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Dalit Suicide an Emerging Social Problem in India

Avanish Bhai Patel and Sumant Kumar

Abstract

There are various kinds of discrimination is prevailing in Indian Society. India is practising discrimination against the lower caste for many centuries. But in contemporary Indian Society, caste-based discrimination is becoming a matter of grave concern for committing suicide. Caste-based discrimination is surviving in Indian society. In many cases of caste discrimination, Dalits were persecuted by the upper caste of Indian society for demanding education, employment, and equal social status. Every year several Dalits were committing suicide due to atrocities and discrimination. The present study will understand the nature of suicide among Dalits due to social discrimination and explores the factors affecting Dalit suicide. The data on suicide have been collected from 2011 to 2021 through various newspapers, magazines, journals and articles.

Keywords: dalit suicide, document analysis, social identity theory, India

1. Introduction

The identity of the Dalit community as oppressed or untouchable was identified in the early Vedic Period (c. 1500 – c. 500 BCE). Manu¹ in his Varna system (Manusmriti) categorises the Hindu community in ‘Chaturvarnya’ that divided the society into four distinct classes—Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (soldiers), Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (menials).² The division of the society in India evaluated the principle of inequality that was legal and penal. The bottom position of the Shudras community identified as innumerable ignominies in the society, until the fifth division ‘Varna’ of the Untouchables came to the fore. The existence of the division of these classes in contemporary India is continuing due to abomination towards the Dalits community. The identity of an individual in rural India is still classified based on their caste. Due to all these factors, Dalit in India is considered as an oppressed or discriminated class and untouchable. Discrimination maintained by the upper caste in the society-outcast the Dalit community from the mainstream. Even in the rural villages, the Dalit community were not allowed to settle with other class. From ancient times they are not allowed to do equal work which other people do. Due to economically and socially vulnerable they follow the order whatever upper caste people assign to them. Division of discrimination created based on work and caste in ancient India is still surviving in Indian society.

¹ Manu, in the mythology of India, the first man, and the legendary author of an important Sanskrit law code, the Manu-smriti (Laws of Manu).

² Categorization of Hindu Community is defined under the book ‘Who Were the Shudras?; see in reference for more details [1].

Consequently, Dalits are committing suicide in contemporary times due to long history of caste discrimination in social and political institutions.

Dalit suicide as a social problem is a relatively new phenomenon in contemporary Indian society. Many studies [2–7] have been conducted over the years on student suicides that are associated with the Dalit community. According to the findings of these studies, Dalit students commit suicide as a result of social discrimination and a lack of opportunities in various institutions. We can think of a few students such as Rohith Vemula (2016), Muthukrishnan, (2017), Anitha (2017) and Payal Tadvii (2019) who have committed suicide as a result of social discrimination. These suicide cases have brought to light the worst form of Indian caste system that is still prevalent in democratic Indian society today. The number of Dalit suicides reported here is not representative of the overall trend of Dalit suicide. Dalits are being harassed everywhere in Indian society today, and this is a growing problem. They are sometimes harassed because of their social standing, and they are sometimes denied opportunities because of their social standing. They are so traumatised by all of the tortures and helpless take their own lives as suicide.

Dalits from Indian society are being increasingly committing suicide in a variety of settings, including educational institutions, the medical profession, and other occupations. Women from the Dalit community have also committed suicide in large numbers as a result of sexual harassment, as has been documented in numerous cases. Some of these Dalit suicide cases have been reported in leading Indian newspapers and can be described in detail. A Dalit doctor committed suicide in a well-known Delhi hospital as a result of his social status being overlooked by the people in his department, according to reports [8]. In a similar vein, in a district of Uttar Pradesh, a village-level officer was humiliated in the name of his caste, and after being insulted, he committed suicide [9]. In addition to this, in another instance, a Dalit girl who had been raped was not reported to the police station, and as a result, she committed suicide as a result of the mental trauma she had experienced [10].

1.1 Theoretical framework of Dalit identity and suicide

The term “social identity theory,” coined in the 1970s by social psychologists Henry Tajfel [11], refers to the conditions in which the social identity of an individual takes precedence over one’s personal identity. The concept of social identity was introduced through ‘social identity theory as a behaviour that can be used to understand the behaviour of various groups living within a society. Social identity theory [12] explains minimal intergroup bias as well as a broader statement of how social identity is related to relationships between real-world groups. Tajfel [13] suggested that it was the groups that people were associated with (e.g. social class and family) that significantly contributed to people’s self-esteem and pride. Groups form the concept of social identity, provide us importance and feeling of the social world. Additionally, he asserted that in-group (Upper Caste) of society (i.e. those of higher socioeconomic status) can persecute the out-group (i.e. those of lower socioeconomic status or Dalits) to maintain their social standing. A process of social categorization, social identification, and social comparison can differentiate groups from each other, creating what is known as an “out-group.” The other group known as “in-group,” individuals can create similarities between themselves and members of their group. The central hypothesis of social identity is that “group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their social status.” This theory states that there are three different processes, namely social categorisation, social comparison, and social identification, that act to promote the formation of a person or a group towards negative social identity when considering others within the out-group. This is an example of someone belonging

to upper caste people who discriminate against lower caste people based on their poor social, economic, and political status. Dalits due to their low status in society are defined and identified as marginalised, socially excluded, or untouchable. Due to all these social statuses, they are distinguished from other groups.

As an out-group, Dalits (a derogatory term for India's low caste Hindu people) experience various forms of discrimination from within society by upper caste people. Due to this discrimination, negative emotions, feelings of hatred and resentment, fuel their despair, leading to many cases of suicides among Dalits in India. Based on the social identity theory this paper further laid the discussion within the three theoretical division explained by Tajfel [11] why and how the social identity processes of the Dalits lead to their segregation from the rest of society under social categorisation, social comparison, and social identification. We can understand about Dalit suicide based on theoretical framework of social identity theory and status frustration theory through following diagram (Figure 1).

To know why the society was stratified because upper-caste already decided about who will get what, and how. From the sociological point of view, the division is made in the society according to rank, caste and class to explain what they deserve. Social stratification is interconnected with a form of inequality, that endure after-effects on the people who live in the society and can experience it. The division is based on what power, status or economic resources they are availing in the society. Based on the division they also limit individual choice including freedom and equality. The analysis of the social Categorisation of Dalit in Indian society is to trace how social inequalities are continuing and surviving, over lifetimes and continuing for generations.

1.2 Social categorisation of Dalit

Social Categorisation is defined as the tendency to perceive individuals and groups as socially distinct. Dalit is designated as the lowest caste group within the Indian caste system. The caste system divides people into social groups (castes) where assignments of rights are determined by birth (born in which class), are fixed, and are hereditary. This leads to the categorisation in the employment-based on the job assigned to them. To prevent anyone from breaking away from the caste system, we have an inflexible system of social ostracism (a series of social and economic penalties) in place Kumar [14] argues that Dalits have been classified in various ways, including as people who are distinctive in the Hindu social order. Historical background of social exclusion through Varna hierarchy made by the

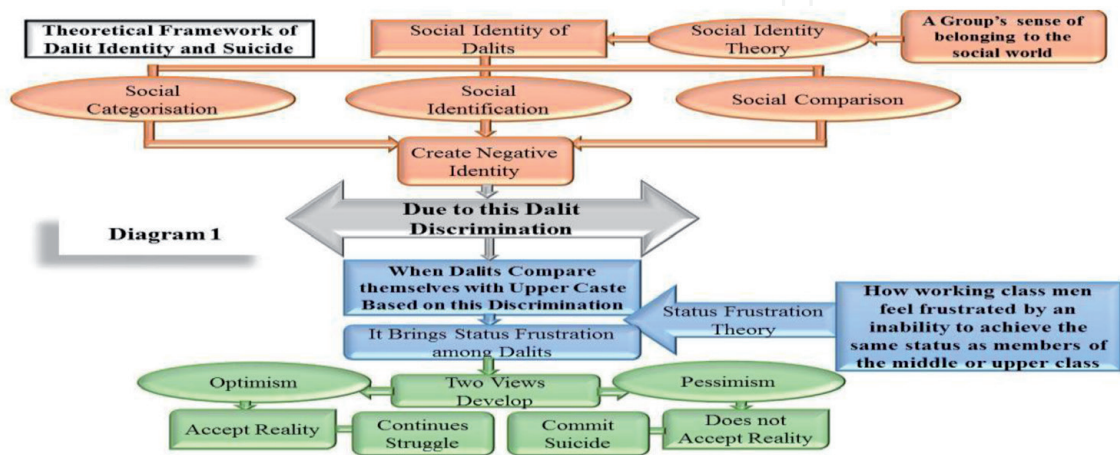


Figure 1.
Dalit suicide theoretical framework of social identity theory and status frustration theory.

upper caste in the Indian society. They divided the social group based on their birth and status to lower caste and that is unchangeable.

Dalit community due to social Categorisation facing various kinds of discrimination which leads to committing suicide. The suicides cases were more noticed due to violations and discrimination in Employment, Education, Health sector. However, few individuals who were with their optimistic approaches overcome all the obstacle to claiming social equality. But the obstacle increased once they want to claim better opportunity in employment, education, or health facilities.

1.3 Employment

The dividing line of 'haves' and 'have not's' in Indian society is not just based on economic but as well as for social factors. The congruence of deprivations only increases the disparity between the privileged class and the others. There is a real challenge in India for the Dalit community to the pursuit of equity in India. There are several suicides cases have been registered among Dalit participants as even after having good qualification and academic records they were not being selected for an academic post. For instance, a survey indicated that faculty belong to the lower caste/group (SC/ST) comprise only 3 percent of all the faculty at the Indian Institutes of Technology. There are 23 Indian Institutes of Technology in India in which 6,043 faculty are working but the contribution of the lower cast to the institution is only 149 faculty member [15]. This means merely 2.8 per cent of the faculty members come from the reserved categories. However, the employment reservation policy stipulates 7.5 per cent reservation for SC and it should be followed in all government appointments. In response to one RTI it revealed that in 2018 for the appointment in IIT and IIM³, 682 people applied from the SC and ST category of which just 16 were called for interview. An almost all the interview-based selection process are often under the control of upper-caste people, those still believe that how lower caste people will seat equally to them. Due to that most of the time in the appointment process, they make Dalit applicants ineligible.

Similarly, within the employment area, the Media sector is hugely affected with worse than the academic sector as Oxfam study reveals that "print and electronic are totally in the hands of upper-caste Hindus. Newslandry, a media watchdog, revealed that of 121 newsroom leadership positions across newspapers, digital media, magazines and TV channels, 106 are occupied by journalists from the upper castes", and no one is from Scheduled Caste (Dalits) or scheduled tribe (Tribals) [16]. A similar study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi with surveying 315 editors, found that not one of them belonged to a Scheduled Caste (SC) or scheduled tribe (ST) [17]. It is a very clear message from the media sector that "Indian media wants Dalit news but not Dalit reporters" [18]. Apart from the media sector, there are other public and private sector which also maintain same. The employment sector in India has also noticed discrimination with Dalits and lower caste people. Inequalities with Dalits people have contained several factors such as illiteracy, unemployment, and health issue, social and economic status. The rich are getting richer, and the poor getting poorer is highly visible in India. Oxfam in his report mentioned that Income inequality gets worse as India's top 1 percent bag 73% percent of the country's wealth [18].⁴ Report on economic inequality stated that between 2006 and 2015, workers incomes merely

³ Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) are Asia's top level academic institution in India.

⁴ Oxfam is a confederation of 19 independent charitable organisations focusing on the alleviation of global poverty, founded in 1942 and led by Oxfam International.

rise by 2 percent a year while billionaire wealth rose almost six times faster [19]. Most of the labour class or workers class belongs to SC/ST or other backward communities, and they still lack basic adequate facilities such as; food, shelter, clothing, sanitation, health care, and schools for their children are major such issues. In the year 2019 itself reported 1,39,123 suicides in India, the suicide ratio increased by 3.4 percent compared to the year 2018. In which 23.4 percent of suicides contribute to the daily wages workers, mostly from the Dalit community.

1.4 Education

In 2019 the National Commission for Scheduled Castes Member Ms. Swaraj⁵ stated that even after appointment lower caste people and Scheduled Tribes and even Other Backwards Class people “faced discrimination and mental harassment” at IIT and IIM. Similar activity was noticed in the admission process of Dalit students as data provided by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) to the Rajya Sabha mentioned that “more than 2,400 students have dropped out from the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) in just two years”, out of these, 371 were from the Scheduled Caste (Dalits) [20]. Socialist thinker Rammanohar Lohia, who even argued that “high-caste, wealth, and knowledge of English are the three requisites, with anyone possessing two of these belonging to the ruling class” [21]. To analyse this statement we can see that upper-caste monopoly is still clearly visible in of educational sector. Recently, a protest in Jawaharlal Nehru University was made against the fees hike because in recent years several fold fee hikes implemented in all education sectors which mostly affected the lower-income Dalits community, people such as farmer, a rickshaw puller, vegetable vendor, daily wages workers, contract labourer, etc. It observed that education will eradicate inequality in Indian society but due to unaffordable education, but it is not an easy task for the economically weaker Dalits community to achieve it.

1.5 Health

In the survey conducted by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) on the status of Dalit women, which indicates that 70.4% had problems accessing health care. NFHS report in 2018 mentioned that “the average age when Dalit women die is 39.5, as against 54.1 for an upper-caste woman. In the continuity, it also stated that one in four Dalit women aged from 15 to 49 is undernourished, as per their Body Mass Index. Amongst upper-caste women, the ratio is one undernourished woman for every six” [22]. She also expressed that women from the Dalit community are lingering from most of the health policies and health care and due to that, they are dying at a younger age [22]. The fact is that the ‘untouchable’ word is labelled with Dalit people means that they have to face discrimination. A survey conducted on the Dalits community found that around 21.3 percent of the lower caste were denied to get entry to health centres. The survey also revealed that healthcare workers also denied to facilitates health services to 65 percent of Dalit communities. Due to that most of the Dalits are not having a choice but to go without healthcare [23].

1.6 Food

As per Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre around “22 percent of sanitation workers, manual scavengers and waste pickers did not have the 12-digit, biometric national identification number and 33% did not possess ration cards to get subsidized food

⁵ Ms. Swaraj is Federation of All IITs SC ST Employees Association.

through the public distribution system” [22]. Due to that their social and economic status continues degrading in the Indian society they were outcasted. For instance, a 13-year-old Dalit girl committed suicide after starving for two days in Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh [24]. A Similar case of starving to commit suicide was noticed in Bundelkhand District of Madhya Pradesh in which 75 Year Sukhya hang himself due to not getting food and a Dalit farmer 62-year-old Samaydin Paswan hang himself due to poverty [25]. Locals told that he was not eaten anything for two-three days due to his financial condition gone very bad. However, it was not officially confirmed [26].

1.7 Social identification of Dalits

Social identification relates to the concept that people generally do not see the social status in the society and detached from it. In that situation, they compare their situation from the other upper caste and asked the question to himself “who am I”, “what are my status in the society” and they also relate or compare their status to other individuals and groups around them. In its most extreme form, the caste system manifests itself as untouchability, which is a pejorative for Dalits, who are referred to as “oppressed” “broken” or “crushed” in the extreme to the point of losing their original identity [3, 27]. Those who fall outside the caste system are considered as “impure”, “polluted” and “untouchable”, considered being inferior human beings. These labelled statuses on the lower group isolated them from the other upper caste group. Mahatma Gandhi renamed the untouchable Dalit as ‘Harijans’ means children of God. However, it did not provide equal status in Indian society.

The term “untouchables” is often used to refer to people who are forcibly assigned to do the most undesirable and unpleasant jobs, such as manual scavenging, clean human excreta, cleaning carcass of animals from the city. Due to the continuity of their engagement in all these dirty and polluted work, neither their economic conditions improved nor their social status. In addition, the polluted work forced to bear additional stigma in the society [3]. Data collected based on a survey conducted in India by the Gates Foundation found that “sanitation and cleaning work together contributes the employment of 5 million people, of which 90% belong to the lower Dalit sub-castes, on sanitation workers across India in 2017 [28].

Dalits since ancient India was economically marginalised as they were not allowed to go to school, temple, festival, and clinics. Bros have stated that “those who have long suffered from discrimination, may also suffer from a diminished self-image” [29]. Similarly, she also supported that the continuity of discrimination can reshape their self-perception, expectations, behaviour, and preferences within their arena. Due to self-discrimination and diminished self-image within social identity, they react to any collective action against the oppressor. Some individual, due to their self-dignity and self-image cannot tolerate the discrimination and commit suicide. For instance, an incident was reported in the Gaya District of Bihar where the upper caste youth abducted the Dalit girl who was coming from a birthday party. After the incident, the girl hangs herself to protect self-esteem [30].

Dalit suicides case is increasing among educated individuals. Discrimination towards Dalit people is inherent in every sector, school, colleges, University, Institution, Business, etc. Dr. Payal Tadvai a Dalit student was pursuing MD Gynaecology from BYL Nair Hospital in Mumbai. She committed suicide in 2019 due to their upper-caste senior colleagues allegedly harass with her casteist remarks. In a similar case, a 26-year-old Dalit student Rohith Vemula hanged himself in 2016 in the Hyderabad University, due to caste-based discrimination was alleged by the University administration [31]. All these practices banned by law in India, but it is

not hidden that the practice is still rampant in every States. To abolish caste-based discrimination, Indian is having several laws such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955, the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013. However, these laws were still not implemented successfully in India. Even India is having National Human Rights Commission, National Commission for SC & ST but these institutions are vulnerable to take actions against all cases of Dalits.

Neither the society nor the State is believing in the protection of the rights of Dalit people. Most of the violations against Dalit people are not considered a violation of human rights. Untouchability is restricted in The Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 [32] adopted in India. Under this it is mentioned that untouchability is strictly prohibited if Dalit eats with other members of the society, not to be maintained separate seating arrangements in schools and other places, not to be denied entering temples, tourist places, shops, or using common village paths, for accessing resources such as common wells, ponds. Society cannot boycott them to perform their belief and purchasing properties.

1.8 Social comparison of Dalit

In the world of social comparison, the way “people define the relative value or social standing of a particular group, and its members through the process of social comparison” [33]. Dalits in modern India are still facing constant social comparison from the upper caste because of social stratification. The various socio-economic, cultural, and structural discriminations and disempowerments, influence the identification of Dalits in Indian society to expand the notion of caste under lower castes [33]. The Dalits, who have suffered discrimination for generations and whose socioeconomic status is perpetually marginalised [34]. The socio-economic conditions of the people who are excluded (those with low levels of education, poor health, and a lower income) have not changed, despite some improvement [34]. People are unable to work up to par, so they are labelled Dalits (also known as the “oppressed” or “the disinherited”) [3].

We can understand the elements of the process of social identity theory mentioned above that the Dalit community have always been excluded from the mainstream of society. On one hand, in the changing times, our constitution talks about the social justice of the Dalit community and also brings them to the mainstream of society. On the other hand, the Dalit community still boycott by society and compelled to live an inhuman life. The majority of people who belong to the upper caste society see the Dalit community with very disgraced eyes and abuse them in common public places.

The upper-class society maintained all the higher post in every social and statutory institution in which they humiliate Dalit candidates if they appear for the selection process. Whenever they find an opportunity insult them in the name of their caste. Such inappropriate and discriminatory behaviour of upper caste people creates the negative identity of the Dalit community in society. When the Dalit community see that the upper caste people have a negative and discriminative attitude towards them, then they consider themselves outside of the mainstream of society. Albert Cohen in the social frustration theory stated that seeing inhuman behaviour from the society, individual feel frustrated which creates negative thought (1955). The same is happening within the Dalit community.

Cohen is concerned with “class values such as achievement, individuality, ambition, and delayed gratification”, which applies to both the upper and middle classes (1955). Cohen postulated that “the values expressed here stem directly from middle- and upper-class socialization, thus they dominate the American value system” [35]. Unfortunately, these values are difficult to obtain by working-class people, because

of the socio-economic environments that working-class people are socialised in [36]. Society's standards of expectation and its resulting standards of outcome have left the working class disappointed and disgruntled. From there, a variety of mental illnesses appear, ranging from the most basic types of neuroses and psychoses to more sophisticated conditions such as psychopathy and various mental illnesses [36, 37].

This paper brings the discussion what steps are taken by the Dalits who feel frustrated due to discrimination and negative identity created by the upper caste for them in the society under the status frustration theory of Albert Cohen. The social discrimination and negative identity imposed on the Dalit community by the upper caste divided into two ways, (1) optimistic views (2) pessimistic views. Dalit individuals with optimistic views continue to struggle and fight to get their social honour by changing their discrimination and negative identity with time and circumstances. They believe that their struggle will reform the society will gain their equal status in the mainstream of society. However, the pessimistic views create negative thought in their mind, and they get frustrated due to social discrimination and negative identity. Such people are not able to struggle with time and circumstances and they find their future is dark in the current social system. These Dalit people are so mentally hurt that their desire to live ends and they commit suicide.

2. Document analysis method

The present study has applied the document analysis method (which is a kind of content analysis) for the study of Dalit suicide in India. It aims to a systematic examination of printed and electronic document material such as books, newspapers, journal, article, and magazines [38]. "Document analysis necessitates the examination and interpretation of data to elicit meaning, gain comprehension, and develop scientific knowledge" ([39] cited by [38]). Researchers use a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis to identify the various words and concepts in a text, along with their meaning and relationships, and then make inferences about the text, the author(s), the audience, and even the time and culture in which the words were created [40, 41]. The author has decided to use this technique because the newspapers, magazines and other literature in India are the biggest and the best source of reporting on the problems of Dalits. The authors were able to easily gather data on Dalit suicide that occurred within a certain time using the method of document analysis. In nearly every instance, when there has been a Dalit suicide, the newspapers have not only reported on the possible reasons but also how Dalits are discriminated against because of their caste. The researchers used secondary data acquired from newspapers (both print and electronic) and magazines in India as the major source for this study. Secondary data for document analysis is gathered from Hindi language newspapers including Amar Ujala, Dainik Bhaskar, Dainik Jagran, and Jansatta, as well as English language publications like Hindustan Times, The Hindu and The Times of India.

Data has been collected from various states of India such as Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, and so on. Suicide cases of Dalit castes are widely publicised and highlighted in these regions, therefore it was imperative to study the current topic in these areas. According to the authors, the majority of the 50 reported cases of Dalit suicide were found in these regions. Each of these incidents of Dalit suicide has been divided into several groups, such as victims' age group (11–20 years, 21–30 years, 31–40 years, 41–50 years, and age unknown), gender (male and female), causes of Dalit suicide (social humiliation, fake cases of theft, sexual harassment, lack of basic needs and not available), and the occupation of the victim (doctor, student, farmer, officer,

journalist, labour and not available). This paper has collected all the information from various sources such as both print and electronic media, the author has applied the document analysis method for better understanding to explain the reason for Dalit suicide in India.

The data for this study was collected between 2015 and June 2021. The sample cases for the current study were gathered manually by reading each and every news section that was published on Dalit suicide and discrimination in the various newspapers and magazines that were referenced in the introduction. The researchers have identified the frequent terms used by Indian journalists to report such cases from offline publications, and these terms have been utilised to search for information on online platforms using the terms they have discovered. When looking for Dalit exploitation on the internet, look for terms such as barred, threat, entry, abuse, denial, stigma, attack, and discrimination [40]. The researchers then went through all of the search results and chose the cases where Dalits committed suicide as a result of social discrimination, which they then documented. The fundamental goal of employing this method in the current study is to gain an empirical understanding of the nature and pattern of Dalit suicide in Indian culture. Specifically, the researchers were interested in learning more about the effects of societal discrimination on the well-being of Dalit people and their communities. During the research period (from 2015 to June 2021), there were no alternative sources of empirical data available in India that could be used in the investigations, and collecting data through field visits was not feasible due to logistical constraints. This method of data collection was therefore deemed to be the most effective approach for collecting empirical data on the issue under investigation within the time period under consideration. This strategy enables the authors to conduct a scientific investigation on the Dalit suicide (observation, scientific view and fact examine) [40].

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Victims' sex

Table 1 shows that a total of 51 (63.75%) Dalit male has committed suicide as compared to 29 (36.25%) Dalit female has committed suicide. The study finds that most Dalit women have committed suicide due to sexual victimisation. There are few cases in which Dalit women have committed because of other reasons.

3.2 Cases of Dalit suicide in the last seven years

Figure 2 shows that the number of Dalit suicide cases has steadily increased over the last seven years, with an increase in the number of cases occurring every year. So far, the number of reported Dalit suicides has decreased only in the year 2018, with the highest number of 19 reported Dalit suicide cases occurring in the year 2020. Till May 2021, 9 Dalit suicide cases have been published in the print media.

Sex	Number of cases	Percentage
Male	51	63.75
Female	29	36.25
Total	80	

Table 1.
Victim's sex.

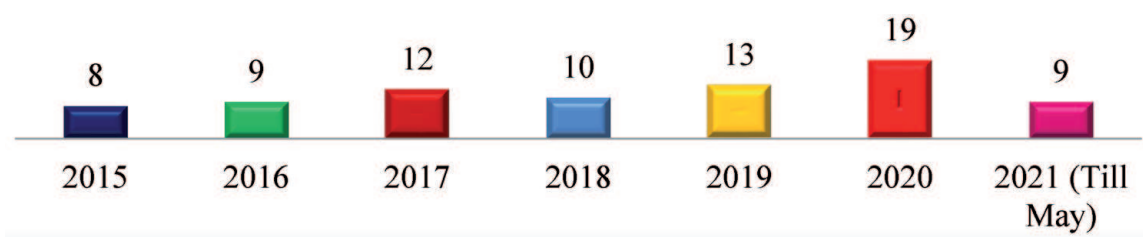


Figure 2.
Cases of Dalit suicide in last seven years.

Based on the number of Dalit suicides reported in the year 2020, it can be predicted that by the end of the year 2021, the number of Dalit suicides will have surpassed the number reported in the year 2020. These Dalit suicide cases have been collected from print media in 15 districts of 10 states across the country over the last seven years, and they represent a significant increase from the previous year.

3.3 Victim’s age group

Figure 3 shows that a maximum of 35.00% (28) Dalit people who belong to the age group of 21–30 years have committed suicide in India. While 27.50% (22) incidents of suicide belong to 31–40 year age group, 20.00% (16) incidents of suicide have been committed by age group of 11–20 years and 17.50% (14) individuals have committed suicide, who belong to the age group of 41–50 years or above age group.

If we add up the cases of Dalit suicide by age group of 21–30 years and 31–40 years, the number obtained is 50 (62.50%). This is a substantial percent-age that reveals that the rate of Dalit suicide is more between the age group of 21–40 years. It should be noted that a Dalit person between the ages of 21 and 40 years is the one who struggles to come into the mainstream of society and who makes an effort to do so. This is the age group of the Dalit community who keeps some hope in his mind and thinks that when he gets his success then he will do some work for the upliftment of his family and community. But everywhere in the society whether they are social institutions, educational institutions or political institutions, he has to face social discrimination everywhere. This results in his hopes being dashed and him being bound to commit suicide out of desperation and frustration.

3.4 Victims’ profession

According to **Figure 4**, the majority of suicides among Dalit students are the result of discrimination and humiliation in educational institutions. There have been 25 such cases discovered, representing 31.25% of the total. Dalits who are in the medical profession, have been involved in approximately 15.00% (12) of

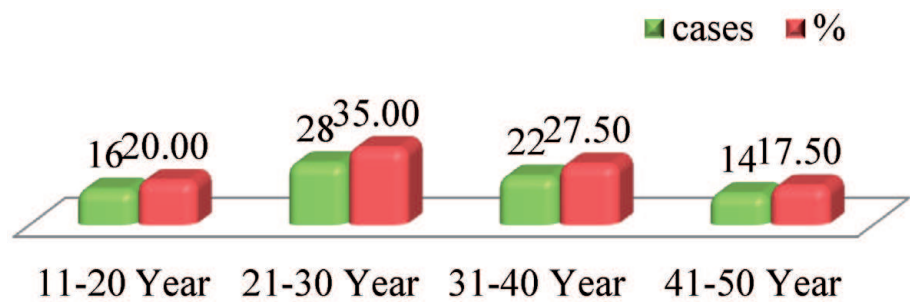


Figure 3.
Age group of Dalits during committing suicide.

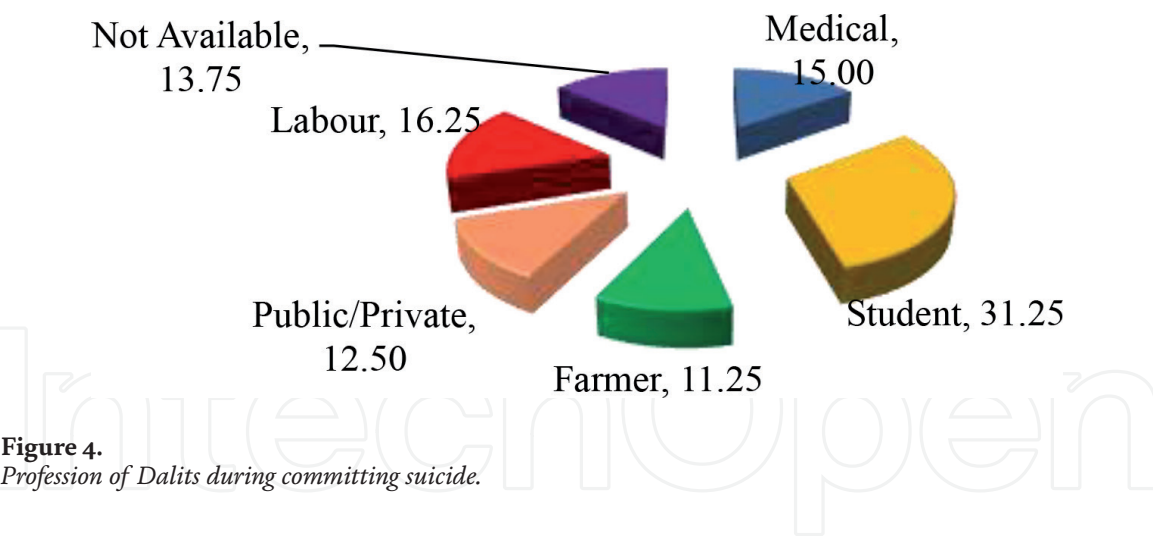


Figure 4.
Profession of Dalits during committing suicide.

the suicides committed, while Dalit labours have been involved in approximately 16.25% (13) of the suicides committed. Furthermore, according to the findings of the study, 12.50% (10) of Dalits who are engaged in the public/private sector and 11.25% (9) Dalit labourers committed suicide as a result of social discrimination and other causes. Furthermore, the study has indicated that in 13.75% (11) cases of Dalit suicide, the profession of Dalits is not available.

3.5 Causes of suicide

Figure 5 reveals that most of the Dalit suicide cases (42.50%) have been due to social humiliation, which is followed by several other factors that contribute to committing suicide, such as sexual harassment (23.75%), a lack of basic needs (12.50%), fake theft cases (6.25%), and no information on the causes of suicide in the remaining 15% of Dalit suicide cases.

It has been found from the analysis of newspapers that the people of the Dalit community face social humiliation daily. Sometimes they have to bear this humiliation in the name of their caste, and sometimes they have to suffer because of being ostracised from society. The people of the Dalit community have been facing this stigma of social humiliation for centuries. This stigma is prevalent in Indian society even after so many years of independence. The Government of India has made a provision for the right to equality in the fundamental rights of the Constitution to eradicate caste discrimination and the Constitution has also made a provision in the fundamental rights to eradicate social evils like untouchability. As a result of this, the Government of India did important work for the upliftment of the Dalit community by making a law to prevent untouchability in 1955 and 1989 made SC/ST Act to stop the atrocities against the Dalit community. But even after all these

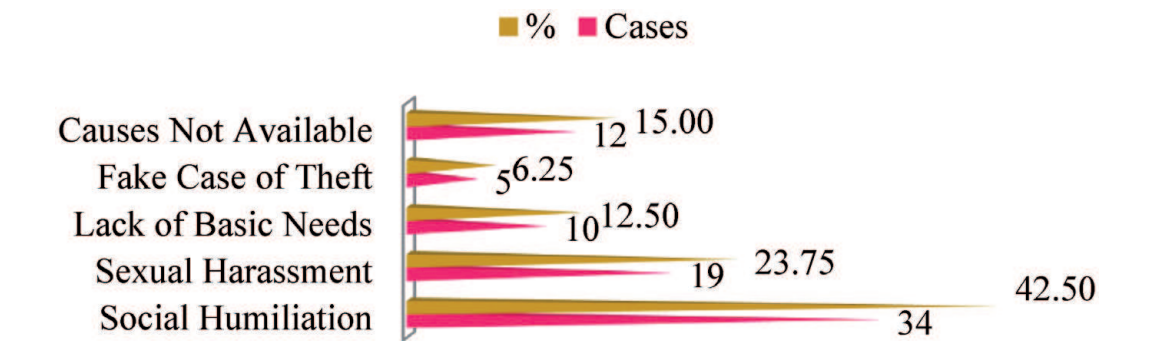


Figure 5.
Causes of Dalit suicide.

provisions, social discrimination is done against the people of the Dalit community. When the people of the Dalit community think that despite having these laws, social discrimination and atrocities are done against us and our community. Thinking of this they become sad and commit suicide. The study also found that there are many cases of sexual harassment with women from the Dalit community. When the women of the Dalit community raise their voice about the incident of sexual harassment with them, then their voice is not heard anywhere. Due to which they become so mentally weak due to sexual harassment and no hearing anywhere that became the to commit suicide.

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) yearly report mentioned that every year more than 1,00,000 people commit suicide in India. The causes of suicides mentioned in the report includes professional/career problems, isolation/distress, abuse, violence, family issues, mental disorders, alcohol addiction, financial loss, chronic pain, etc. However, there are several other causes are not included in the NCRB record which are still increasing in India such as Dalit Suicides, Migrant Workers suicides, etc. In the year of 2019, the rate was 10.4 percent with total number of 1,39,123 reported suicides cases in India. The ratio in the year of 2019 suicides was increased by 3.4 percent compare to the last year 2018 (1,34,516). The **Figure 6** illustrate that the various causes of suicides in the year 2019. The reason for the Dalit suicides is still not included in the NCRB data as the Dalit Suicides in India is not only happening with one reason but several.

The authors have analyses that the NCRB is not maintaining separate data of Dalit suicides in the yearly report due to several causes is the reason behind that. The author strongly believed that data on Other Causes and the Causes Not Know mentioned in the **Figure 6** comprise 21.4 percent of total suicides which includes the suicides cases against the Dalits people. Similarly, the causes of Dalits suicides also include Unemployment, Professional and Career Problem, Poverty, and Fall in Social Reputation which comprise 4.4 percent of total percentage. We cannot say that the all the reported cases include Dalit suicides only, but most of the suicides cases is with Dalit community only. The Dalit suicides is becoming an emerging issue in India. However, it is not getting attention due to government do not want highlight that still they are committing suicides due to discrimination and deprivation. The ratio with Students (7.4), Unemployed persons (10.1) and Daily wages earner (23.4) comprise 40.9 percent of suicides which can includes the economically poor Dalit community. A Survey conducted by the Centre for Study of Social

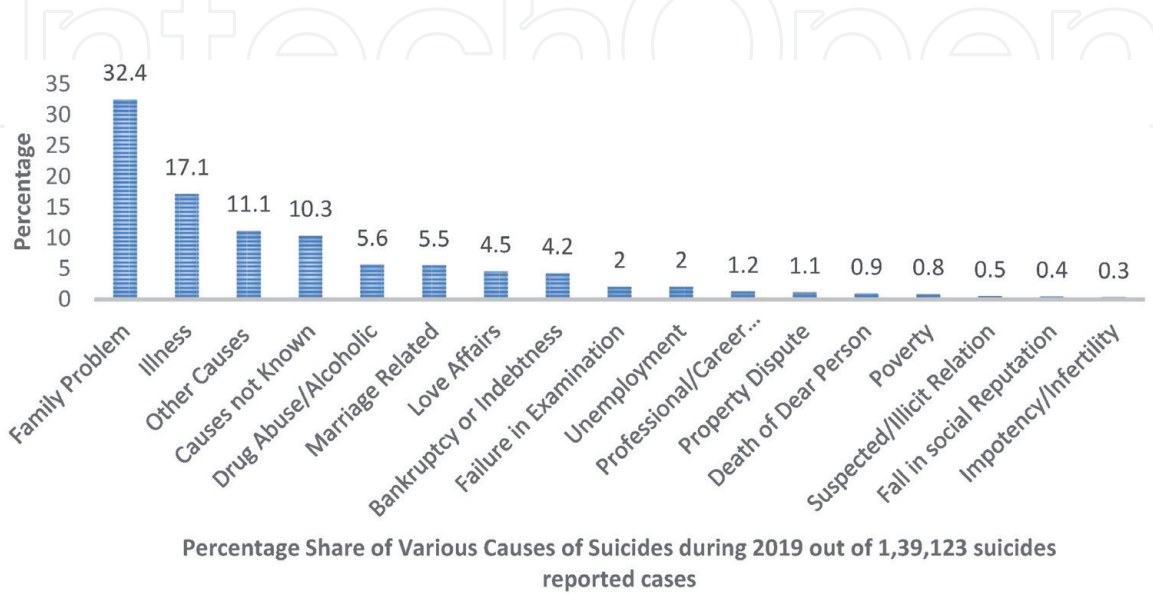


Figure 6.
Percentage share of various causes of suicides during 2019.

Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSEIP) sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in the State of Karnataka found that only 5.8 percent of rural Dalit households have government employees and about 7.7 percent families work in private sector ([42] October 28). The suicides cases with reason to the economic status includes 66.2 percent (92,083) those who are having annual income less than Rupees 1 Lakh. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)'s global multidimensional poverty index (MPI), 2018, every third (33 percent) Dalits in India are poor. If we compare the Dalit among upper caste in terms of poverty, only 15 percent of 'upper caste' people in India are poor [43]. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty mentioned in 2010 report that two thirds of Dalits population in India are poor [44]. While the suicide rates among the educational status includes 23.3 percent (32,427) victims with illiterate people 12.6 percent (17,588) and with graduate degree 3.7 percent (5,185) out of 1,39,123 victims. The literacy rate among the Dalits shows that 80 percent of man and 64 percent of female are literate in India. However, there is no definition of literacy in India, those can write their name they are considered as literate. Most of the literate elder Dalit poor people never went to school. The other such reason for highest illiteracy rate among Dalits is increasing dropout rate from school due to their poor economic status, discrimination in school, not allowed to enter in school etc., and due to socially outcast by the upper caste. In 2019 Dalit children dropout from school was 81 percent for 6–14 years age group and 60 percent in 15–19 age group and it increased among 20–24-year age group in higher education [45].

There are around 160 million Untouchables in India, numbers are uncertain, but are from reliable sources [46]. Due to the lack of social and economic opportunity provided by the Upper community to the Dalits community they are deprived of literacy, health, education, and equal status in Indian Society. Violation against Dalits rarely come in the news as they believe that Dalits, get what they deserve. The stigma of untouchability entails a distinctive form of suffering that pervades all aspects of everyday's life and encompasses the present, past and future. Many laws were implemented to uplift the status of the Dalit community but still failed to ensure social equality. Even though social reforms hardly able to change the perception/behaviour/mindset of the upper castes society to recognise the rights of the Dalit community. Several time violence against Dalit people gained international media attention but till date, there is no such international conventions or treaties has been introduced those specifically covered problems of Untouchability or Dalit community. Some individual Dalit people are changing their surname or converting to other religion to protect themselves from the atrocities. But even upper caste people targeted Dalits for changing their names and religion.

However, sometimes optimistic thought led to violent incidents with the Dalit individual. Many such incidents were noticed in which Dalits being targeted when they tried to act like a normal individual in society. Several beaten to death incidents were reported in India when Dalit individual wear sandals, ride a bike, climb on a horse during a wedding, doing inter-caste marriages, for entering in temples, for cooking and serving in school, or to sit on a chair in the presence of upper castes. Now, the Dalit beaten to death news is common in every news headlines. After being beaten for plucking leaves for goat, due to disappointment over the act 26-year-old Dharampal Diwakar Dalit youth committed suicide in Fatehpur District of Uttar Pradesh [47, 48]. Beaten for taking upper-caste surname, The Dalit youth Bharat Jadhav was beaten due to having a similar surname like upper caste, he said that "Due to the lockdown all the colleges are closed, and I had come to Sanand from Saurashtra to earn some money. But I didn't know that my habit of

keeping my surname and shirt buttons open would get me in trouble and I would have to quit my job” [49].

Sometimes those who survived to continue face humiliation from society which lead to committing suicide. Dalits face various types of humiliation and subjugation if they want to register their cases against the upper caste people in a police station or want to claim social equality. In many such cases when Dalit people have filled any complaints against the upper caste was not entertained by the police. Rather than taking their cases, they threaten Dalit people for their action, in many cases due to lack of support from the administration incident of suicides has occurred. There are several examples is there in which rape victims committed suicides due to their cases were not taken by the police officials or society neglected them. For instance, gang-raped victim 32-year Dalit woman commits suicide in Narsinghpur district of Madhya Pradesh due to the police did not register a case against the economically pool Dalit women for the last 3 days [43]. In a similar case gang-raped victim beg to police to register her case in Chitrakut district of Uttar Pradesh. But due to not file the case against the culprit, a 15-year-old girl hangs herself in the home. After those police started the investigation. Most of the cases happened due to upper caste police official has captured the higher post in the police station and they hardly bother about the lower caste cases due to pressure from the upper caste society [50]. Such as a case in Guna District of Madhya Pradesh, a Dalit farmer couple committed suicide due to police brutality. The police official was destroying the standing crops of the farmer to clear land during an anti-encroachment drive, when couple requested to stop them, police brutally beaten the couple with sticks and both Rajkumar Ahirwar (38) and his wife Savitri (35) in front of the police and their six children drank insecticide [51].

The status of Dalit women is worse in India, the Devdasi system⁶ is still carried out in many southern states in India. In many places if any women will be stood for their rights they will be stripped, naked paraded in front of the public or gang-raped. Indu Agnihotri from the Centre for Women Development Studies stated that “the NCRB data also suggests that more than four Dalit women are raped every day”. Ranjana Kumari of the Centre for Social Studies expressed that “If you are a woman in India and poor and a Dalit—then there is no position worse than that.” The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, an NGO, mentioned that “more than 23 percent of Dalit women report being raped, and several have reported multiple instances of rape”. “Many perpetrators commit sexual crimes with a sense of impunity”, said Mariam Dhawale, general secretary of the All-India Democratic Women’s Association [52]. An example can be taken with the case in the Hathras where not only police ignorance can be seen but also shows that how they treat Dalit related case. A 19-year-old Dalit woman was raped and brutally murdered by the upper caste people in the Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh. Their family immediately rushed to the nearby Chandpa police station. However, rather than registering the case, the police official misbehaves with the family members. Including that without informing the family members the police officers forcefully cremated the victim at night. Due to pressure from the upper caste people police officer also compromised with all medical test and forensic evidence. Over the countrywide protest on the Hathras case, the UP

⁶ Devadasi system is a religious practice whereby girls are ‘married’ or dedicated to god at a young age. It is generally marked by muttu kattuvudu, a ritual in which a neck chain with beads is tied to the girl. These Devadasis, meaning ‘servants of god’ in Kannada, are not allowed to marry, stay alone or with parents, and make a living on their own. Essentially, this regressive system forces women into a lifetime of sexual slavery. And, girls from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities are the victims of this exploitative system, for more details visit URL:<https://www.deccanherald.com/servants-god-no-end-their-704825.html>.

government washed their hand saying that the cremation was done at night “to avoid large-scale violence”. But, the fact is that in India Dalit community always compromised with all these cases as the upper caste people still suppressing them at all levels.

4. Conclusion and suggestions


In contemporary India, Dalit Suicides has increased their ratio compared to the earlier times. The reason behind the Dalit suicides cases was earlier mostly due to Social Categorisation in the Society based on employment, education, health etc. However, the present paper has found that in recent suicides cases has been more increased due to the Social identification of Dalits and Social comparison. The Indian constitution provided reservation for the marginalised Dalits to attaining education and get better jobs opportunities. However, getting education and jobs by the Dalits community through reservation was not welcomed/promoted by the upper-caste society as they equally standing with them. This paper also found that society has to play a major role rather than the executive, legislative and judiciary system. Until unless the behaviour of the society will not change their perspective towards the Dalit community we cannot expect that they will claim equal opportunity through education and employment. The state, media, police administration, and society all are equally responsible for discrimination against the Dalit community in the society, which became the reason for an increasing number of Dalit suicides cases.

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