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## **UNIT 2 HUMAN VALUES AND MORAL OUTLOOK OF THE DALITS**

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### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The objective of this unit is to understand the Human Values and moral outlook of Dalits which are very much buried and unknown.

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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‘Dalit is the term which embraces all the oppressed who want to change oppressive situations. This section deals with people who suffer with the practices of untouchability. Every community has its own values and moral outlook. Every member of the community is expected to bear these values and moral outlook and abide by them. The values and outlook are also used to distinguish one community from the other. In our Indian context, caste identity dominates, and the other identities such as religion, language, class and territory play their own crucial role.

The values and the moral outlook of any caste is determined by the dominant groups and sections. The beneficiaries are normally those who determine these values and moral outlook. There will be losers or suffers because of these values and outlook. In a patriarchal society, men are the real beneficiaries and women are the victims. Similarly in a caste society, the upper and Dominant castes are the beneficiaries and the Dalits the victims. The victims have the tendency to break the norms and values and moral outlook. In the Indian caste context, Dalits

are the real critics of the caste system and have developed and practicing their own values and moral outlook. However we cannot deny the fact their certain oppressive values of the upper castes are internalized by Dalits due to their close proximity or association.

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## 2.2 CELEBRATING LIFE

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Celebrating life is an ending war with death and suicide. Dalits have regard for life. They celebrate life. A pregnant mother is given care and receives more attention in Dalit culture. Like wise, child birth is welcomed and celebrated. A girl child is not discriminated. In fact the puberty is celebrated as the blessing for the family and relatives. There is no permanent or compulsory widow hood in Dalit culture. Dalit women are free to remarry. Dalit Culture affirms strongly the life of the human. It is therefore food and work that are central in dalit culture. Murders and suicides are less among Dalits. Dalits are celebrating life. Their celebrations are mostly communitarian in nature. Childbirth, puberty, marriage or annual deity worship, everything are celebrated by the village along with the family. Dalits both men and women dance in the funeral procession as a symbol of celebrating and honouring the deceased. They are able to celebrate life because the pains and sorrows of the individual is shared by many. They listen, respond and help the person to get over from the loss, and disappointment.

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## 2.3 GOD AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

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The relationship between God and Human is an expression of comradeship in the spiritual Journey for Transformation in Dalit philosophy of life. In Dalit religion the Deities are both male and female. Most of the deities were once human either slain by the upper castes for transgressing the caste norms or lived for the welfare of the Dalit community. For example, Madurai Veeran in South Tamilnadu was killed because of his marriage with the upper caste woman. It is the practice in Dalit culture that to elevate human to Godly status when their lives are worth to do so. In this situation we also need to understand that Dalits and their Deities are interdependent. Dalits believe that their Deities are protecting their life from oppression and bless their labour and the nature for sustenance. They do not expect their deity to do things in unnatural or super natural ways. For example in the conversation with the Dalit elders in a village, said it is impossible for God to stop the rain. Their understanding is that, God should not be understood as super power Hero, rather one who is in harmony with the nature. A story in Karnataka says that, the God in the forest is refusing to have roof on top, in solidarity with the homeless people who are worshipping him. In many villages the Dalit deities are humiliated and treated as untouchable by the upper castes. In few villages Dalits are fighting against the upper caste to redeem the Deities who are seized by them. Dalit and their Deities are journeying together, undergoing similar experiences in order to transform the society, to become a just, loving and compassionate.

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## 2.4 SPRINGS FOR COMMUNAL HARMONY

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Forgiving within the family may occur among the poor of few other backward castes too. But forgiving the oppressor seldom takes place among non-Dalits. We can even say that it is an exclusive characteristic of Dalits. Maruthappan, a Dalit, is a social worker. He was placed in his own village as a health worker, about twenty years back. Like any other village, untouchability was very much in

practice here and Dalits tended never to violate it. When the matter was brought to the notice of Maruthappan's co-workers, they agitated and challenged the whole village to give up the practice. They also challenged Maruthappan to violate the norms of the non-Dalits. Maruthappan's wife Alageswari took the challenge and drew water from the water pipe meant for non-Dalits. The non-Dalits were shocked and as a result a social boycott was imposed on Maruthappan's family. Maruthappan was very upset when even the village youth who were very friendly with him also took part in the boycott.

One evening as Maruthappan was approaching his village, he found the son of the village president, who was responsible for the imposition of the social boycott, sitting on the bound of the water tank, looking pensive. At first Maruthappan wanted to ignore him, but later he explained to him about the quarrel which he had with his father and his plan to move out of the village. Maruthappan discouraged the youth's plan and promised him that he would convince his father. He took him to his humble dwelling, which is nothing but a small hut. Maruthappan could have pressurized the youth further, to foster and promote permanent estrangement and hostility towards his father. But love, compassion and the spirit of forgiveness prevailed and motivated Maruthappan to impart only good to the oppressor. In this story we find that the spirit of freedom and forgiveness go hand in hand.

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## 2.5 DALIT POWER OF FORGIVING

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Dalits forgiving the non – Dalits is it not an expression of inability and powerlessness? This is true of few cases, but one cannot generalize. In many cases, Dalits use forgiveness as power to weaken the oppressive non-Dalits. Molayakavundanur is a village in Thirumalai Mannar District of Tamil Nadu where ten non-Dalit and forty Dalit families live. Though the non-Dalits from the minority, they did not desist from practicing untouchability towards Dalits. The problem arose when the non-Dalits objected to a Government plan to provide a water tap connection to Dalits. Dalits took the matter to the police under the Protection of Civil Rights Act (PCRA). Normally the PCR sections are headed by non - Dalit officers who never take such cases seriously, except to demand some money from the accused. Quite surprisingly, in this case, the complaint was taken seriously and the non – Dalits were exposed to real trouble. When the non-Dalits realized the strength of the case against them, they pleaded with the Dalit leaders to withdraw the complaint. The Dalits gathered, discussed the matter and decided to withdraw the petition on the grounds that since they were nearing the completion of a forty day fast as a vow made to their God and would soon be going the temple, forgiveness therefore became obligatory.

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## 2.6 FORGIVENESS AND REPENTANCE

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Why are Dalit always ready to reconcile, even after their most difficult experiences with non-Dalits? Is it because of their dependency on non-Dalits for their life and livelihood? It is true that the Dalit's life and livelihood is very much dependent on non-Dalits. But this is not taken retaliation as their principle and weapons as their language. They are still hoping for the conversion of the wolves, for which they pay a heavy price. Moreover, Dalits long for the human relationship the non – Dalits deny them and they wouldn't like to miss the opportunity in achieving this.

Author very important reason for Dalit forgiveness is their repentant nature. Dalits are basically a repentant community. They would readily come forward to repent for any small act which had hurt or caused damage to others. Unlike non-Dalits,

Dalits do not worship daily or go to temple every week with offerings of coconuts, flowers and money. Dalit Gods or goddesses' festivals take place once a year, that too after the peace and reconciliation process within the Dalit community. During the festival the whole Dalit community gathers before the Deity and confess their sins in simple language 'Lord forgive our sin'. They do not use any ornamental words or set liturgy for confession. The sacrificial goat has to nod its head as a sign of the deity's acceptance. Until then, there will not be any celebration. Repentance and seeking the gods or goddesses' forgiveness is an important feature in Dalit festivals. Dalits maintain the nature of repentance and forgiveness in their daily life too. But non-Dalits on the other hand find it difficult to repent and forgive. They would either try to justify themselves or make the victim forget by receiving some compensation, or force victims to ignore the problem. They consider it humiliating to apologize to Dalits.

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## **2.7 NON VIOLENCE: RULE OF LIFE**

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Dalit face, Murder, rape and all forms of violence for Past 1500 years in India became of untouchability. There is no racial or occupational reasons for the origin of untouchability. One has to keep in mind that the origin of untouchability is independent from that of caste. It originated about 4 CE. Dr. Ambedkar provides two main reasons for the origination of untouchability they are, as the untouchables were Buddhists who did not accept the Brahmin supremacy. Therefore one of the main roots of untouchability lied in the hatred and contempt, which Brahmin created against those who were Buddhists. The second reason he gives is that the untouchables who were the Broken men continued the habit of beef eating. Is there any other existing human community which suffers with such disability for a sustained period of one thousand six hundred years? In that are Dalits submissive? No, certainly Not. Dalits are protesting against the evil practices of untouchability. They are basically a non-violent group and have kept non-violence as the rule of life. Dalits continue to fight against untouchability using non-Violence means. It is an unfortunate threat to the Indian society and the rest of the world have fielded to acknowledge their power of non-violence. Using non-violent means Dalits have safeguarded the lives of the non-Dalits, but they are paying a heavy price for loading non-violence as a rule of life.

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## **2.8 JUSTICE, LOVE AND COMPASSION**

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Justice, love and compassion are the expression of mutual challenge and support. Justice love and compassion are inseparable in Dalit culture. A true dalit will not support a corrupted Dalit leader or person because he belongs to his caste. This type of leaders would face opposition mainly from Dalits. Justice question will always arise in the contact of oppression and exploitation within and without. Like wise, love and compassion are very much part of Dalit culture. When justice love and compassion are in conflict with each other Dalit will give select compassion. There are stories in every Dalit hamlet where they have kept compassion in the place of justice.

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## **2.9 COMMUNICATION OF THE EX-COMMUNICATES**

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It is a protest to the purity-pollution practices. The concept of purity-pollution controls the thinking and behavior of non-dalits. They always suffer with the fear of pollution and thereby lay many restrictions for themselves to come into contact

with others and food. Their women at home are secluded during the periods of menstruation, puberty childbirth etc. Dalits do not have the fear of pollution and therefore associate freely with all those who encounter. Dr. Ambedkar in his book 'who are the untouchables' where they have come from, defines untouchables as broken men. He states that they were the constitution of the defeated tribes, and the run away tribes. It has to be noted that those who are living outside the village are not homogenous people. They are the mixture of many tribes and cultures. This gives them the courage and motivation to accept any stranger without any fear. They also receive happily those who are excommunicated by the caste people for so many reasons; such as inter-caste marriage. Their houses of dalits are very small and they do not permit them to practice purity-pollution rules within and without. Dalits love human free association, relationship which includes communality, marriage.

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## 2.10 VALUE OF DRESSING

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The Dalits have developed a culture of cultivating the aesthetic value of multiple colours in dresses, as the seven-colour rainbow is highly respected among them. Loving the nature and its colour becomes a value. Unfortunately, the Hindu Brahmanism worked out the dress code and used it as an oppressive instrument against the people in constructing a subtle and suppressive aesthetic value around the dress code, in a way people wear and the colours of the dress they wear. This false philosophy constructed around clothes was used as a suppressive method to humiliate the productive masses, with hegemonic and subordinating structures on colour of dresses and method of wearing them. The Hindu God is constructed to love a particular colour, saffron, and to wear in a particular way. The *sanyasis* are said to be lovers of that colour. A religion that prescribes one particular colour destroys the aesthetic culture of people. Hindu Brahmanism constructed its philosophy and spirituality around the colour of clothes. The colours and modes of dressing are constructed with hegemonic and subordinating motives. The contemporary phenomena of politics of colour gets reflected in the brutalizing saffron colour as a symbolic of the Hindutva ideology validates the caste hierarchy. In contrast to dehumanizing nature of the food culture and dress code of Brahmanism, Dalit communities dwell in the realm of science of wearing clothes and the aesthetic values of beauty. (Ilaiah 2009, 73-74)

Even in the construction of Hindu *sanyasi* culture, a hegemonic status is kept up. From the Dalit perspective, a *sanyasi* is one who does not believe in washing clothes and cutting hair. The so-called spiritual bath of the Brahmanism does not talk of cleaning the body. A Telugu proverb states, *Brahman snanam vadalani banka*, the Brahman mode of bath is not meant to clean off the dirt on the body, but is meant to only satisfy the spiritual ego. The Brahman bath is that which lasts only for few minutes as a Brahmin does not take bath for the sake of his own health. Pouring water on one's body is by the belief that very wetting of his body satisfies God. In contrast, Dalit mode of washing the clothes is for satisfying both the temporal needs of health and economy and the spiritual needs of absolute cleanliness (Ilaiah 2009, 74-75)

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## 2.11 LABOUR AS FOUNDATION OF LIVING

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Besides 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.

For anyone, who chooses to accompany 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.

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## 2.12 DALIT AESTHETIC CULTURE

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In the Dalit social living, women have played a leading role in the construction of a society's aesthetic culture. All the patriarchies have suppressed the role of women, but Dalit have upheld their values. From the decoration of household, physical beauty of the children along with their well-being, to their mental and physical growth, activities of women are evident. In the process of washing clothes, especially of washing of all clothes of the entire village, there is a cultural and aesthetic activity more than mere economic activity. Neatness and cleanliness not only have health value, but also have an aesthetic value. The *Dhobis* have made individual beauty as well as social beauty their objective. The collective beauty of the village takes shape only when the whole village is clean in terms of clothes that the people wear. The *Dhobis* have constructed an aesthetic consciousness among the village as it is evident in a Telugu proverb: "A village that does not have a *Chakalis* [washer community] is a village of ugliness." (Ilaiah 2009, 75)

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## 2.13 LET US SUM UP

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Human values and moral outlook of Dalits is liberating in nature. It gives importance for human freedom, equality and community. It is therefore rules and rituals do not have control over their thinking and action. They are basically rebels therefore. Violation especially against unjust orders is inherent in them. They also encourage and extend solidarity to those who struggle against injustice. Dalit struggles are mostly non violent.

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## 2.14 KEY WORDS

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Forgiveness , Repentance , Love , Justice , compassion , Non violence , Equality and community.

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## 2.15 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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