question.
4. The rigidity of caste distinctions is responsible for the tendency of higher classes to look down upon certain forms of labor. This lack of the sense of dignity of labor is inimical to economic progress.

The spread of education and the modern modes of thinking and living have caused a general laxity of caste rules and distinctions in India. Boys and girls of different castes read in the same schools. In trains, buses, and steamers, men of different castes ride together. In hotels and restaurants, it is obviously impossible to observe the caste rules prohibiting inter-dining. In the factories and trade unions, the workers feel their unity as workers much more keenly than their caste and religious diversities. Caste has ceased to be an inseparable barrier to economic progress though its evil effects are still considerable. The rigidity of these sub-divisions according to specific occupations is also gradually breaking down.

5. Write short notes on **any five** of the following in about **100 words** each:

a) Dalit world-view 4

The very Dalit existence with its struggles in history is passionately attuned to move its present wounded history towards a new possibility of building a new human community. The articulate and inarticulate agenda of this transition is from the state of imposed exclusion and humiliation to the possibility of conscious inclusion of others as co-humans with due human dignity with equal footing. In other words, Dalits are struggling to do away with the existing sad states of affairs while constructing a new moral order ensuring personal dignity to be celebrated with all other humans as sisters and brothers. This dynamic mind-set could be portrayed as follows:

<p>imposed disempowerment Experience of dishonour and shame Being excluded in human relationship with equal footing yet imposed with menial labour</p> <p>Acceptance and internalization of the discriminatory hierarchy</p>	<p>Self-empowerment</p> <p>Experience of honour and dignity</p> <p>Being included in human relationship with personal choices of work with creativity</p> <p>Eradication and annihilation of every form of discriminatory</p>
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b) Varna 4

Varna is a Sanskrit word which means type, order, colour or class. The term refers to social classes in Brahminical books like the Manusmriti. These and other Hindu literature classified the society in principle into four varnas:

Brahmins: priests, scholars and teachers.

Kshatriyas: rulers, warriors and administrators.

Vaishyas: agriculturalists and merchants.[6]

Shudras: laborers and service providers.

Communities which belong to one of the four varnas or classes are called savarna. In the present-day context, they include all the forward castes. The Dalits and scheduled tribes who do not belong to any varna, are called avarna. This quadruple division is a form of social stratification not to be confused with the much more nuanced Jāti or the European term "caste". The varna system is discussed in Hindu texts, and understood as idealised human callings. The Vedas, Dharm shastras, Epics, Buddhist and Jains have different approach to Varna system.

#### c) Chakalatwam 4

#### d) Subaltern Religion 4

The term God refers to those men and women, who through their own morally right conduct towards their fellow human beings and society have become immortalized in history and inspiration for subsequent generations. God is an ideal term and invitation to all similarly raise themselves morally to the status of the Divine. Veneration of these gods is neither out of fear nor for favor but a celebratory remembrance to strengthen one's own resolve to become like them. A righteous life taught by Buddha is religion for him. The three fundamental ethical teachings of Buddha are: Don't sin (*Kanma Bhaagai*); Do good (*Artha Bhaagai*); Purify your heart (*Gnana Bhaagai*). These fundamental teachings are further explicated in the four (*Bhedas*): *Aram*, *Porul*, *Inbam*, *Veedu*. Each *Bhaagai* has got eight deeper understandings which are called upanidam. Apart from three *Bhaagai*, the fourth one is called *Niruvaana Bhaagai* which emphasizes renunciation. He mentions about *Devanilai*, which means completely removing the evil desires and deeds in oneself, engulfed in virtues of compassion, love and forbearance and loving relationship with all creatures. Those people who have obtained the status of *Devanilai* are called Devars. The Buddha was the *Adidevan* and *Adinathan*. Brahminical religion introduced a hierarchical society in the form of caste system. It elevated Brahmins to the level of gods and divided the society into upper classes and lower classes and treated women as inferior groups.

#### g) Jyotirao Phule 4

Mahatma Jotiba Phule was an activist, thinker, social reformer, philosopher and a revolutionary. His main interests were on ethics, religion and humanism. He was the pioneer of women's education in Maharashtra. He is one of the most important figures in social reform movement in Maharashtra and is rightly called as the father of Indian social revolution. Phule was born in a Mali family in a caste perceived to be inferior caste by certain sections of the society. According to Phule, "God is Creator, Governor, and Protector and who is all Holiness himself." But Manu and others of his class have distorted the idea of God by attributing the most immoral, inhuman, unjust actions and deeds to the Supreme Being. From this idea of God emerged a social order that dehumanizes the Sudras and the Adisudras. They were exploited in all levels. The Brahmins under the guise of religion controls all spheres of life of Sudras. He tried to remove the factors that breed blind faith. He characterised blind faith as outwardly religious but in essence politically motivated. He accused them of upholding the teachings of religion and refusing to be rational. At the root of all calamities, maintains Phule is the blind faith in religious books that are said to be created or inspired by God.

#### f) Social equality 4

**Social equality** in a society is the social state of affairs whereby all the people in the society have equal rights under the law, including right to vote, physical security, freedom of speech and assembly, and the right to own property and to protect it. In addition to that, **social equality** also includes concepts of economic equity, that is equal access to education, health care, social securities, public infrastructure (e.g., roads), and starting and running a business



/ organization. It also includes equal opportunities for employment, equal access to rent apartments, etc.,. In order for a society to consider itself a bastion of **social equality**, it will mean that there are no legally enforced social class / caste boundaries and there is no unfair discrimination motivated by a person's ethnic identity. It also means that gender, age, sexual orientation, origin, caste or class, income or property, language, religion, convictions, opinions, health or disability do not result in unequal treatment under the law and will not reduce opportunities based on any of those criteria.

g) Kancha Ilaiah 4

h) Labour as foundation of dalit Living 4

The labour from the Dalit manual power contributing to the welfare of the society, the passion for creating a casteless humanity is the unique Dalit agenda in building up the community. Hence the Dalits, through their very struggles are the community-building community. And the existing Dalit discourses have to deepen their commitment and broaden the scope of their strategies to accomplish the desired result of integral Dalit emancipation. In other words, the Dalits themselves are challenged to extend their hands out of this Dalit-centredness to reach out to a broad-based Dalit discourse while deepening their commitment to their emancipation. the Dalits, cannot have the luxury of supporting them from outside. Their own pre understanding has to be organically tempered by the ever-struggling and ever-exploratory preunderstanding of Dalits. It is with this deep sense of genuine solidarity with them, they are constantly challenged to play the role of compassionate midwife to Dalits who are undergoing the ongoing labor pain of delivering dreams of Dalit empowerment. Possibility of creating Dalit Solidarity to create a new order of humanity built on the foundation of egalitarian values. Every brand of discriminatory exclusion and inequitable hierarchy is sought to be demolished by Dalit sensibilities.