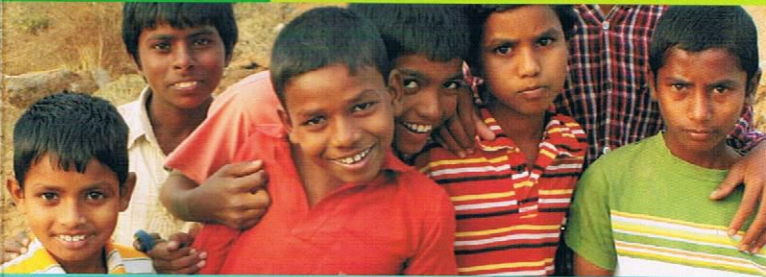




India's untouchable
DALITS

CHANGE their future
one child at a **TIME**



and their **QUEST**



www.dalitfreedom.net

for **FREEDOM**

Who Are The Dalits?

The Dalits are the most exploited people in the world and represent a people group in India formerly known as the "untouchables". They are considered totally impure and unworthy to be considered a part of the caste system. The term Dalit means downtrodden, broken, or crushed.

Strictly speaking, they have been born outside the caste system and are considered soulless, outcast people with no connection to Brahma, the Hindu god who created the caste system from his body. One out of every four Indians is a Dalit.

They are considered so impure that their mere touch severely pollutes members of all other castes. According to Hindu belief, their sub-human position is the consequence of their karma and their sinful behaviour in a previous life.

Dalits are considered soulless, outcast people with no connection to Brahma.

What Does Untouchability Mean?

Untouchability is a distinct Indian social institution. It legitimizes and enforces practices of discrimination against people born into particular castes, and legitimizes practices that are humiliating, exclusionary, and exploitive.

The institution of "untouchability" refers not just to the avoidance of physical contact but to a much broader set of social sanctions. Dalits have been deprived of all religious privileges such as temple worship, access to the Vedas

(Scriptures), and the priesthood. They have also been denied participation in social ceremonies and festivals and denied access to public parks, services, and utilities including water sources and wells.

The Dalits also have the least access to education and health care, and experience dehumanization at the hands of the "higher" castes.

*"Untouchability
is a blot on
humanity."*

*Manmohan Singh,
Prime Minister
of India 2006.*

In December 2006, the Prime Minister of India openly acknowledged the parallel between the practice of untouchability in India and Apartheid in South Africa. He described untouchability as "a blot on humanity."

The Caste System — How It All Began

The historical origins of the caste system are uncertain. However, some historians believe that the caste system began around 1,500 B.C. by the Aryan invaders who came from Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Asia.

In order to secure their conquest over the indigenous people of India, they imposed a servitude class-identity on the people based on physical features, occupations, social dimensions, and religious rules. The caste system is primarily identified with Indian society and is an integral part of the foundation of the Hindu religion.

Each caste is historically linked to an occupation and represents a strict hierarchy of society and status, into which people are born and can never change their caste-identity.

According to Hindu Scriptures, people are classified into four groups (varna), corresponding to parts of the body of the Hindu god, Brahma, from whom they were created.

Then there is a fifth group of people who fall below this system altogether, known as the

"untouchables," but

now identified as the

Dalits. They are considered a species of human beings not connected to the body of Brahma at all because of the sins of their past life; their fate is that they are

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soulless, considered unclean, and even lower in status than animals. The Dalits do not belong to the pyramid of castes and are therefore known as "outcasts."

Scheduled Castes

In 1935 the term Scheduled Caste was created and passed by the British Indian government. It defines all untouchables, specifically the people known as the Dalits, and includes all people from the lowest of the Hindu castes.

With India's increased population growth the combined numbers of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes now exceeds 250 million.

What Is the Indian Government Doing to Help the Dalits?

In 1950, the Indian Government introduced a series of practical measures through the Constitution Order to reverse the Dalits historical position.

In an effort to ease their plight, the Constitution instituted and guaranteed a socioeconomic system called "Compensary Discrimination" or "Reservation" (also defined as "Affirmative Action"). This system grants some privileges to the Dalits in government-run schools, colleges, and institutions. A percentage of government jobs and parliamentary positions are also reserved for the Dalit people.

Although these privileges are written in the constitution and theoretically available to the Dalits, in reality there is a very limited application and implementation due to the lack of English-medium education for the Dalits, making it almost impossible for them to qualify for these positions.

In other words, the scope of the reservation policy is limited and dependent upon sufficient numbers of Dalits reaching higher levels of education. Also, the success of the program is severely limited by caste-based bias, extreme poverty of the Dalits, and labour exploitation. In reality, the Dalits continue to

The Reservation Policy is limited and dependent upon sufficient numbers of Dalits reaching higher levels of education.

endure centuries-long oppression, struggling for their human rights.

English Education - the Pathway to Dalit Empowerment

For Dalits, an English education is the only way forward. Without it they cannot qualify for the benefits and privileges of government reservation and affirmative-action programs.

Without an English-based education Dalit students can never advance to higher-level English schools or gain entrance to a Central Government university. All the Central Government-run higher educational institutions use English as their medium of instruction. And all Central universities and medical schools teach only in English and admit students only through English language entrance examination papers.

The dilemma facing the Dalit school children is the result of the government's policy of requiring all educational curriculums taught in primary and public schools be taught in the regional languages. This makes it virtually impossible for Dalit children to advance in English education.

Without English based education Dalit students can never advance to higher level schools.

Dalits also need an English-based education so they can compete in a global economy. In the new Indian economy, globalization and information technology are communicated in

English. Dalit leaders believe that it is knowledge that creates all other avenues of freedom.

They believe that education is the primary key to any advancement the Dalits hope to have in this world.

This is why Dalit Freedom Network Canada and partners in the USA, United Kingdom, and several other countries are committed to establishing English Education Centres for Dalit children in India.

Dalits See Religious Exodus as the Ultimate Solution

In 1956, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the Moses of the Dalits, spearheaded the first major socio-spiritual movement of the Dalits. He concluded that if Hinduism was not able to reform itself and annihilate the caste system, then conversion was the ultimate solution for the Dalits.

Ambedkar championed religious freedom for the Dalits, thereby leading hundreds of thousands of Dalits into Buddhism. As a result of his courageous stand, Dalits have been embracing other faiths in various individual states of India. This ongoing exodus from Hinduism is because the Dalits continue to endure centuries-long oppression, struggling for human rights, equality, personal dignity, and spiritual freedom.

Now, more than fifty years later, these same spiritual aspirations have ignited a renewed "Freedom Movement" that has mobilized Dalits from every part of the country. On November 4,

2001, Ram Raj, chairman of All India Confederation of Scheduled Castes/ Tribes, gave a national call to "quit Hinduism."

Hundreds of thousands of Dalits throughout India responded and converged on the Capital in spite of government opposition and intervention. By mid-morning over 100,000 Dalits had gained access to New Delhi and were ready to begin the historic ceremony of conversion to Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity.

*Dr. B.R. Ambedkar
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religious freedom
for the Dalits.*

One Dalit leader expressed the sentiments of them all when he quoted Dr. Ambedkar's famous words: ***"I was born a Hindu, but I will not die a Hindu."***

State Governments Enact Anti-Conversion Laws

In view of the historic developments among the Dalits, it is not surprising that a number of State Governments enacted anti-conversion laws in an attempt to stop the exodus of Dalits from Hinduism to other religions.

As of 2010, seven states have passed "anti-conversion" laws and five of these states have fully implemented them.

Upper caste Hindu leaders, together with right-wing fundamentalists known as Hindutva and other political factions, see the empowerment of the Dalits as a threat to their religious and political power base. They have portrayed religious conversions as illegitimate and subversive. Every attempt is made to

maintain the power structure of the upper castes. Without the slavery of the caste system, the whole edifice of the upper caste power structure comes apart, religiously, socially, and politically.

The right-wing fundamentalist groups are determined to prevent any changes of the Dalit status by enacting these "anti-conversion" laws.

Indian Christian Leaders Declare Support for the Dalit Struggle

When Dr. Ambedkar led the Dalit exodus from Hinduism in 1956, the Christian Church of India was unprepared for such a historic development.

Having been influenced by British colonialism and riddled with caste-based politics, the Church had no appeal whatsoever to Dr. Ambedkar, who sought a religion that would unite his people and bring cohesion and equality to all the sub-castes and untouchables.

Anti-Conversion laws as an attempt to stop the exodus of Dalits from Hinduism to other religions.

Fifty years later, Dr. Joseph D'Souza and leaders of The All India Christian Council determined that they would never let this kind of lost opportunity happen again. In their historic meeting in Hyderabad in early 2001, Christian leaders representing over 5,000 church denominations and Christian organizations unanimously declared their solidarity for the

Dalit people and committed to help free the Dalits and their children from centuries-old enslavement.

This action was followed by total support of the second Dalit exodus from Hinduism in New Delhi on November 4, 2001. On this historic occasion many hundreds of Christian leaders and observers from the West were present to witness and express solidarity for the Dalits as they sought liberation.

Three Christian leaders were given opportunity to speak and express public support of the Indian Christian Church. One speaker declared: "The whole Church of India is with you, we are your friends." He declared that they were there because Jesus loved the Dalits and Christians were committed to bringing the love of Jesus to the Dalits in word and in deed.

5,000 church denominations and Christian organizations unanimously declared their solidarity with the Dalit people.

The speakers assured the Dalits that the Christian Church of India supports the Dalits' freedom of choice to choose their own destiny.

Dr. Joseph D'Souza believes that the Church's open stand with the Dalits and their movement for liberation has put the Indian Church on the right side of history.

Persecution of the Dalits and Christians

By virtue of their public commitment to the Dalits, the Indian church not only put itself "on the right side of history," but also in the direct line of fire of the right-wing extremists Hindutva; as a result caste turmoil, social upheaval, and violence exploded all across India.

Brutal attacks against the Dalits and Christians began under the reign of the BJP government and a spirit of fear descended upon the Indian Church. The Hindutva forces believed that by using physical force, propaganda, and institutional harassment, as well as by the passing of laws that violate the fundamental rights of human beings, Indian Christians would be intimidated to practice their Christian faith and love in the confines of their churches. They were determined to shut the doors of Indian churches to the oppressed millions who sought holistic liberation and salvation.

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But the opposite has happened! The Christian churches have kept their doors open to those who want to enter. Indian Christians continue to live out Jesus' teaching about compassion and love that they are commanded to give to all the oppressed, victimized, and dehumanized.

The motive and goal of Indian Christian love is not conversion, but instead to demonstrate the unconditional love of Jesus Christ to the

untouchables of India. Dr. D'Souza believes that Christians are commanded to love people and serve them unconditionally, whether they follow Christ or not.

A New Day Dawns for the Dalits

Even though the attacks against the Indian Christian community and Dalits continues unabated, the pursuit of freedom for Dalit families and their children also continues unabated. Dalit leaders believe that with the support of Christians and compassionate people around the world a new day of hope has dawned for them and their children.

Dalit leaders of India have asked that we help educate their children and give them dignity and hope for the future through a Christian worldview. We invite you to stand with the Dalits in their quest for freedom.

*Dalit leaders
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For more information on the Dalits or how to sponsor a Dalit child's education contact:

DALIT FREEDOM NETWORK CANADA
www.dalitfreedom.net

You Can Change Their Lives and Give Them Hope for the Future

- Sponsor a Dalit child's education
- Contribute to the building of schools for Dalit children
- Empower Dalit women through training and micro-finance
- Pray for India
- Share this ministry with friends

For more information, please contact:

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