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## UNIT 3 SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF DALITS

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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The main objective of this Unit— to familiarize the students with the social problems of almost 20% of the Indian population treated as untouchables, who in the contemporary history call themselves as Dalits. Having explained about their social location, it proceeds further how they are dehumanized through exclusion, denied through exploitation, and defaced through elimination from the main stream of the Indian caste-ridden society. While dwelling on the claims of protecting their human rights, it explains how, in practice, they are treated with the attitude of indifference and callousness. By the end of this Unit one should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of the social location of the Dalits;
- to grapple with the process of dehumanization ;
- to perceive the stories behind the denial of space;
- to recognise the process of defacement;
- to reflect on the ways of facing the problem of untouchability adequately as co-humans with them.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Even while the human history claims to have entered the new era of the third millennium with much fanfare, the atrocities against the Dalits in India remain unabated. They are treated as untouchables and ill-treated as lesser humans and non-humans. And thus about 165 million people (16 percent) of the Indian total population (1100 million) are relegated to the margins of Indian caste-ridden society. This figure does not include those Dalits who are Christians and Muslims, who could be approximately 25 million.

Though the Constitution of India has outlawed the practice of untouchability in any form as a criminal offence, the disadvantaged Dalits are ostracised from and even persecuted in the day-to-day life of Indian society. Even the remedial measures

of reservation of the jobs and the educational privileges did not suffice to undo the injustice done to the Dalits.

This atrocious situation creates a lot of suffering in the hearts and the minds of the Dalits. When they undergo all these untold miseries, the non-Dalits and the government machinery, by and large, treat Dalit suffering, very often, with mere lip-service. Their evasive approach and callous attitude add insult to injury. Even the legitimate self-assertion of the Dalits to establish their human dignity seems to provoke the caste-ridden society to step up its repression against them. This again dehumanizes them and deepens their wounds. And Dalit suffering is further intensified.

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### 3.2 SOCIAL LOCATION OF DALITS

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On March 11, 2000, seven Dalits were burnt alive in Kambalapalli village in Kolar District of Karnataka for having refused to be subservient to the whimsical norms of the so-called upper caste people. On July 6, 1999, a 42 year-old Dalit woman was gang-raped and burnt alive near Kanpur of Uttar Pradesh by the so-called high caste people. This was supposed to be the 'punishment' for her son's 'crime' of having tried to get married to the daughter of one of the culprits (cf. The New Indian Express, Chennai, July 7, 1999). The connivance of the local police personnel at this week-long atrocities by the influential high caste people against the family members of the victim is highlighted in this brief news item titled "Dalit Mother Raped for Son's 'Criminal' Affair".

On the eve of its 50th anniversary of the Republic Day (January 26, 1999), India witnessed a cold-blooded massacre of 23 landless Dalit labourers including a 60 year-old woman and 10 year-old child in Shankarbigah village of Jehanabad District of Bihar, by the private army maintained by the powerful land-owning high caste people. It was a well-planned operation with a clear purpose: to terrorise the landless and the Dalit population of the area into submission so that they did not dare to resist the domination of landlords and rural rich over the social and economic life of rural Bihar.

The nexus between the caste-minded landlords and the callous government machinery is highlighted in many parts of the country (cf. S.K.Mishra, "The Caste War in Bihar", The Hindu Magazine-Chennai, February 21, 1999). Enlisting the names of the private armies of the land-owning caste people, it further throws light on the dynamics of the retaliatory measures undertaken by the leftist Naxalite groups against the landlords for initiating the spiral of violence through such atrocities against the Dalit labourers.

When Dalits- Murugesan and Mooken- were elected president and vice-president, respectively, of Melavalavu Panchayat, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu 'reserved' for the Dalit candidates through the democratic process, they were not only not allowed to function as people's representatives but also not allowed to live. On June 30, 1997, they were murdered along with four other Dalits in the broad day light by the intolerant caste people. They were 'punished' with death for participating in the election and getting elected. Their sin was their low caste- Adi-Dravida - and they showed the temerity to contest. (cf. G. Mathew, "The Meaning of Melavalavu", The Hindu-Chennai, September 30, 1997)

These are but the sample manifestations of untouchability ruthlessly practiced across the length and breadth of the Indian sub-continent which remains under the grip of caste with its exclusiveness, hierarchy and its ineluctable fragmentation of

civil society'. The brutality to which the Dalits are subjected to in contemporary India is portrayed by the Asian Human Rights Commission (1997) as follows: "During these 50 years of survival after independence from the colonial powers, the Dalit situation has not improved. It has, in fact, become worse which is borne out by the fact that every hour two Dalits are assaulted; every day, three Dalit women are raped; every day, two Dalits are murdered; every day, two Dalit houses are burned down."

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1997) has recorded the following details: "Between 1994 and 1996, a total of 98,349 cases were registered with the police nationwide as crimes and atrocities against scheduled castes. Of these, 38,483 were registered under the Atrocities Act. A further 1,660 were for murder, 2,814 for rape, and 13,671 for hurt." These are but the recorded crimes against the Dalits. But the Human Rights Watch rightly observes that the actual number of the abuses against the dignity and protection to the personhood of the Dalits will be presumably much higher than these registered cases. It is due to the powerlessness of the Dalits and the callousness of the administrative machinery of the government.

E. Zelliot observes as follows: "Untouchability remained firmly ingrained in spite of sporadic reformatory measures taken from time to time. The problem found much needed attention in the course of the freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. He found it against human dignity. It is an excrescence in Hinduism. It is 'a blot on Hinduism' and 'a sin against God and man'. This drag on Hinduism constituted a poison, a snake, a canker, a hydra headed monster, device of satan, a hideous truth." While commenting on the approach on Gandhi, N. Prasad says that he "convinced the orthodox Hindus that there was no sanction in the *shastras* for this inhuman social practice. He wanted to bring an attitudinal change among the caste Hindus by creating guilt consciousness in them as they had been ill-treating their brethren for centuries. This is an ingenious way he wanted to bring about social change without disturbing social harmony." Critiquing the co-option of the Dalits into the fold of casteist society through minor incentives, Ambedkar observe that "...buying, benumbing and drawing the claws of the opposition of the untouchables which [Gandhi] knows is the only force which will disrupt the caste system and will establish real democracy in India". The co-option of the Dalits into the casteist society takes place by the subtle process of benumbing their consciousness and purchasing their loyalty by way of distributing 'petty gifts to petty untouchable'.

When they are called as the Harijans (children of God) by the reformatory circles, they feel it as a condescending label with the overtone of mere lip-service; and when tabled as the 'Scheduled Castes' (SC) by the administrative circles, they find it as an empty slogan with bureaucratic indifference. And as a revolt against every type of names given to them by others, a vast majority of these oppressed people, having reached a new level of political awareness, prefer to call themselves as 'Dalits', irrespective of various linguistic affiliations or sub-caste groups, across the sub-continent. They are systematically (1) dehumanised through exclusion, (2) denied through exploitation, and (3) defaced through elimination.

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### 3.3 DEHUMANIZATION THROUGH EXCLUSION

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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. 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). 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.

### **Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) Explain the social location of the Dalits.

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2) Write on the process of dehumanization of Dalits through exclusion.

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## **3.4 DENIAL THROUGH EXPLOITATION**

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. In fact, the Dalit scavengers are exposed to serious health hazards and treated with callousness by the administrative bodies of the government (cf. “Enslaved by Tradition: The Manual Scavengers of Vidisha”, *The Hindu*, 16, December 2010).

Dalits are excluded from the fabric of the Indian society through the system of religious purity and pollution. Equal status in social relations and worship, ownership

of property and decision- making on the political plane is denied. In other words, they are dismembered from the society and delimited from access to the divine. This, in short, is an outright denial of due share in the resources of life, human dignity, respectability in social life and sometimes even the right to exist.

Though the state has the Constitutional Rights to make the special provisions for the SCs and STs, reservation has not been made applicable to the Judiciary, Private Sector, the Defence Department (the country's largest employer), certain minority institutions etc. (cf. J. Desrochers, "Broken Promises & Dalits Betrayed", *Integral Liberation* 4- March 2000). His brief presentation sums up the This Black Paper (*Broken Promises & Dalits Betrayed*- Secundrabad: NCDHR, 1999) is a collective expression of Dalit rights and a critique of the Indian state for failing to adequately fulfil these rights in the areas of livelihood, education, land and labour, life and security, reservation and employment, and male-female equity.

Despite the Special Recruitment Drive of 1996-1997, a large number and percentage of backlog vacancies remain in the Central Government, the Banks and the Public Sector. To assess how the high positions in the bureaucracy are out of the reach of the Dalits and how the menial jobs are readily allotted to them (cf. National SC/ ST Commission Report 1996-1997).

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

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

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.

### 3.5 DEFACEMENT THROUGH ELIMINATION

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".

The Dalit reality is a painful existence. In India Dalits are social outcasts, economically impoverished, politically powerless, and as a corollary to these, they are skilfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility,



subservience, hopelessness, despair and abasement. It is slavery and a social death. When they are forced to live under such nightmares in slums and 'cheris', when their daily experience tells us that almost nowhere in society are they respected and wanted, nowhere are they granted the ordinary dignity, deference and courtesy accorded to other human beings, we begin to doubt our own inner worth and dignity. They begin to doubt and question whether they and their families really merit no respect from the caste people than we receive today. These nagging doubts and a deep sense of no-people and no-place have sown seeds of a pernicious self-and-group hatred and self pity.

And consequently their social mobility towards other non-traditional occupations, housing facility, access to education and sharing of power is not invisible. But in comparison with the caste people it is marginally moderate. Where some individual mobility is possible, the burden of caste may weigh more heavily on the lower-than on the upper-caste person. In certain contexts, caste might matter more for Harijan than for Brahmin intellectuals as race seems to do more for black than for white intellectuals in the United States.

In the face of these atrocities, whenever Dalits sought to assert their rights, there was a backlash from the feudal lords resulting in mass killings, gang rapes, looting and arsoning in view of teaching them a lesson to accept oppression. Even the oppressed lots among the non-Brahmin sectors (Backward Castes-BCs) isolate the Dalits in fighting their common enemy i.e., the casteist hegemony. Ambedkar says as follows: "It is obvious that these three classes [Dalits, Shudras, and Tribals] are naturally allies. There is every ground for them to combine for the destruction of the Hindu social order. But they have not come together....the result is that there is nobody to join the untouchable in his struggle. He is completely isolated. Not only is he isolated he is opposed by the very classes who ought to be his natural allies."

The Dalits are condemned to engage themselves in religiously polluting and socially demeaning occupations i.e., scavenging, handling the dead bodies of the humans and the animals and human refuse, besides the hard physical labour required in agriculture, laying roads or building houses. The maximum labour is extracted from the ill-fed bodies of the Dalits for a minimum wage. Identification of the persons of Dalits with the means of the labour and especially with the socio-cultural "pollution" attached to them, deface the Dalits as human beings. K.R. Narayanan, even as the President of India who happened to be a Dalit, has not escaped the curse of being labelled as "An Untouchable" during his official visit to a foreign state as appeared in the headlines of *Le Figaro*, a renowned daily in France. Of course the editor-in-chief tendered his apology for having portrayed the state guest from India as "an Untouchable" (cf. "French Editor Apologises to Narayanan", *The Hindu*- Chennai, April 20, 2000).

All the same, one cannot easily set aside the fixation even of the foreign press persons in associating the Dalits with untouchability as heard or learnt from their Indian counterparts. If this is the defacement encountered by the learned statesman of the stature of K.R.Narayanan as the Head of the State in India, one can imagine the severity of the humiliation faced by the poor and illiterate Dalit labourers in the Indian society. The state of these enslaved Dalits condemned to natal alienation and social death can be outlined as follows: "The slave is violently uprooted from his milieu. He is desocialized and depersonalized. This process of social negation constitutes the first, essentially external, phase of enslavement. The next phase involves the introduction of the slave into the community of his master, but involves the paradox of introducing him as a nonbeing."

## Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) Elucidate the denial of due space for Dalits through exploitative practices.

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- 2) Explain the process of defacement of the Dalits in the caste-ridden society.

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## 3.6 TOWARDS AN ADEQUATE RESPONSE

By and large, in public discourses, most of the upper caste people deny any discrimination of Dalits. They tend to remain evasive even when pointedly queried about the existence of caste discrimination. But in the face of legitimate Dalit attempts to demand right wages, to own lands, to build houses or to independently exercise their franchise as per their own choice, the upper caste people cause obstructions to them even to the extent of burning their properties and of attacking them with lethal weapons. The typical evasive approach, callous attitude and antagonistic disposition of the upper caste towards the Dalits are blatantly seen in the government machinery also.

According to the Indian Constitution the practice of “Untouchability” in any form is a forbidden offence and a punishable crime. Also the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 is further geared towards annihilation of untouchability and integration of the Dalits into the main stream of the society. Apart from these provisions, the SC/ST prevention of Atrocities Act 1989 was brought into force to check atrocities against the Dalits. And hence there have been certain landmark judgements in the law courts upholding the rights of the Dalits afflicted by the social system of casteism and prejudices based on untouchability.

But in actuality, Dalits are on the receiving end during the atrocious encounters, in spite of the protection guaranteed by these legal provisions. After the National Public Hearing on the several cases of the atrocities against Dalits, the panel of independent nine-member jury has sharply criticised the dubious role of the State and the inadequacy of the Judiciary as follows: “the State is continuing to perpetuate violence against the Dalits; colluding with the dominant castes in several areas in all the states and it fails to implement all the relevant laws and rules. The judiciary has not responded to the violation of the rights of Dalits with adequate sensitivity and urgency.”

With regard to the Dalit situation in India, one is forced to conclude with pain and anguish that “Dalit beating is a way of life here”. K.R. Narayan, the former President of India records his regrets on how the Constitutional provisions to promote the Dalits are made to be ineffective in the following manner:

“Untouchability has been abolished by law but shades of it remain in the ingrained attitudes nurtured by the caste system. Though the provisions of reservation in educational institutions and public services flow from our constitution, they remain unfulfilled through bureaucratic and administrative deformation or by narrow interpretations of these provisions.”

Despite the onslaught of their humanity and undergoing the ordeal of dehumanisation due to caste hegemony, the Dalits have been all along refusing to be cowed down by the Brahminic onslaught of their humanity. “They have established their lives on the solid foundations of resilience, inclusiveness, equality, justice, peaceful coexistence, liberty and community living.” Perhaps, that is why, there are manifestations of the stepped up Dalit self-assertion which in turn is sought to be silenced through the increase in number of the atrocities against them.

Over the years of their struggle the Dalit yearnings have realized that their attempts at ending the atrocities and claiming the jobs are in view of addressing the core issue of the abolition of the very caste system. They also realize that by playing the leading role they will be poised for gaining power and human dignity.

This realization among the Dalits was much articulated during the tenure of V.P.Singh as the Prime Minister of India during 1989-1991. This was the period which witnessed the organisation of the Dalits in alliance with the oppressed non-Brahmins (Backward Caste people) against the backdrop of the Mandal Commission recommendation. This process of the rise of consciousness takes place to various degrees by numerous Dalit movements and organisations across the sub-continent of India. The operative dynamics behind these movements are varied at different levels. The alienation and disintegration of the Dalit identity take place at all levels: physical, psychological, cultural, moral, social, political, economic and spiritual. But the deep-seated hope within the battered consciousness of the Dalits seeks to undo the atrocities meted out to them down the centuries. And hence, Dalits constantly undergoing the humiliation in the hands of casteist hierarchy and hegemony, are said to have ‘a contradictory consciousness’: “one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one superficially explicit and verbal, which he has inherited from the past and critically absorbed.” This is quite much reflected not only in their day to day lives but also in their efforts to express their voice of dissent in order to revolt against the very caste system. Dalit expressions of protest against the imposed caste consciousness could be observed in their life spectrum with wide ranges from mild forms of opposition up to articulate forms of subversion. The following three forms are some of their direct or indirect ways of communicating their legitimate wrath against their oppression.

- (1) By way of imitating the behaviour and the socio-cultural practices of the so-called caste people, stepping up ostentation in celebrations or dissociating themselves, like the caste people, from those Dalits still in the lower level of access to economic resources and educational opportunities.
- (2) By way of avoiding immediate conflicts or postponing open confrontation, migrating to another locality, opting for conversion to another religion, defecting to another political party or keeping vigilance over the execution of the reservation policy, they work out ways and means of mildly opposing the effects of the caste-system.
- (3) Being proud of their Dalit identity, they assert themselves by occupying lands and other opportunities in life. Discovering their cultural roots, heritage and their liberative potentials, they do not shy away from manifestly celebrating



them. All these efforts seem to openly defy and dismiss those systems that promote caste consciousness and to demand self-rule by disobeying the norms imposed by caste system.

With regard to the expression of self-identity and self-assertion of the Dalits, one cannot expect uniformity. Because, Dalit culture is an acquired and constructed system of collective self-representation, communicated by means of multivalent symbols held together in a loosely organised pattern, which have expressive, directive, resistive and affective functions for a human community.

At the symbolic level, there is a wide spectrum of Dalit responses to their oppression with the process of Sanskritisation on one extreme and of an outright de-Hinduisation on the other. At the secular level, the great personality of Ambedkar seems to have captured the collective Dalit imagination as their liberative symbol especially in the recent past. And further, the native cultural expressions of Dalits like Parayattam (dance with drums), which has been associated only with funeral and hence dismissed as inauspicious by the elite in the casteist society, is now acclaimed by Dalits as the enthusing mode of celebration of life during their gatherings or festivals. Sanskritisation is “the process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, ‘twice born’ caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community”. This is how Dalits tend to handle their own symbolic world with the spirit of an upsurge of self-assertion as against the elitist expectation of uncritical assimilation of their casteist values.

At the social level, the Dalit oppression and Dalit self-assertion could be said to be at war with each other. Perhaps, that is why, in contemporary India, one comes across the phenomenon of increasing atrocities unleashed against the Dalits by the anti-Dalit caste groups seems to be prevalent. This conflict-ridden situation is attributable to the stratified caste structure having come under strain because of the increasing assertiveness of the traditionally oppressed sections, the growing tendency of the political class to play upon the caste equations for partisan ends has inevitably resulted in the sharpening of the caste divide.

This seems to be perceptively recognised in the Presidential Address of K.R.Narayanan to the Nation during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Republic Day (1997) of India. He has rightly diagnosed some of the reasons for the contemporary social unrest. “Many a social upheaval can be traced to the neglect of the lowest tier of society, whose discontent moves towards the path of violence. Dalits and tribals are the worst affected by this.”

There have been spirited campaigns against caste system and untouchability across the country. The nine-member jury engaged in the National Public Hearing on several cases of atrocities against Dalits insists that “the National Human Rights Commission and the international community should recognise that caste, as an institution itself, is a source of violation of human rights. Therefore, it must be treated on a par with the existence of racism and apartheid.” The President of India, who happens to be a Dalit, also emphasises that the Dalit Rights are part of the issues related to Human Rights, in the following words: “It seems, in the social realm, some kind of counter-revolution is taking place in India. It is forgotten that these benefits have been provided not in the way of charity, but as human rights and as social justice to a section of society who constitute a big chunk of our population, and who actually contribute to our agriculture, industry and services

as landless labourers, factory and municipal workers. These are the signs that our privileged classes are getting tired of the affirmative action provided by constitutional provisions.”

The Dalit situation in India could be portrayed in the words of K.R. Narayanan as follows: “Self-regarding purity and righteousness ignoring others has been bane of our culture. It has created the gulf in our society between people even with regard to the basic needs and fundamental rights”. But the Dalits are not prepared to remain as mute spectators of their being dehumanised, denied and defaced. With their awakened consciousness, they assert that nothing short of total destruction of caste system will ensure the restoration of their humanity. In consonance with this spirit, the Charter of Dalit Human Rights, while envisioning the empowerment of Dalits, proclaims its mode of proceeding in the following manner:

Whereas Dalits in India have the capacity to transform our pains and struggles into power, our efforts are:

- to establish our lost Humanity, Dignity and Security
- to establish ourselves as daughters and sons of this soil, queens and Kings of this soil, rulers of this soil since this is our soil
- to assert ourselves as a people, claiming that it is our Earth, an earth that is Dalit in character
- to assert our aspirations for self-governance with Dalit leadership to change power equations in economic, cultural and political positions.

While being the silent victim of the casteist hegemony, Dalits undergo the suffering due to segregation and alienation; and further while revolting against it, they undergo the suffering due to repression and elimination. To be a Dalit or to refuse to be a Dalit is to suffer. To become a human being on a par with others from being a Dalit is to suffer. And hence defining ‘Dalit suffering’ might be a difficult task. But recognising it from the ground reality of the Dalit world might not be a difficult task.. Even while browsing through the mass of concrete data on Dalit suffering, the discourses of the Dalit informants’ subjective understanding of ‘their’ experience is a quite heart-rending. Irrespective of these discourses, one could even surmise that suffering could come through loss of property, loss of persons, through illness, violence and fear. And hence the objective existence of exploitation, exclusion, elimination thrust upon the Dalits cannot but unsettle the minds and the hearts of even the casual spectators with regard to Dalit suffering.

And Dalit suffering is not a discourse dwelling upon the problem of evil in general terms with abstract concepts. It is not meant to be an agenda for discussion in those intellectual circles with an attitude of absolute indifference claiming to be objective in approach. Dalitness is the ‘problem of evil’ imposed upon the Dalits by their co-humans. Because they are reduced to be lesser humans, non-persons or non-people, it is the problem of life and death for the flesh-and-blood persons of Dalits. They suffer and they have to suffer, because they are forced to struggle for identity, dignity and full humanity. And in this struggle, what the Dalits encounter, very often, is the experience of despair and dejection from the repeatedly crushed hopes of their emancipation. Their incessant attempts to draw the curtain on the tragic drama of their dehumanisation often seem to end up with defeat and depression. And consequently the Dalit suffering poses an existential and cognitive problem of meaninglessness.

This situation of Dalit suffering has to be adequately responded to both by the Dalits as sufferers and by others too with a sense of human solidarity with them. Such an exercise of responsibly handling of the problems of Dalit suffering might serve them to cope with the demands of their on-going struggle towards human dignity and emancipation.

In this background, as responsible co-humans with the Dalits, the task we assign for ourselves, is to create a conducive atmosphere for realizing integral Dalit liberation. In our opinion, this can be achieved by way of sharpening the conflict between the Dalit oppression and Dalit assertion and of consciously ushering in the stepped up efforts along the line of Dalit revolt. In this process the liberative potentials on the plane of religio-cultural realm, play a significant role in evolving a faith-vision to cope with the demands of on-going Dalit struggle. In the backdrop of the faith-vision, the Dalit perception of their own alienation and social death on the one hand, and their assertion and revolt against them, on the other, will be further sharpened.

- What is the meaning and the role of suffering imposed upon the Dalits when they undergo the experience of segregation and alienation from other human beings?
- How should one understand those types of suffering as the result of their legitimate self-assertion and revolt against the dehumanising social death caused by caste-oppression?
- Can Dalit suffering produce hope?
- While joining hands with the Dalits, how can others seek to strengthen and enable them to encounter these experiences of suffering and pain in their on-going struggle?
- How could the agony and pain of undergoing the suffering-both due to unjust oppression and the righteous revolt- be transformed into liberative impetus to persevere in and keep up their Dalit struggle towards liberation?

### **Check Your Progress III**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What are the Dalits expressions of self-assertion?

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2) Reflect on the problem of suffering undergone by the Dalits.

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### 3.7 LET US SUM UP

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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, in short, is an outright denial of due share in the resources of life, human dignity, respectability in social life and sometimes even the right to exist. The Dalits are condemned to engage themselves in religiously polluting and socially demeaning occupations i.e., scavenging, handling the dead bodies of the humans and the animals and human refuse, besides the hard physical labour required in agriculture, laying roads or building houses. Dalit suffering is the 'problem of evil' imposed upon the Dalits by their co-humans. And in this struggle, what the Dalits encounter, very often, is the experience of despair and dejection from the repeatedly crushed hopes of their emancipation. In spite of this atrocious culture of casteism, they are hopefully asserting that a casteless society is possibly and positively created.

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### 3.8 KEY WORDS

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<b>DEHUMANIZATION THROUGH EXCLUSION</b>	:	the rejection of the human dignity of the dalits as unwanted creatures for the human society
<b>DENIAL THROUGH EXPLOITATION</b>	:	the extraction of labour from the dalits in the menial jobs while not allotting the due wages
<b>DEFACEMENT THROUGH ELIMINATION</b>	:	the imposition of menial jobs and relegating the dalits as permanently polluted

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### 3.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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