

Untouchability Today: The Rise of Dalit Activism

By Christine Hart

On July 19, 2010, the *Hindustan Times* reported that a Dalit (“untouchable”) woman was gang-raped and murdered in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The crime was an act of revenge perpetrated by members of the Sharma family, incensed over the recent elopement of their daughter with a man from the lower-caste Singh family. Seeking retributive justice for the disgrace of the marriage, men from the Sharma family targeted a Dalit woman who, with her husband, worked in the Singh family fields. Her death was the result of her sub-caste status; while the crime cost the Singh family a valuable worker, the perceived value of her life was less than upper-caste individuals. In this case, the perpetrators of the crime were arrested, but similar atrocities are committed with frequency and impunity throughout India as a result of the entrenched practice of untouchability.

Overview of Untouchability

Caste discrimination, manifested through an array of “untouchability practices,” is an entrenched part of daily life in India. This “hidden apartheid” impacts more than 160 million Dalits—the victims, survivors, and challengers of the practice, as well as approximately 860 million non-Dalits—the perpetrators, bystanders, and witnesses.

Despite domestic policy measures and increased attention to the issue, the practice of untouchability remains ingrained and touches nearly every aspect of Dalit life. Untouchability practices range from actions that impact the minutiae of daily life, to life-altering inequity and denials of opportunity, to violence committed with impunity. A sampling of untouchability practices include: the refusal of upper-caste individuals to walk in or cross the shadow of a Dalit; segregated food and drink and designated water vessels and utensils for Dalits; forced and bonded labor practices; conscription into “unclean” occupations including prostitution, manual scavenging (removing waste from “dry” toilets), and the removal of animal carcasses; the prohibition to intermarry with other castes; and rules governing religious practices, including prohibition from public temples and exclusion from ceremonies and rituals. In addition, caste-motivated violence occurs with regularity. Atrocities committed against Dalits include assault, rape, and murder and are often committed with impunity.

Indian Domestic Policy

Although caste discrimination persists as a widespread and divisive issue in India, the Indian government has taken a host of measures to abolish untouchability, to create mechanisms of enforcement, and to enact policy to combat discrimination against Dalits in government, the workplace, and education. The 1950 Indian Constitution formally abolishes untouchability, prohibits caste discrimination, and expands the system of “Scheduled Caste” reservations initiated by the British Raj that allocated places for Dalits in educational institutes, civil service positions, and state and national legislatures. In addition, the government of India responded to pressure from Dalit groups to pass laws and constitutional amendments increasing protections and expanding reservations systems. As a result, small but significant gains have been made in the past 60 years; a trivial percentage of Dalits have benefited from educational opportunities, become wealthier, and risen to high government positions. Despite small-scale improvements, however, caste discrimination remains pervasive-- committed especially by higher caste Hindus-- and profoundly

impacts the socio-economic mobility of Dalits. Many Dalit activists blame the government and political parties for not taking stronger actions to combat the social and economic exclusion of Dalits.

Caste Discrimination, International Human Rights Instruments, and the United Nations

In contrast to stagnant domestic efforts to combat untouchability practices, significant progress has been made in terms of international engagement over the last fifteen years. Discrimination based on caste has been pervasive throughout the world and particularly in South Asia for millennia, yet until the late 1990s, it was not recognized as a human rights violation or addressed directly in any of the major human rights instruments. Article 2 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction...such as...national or social origin, birth, or other status.” The inclusion of caste was suggested by the Indian delegation to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which crafted the document, but was rejected in favor of broader terms such as “birth” and “social origin.” Only within the last two decades has the issue of caste discrimination gained traction within the global human rights community.

Discussion of caste within international human rights instruments was revisited in 1996, when the United Nations Committee to End Racial Discrimination (CERD)—the body that oversees state compliance with the 1965 International Convention to End All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)—reviewed India’s condensed periodic reports to the Committee. Article 1 of ICERD defines racial discrimination as including “descent” and CERD has asserted that when reviewing the periodic reports of states, it interprets “descent” to include to the situation of Dalits in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, as well as caste discrimination in other countries. In the 1996 condensed reports, India contested this interpretation, arguing that India’s “Scheduled Castes” and “Scheduled Tribes” (the legal designation for Dalits) did not fall under the purview of ICERD because “caste” implies class or social distinction and does not denote racial difference. In 2002, CERD adopted General Recommendation XXIX on ‘descent-based discrimination,’ which confirmed “the consistent view of the Committee that the term “descent” in Article 1, paragraph 1 of the Convention does not solely refer to “race” and has a meaning and application which complements the other prohibited ground of discrimination;” it “reaffirms that discrimination based on “descent” includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification as caste and analogous systems of inherited status which nullify or impair their equal enjoyment of human rights.”

The recognition of caste discrimination under ICERD and increasing visibility in the human rights community, and particularly at the level of the United Nations, can be attributed to the development of robust domestic and transnational Dalit advocacy networks through the 1990s, as well as an increasing willingness of Dalit groups to frame caste discrimination within a broader human rights framework, particularly under the umbrella of discrimination based on “work and descent.”

Domestic and Transnational Dalit Advocacy

The late 1990s saw the advent of increasing organization among Dalit activists. In 1997, the international NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) became the first major human rights organization to engage in the issue of caste discrimination in India. HRW published a comprehensive report entitled “Broken People: Caste Violence Against India’s ‘Untouchables’” that precipitated greater

international attention. As the report was being written, HRW organized a meeting of regional Dalit organizations to seek advice and input on the report. This meeting planted the seed for the formation of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), an umbrella group of Dalit organizations from 14 states that is changing the scope and reach of domestic Dalit activism. In 1999, NCDHR produced a report of its own, in addition to presenting 2.5 million signatures petitioning for the end of caste discrimination in India to the Indian Prime Minister. Today, NCDHR continues to work toward greater visibility for Dalit issues, providing forums for collaboration and information sharing within the Dalit movement. In addition, NCDHR seeks, through grassroots mobilization, to hold the state accountable for equal justice and an end to impunity for atrocities committed against Dalits.

Formed in 2000, the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) facilitates coordination and information sharing among foreign organizations advocating for Dalit rights. The network consists of national federations in South Asia, including NCDHR, and afield, as well as a host of human rights, development, and religious non-profit organizations. IDSN's efforts focus on advocating to national governments and the United Nations. The network regularly organizes international conferences on Dalit rights.

The 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban presented perhaps the most significant breakthrough for the Dalit movement. While the Indian Government effectively blocked the inclusion of caste discrimination from the official conference document, the conference generated crucial international attention and support. The subsequent participation of Dalit organizations in similar international conferences has effectively built upon this momentum.

Transformation and Progress

Dalit activism has made considerable strides in the last fifteen years. Major gains have been made by way of international recognition, especially at the level of the United Nations. In addition, recent domestic successes have included a constitutional amendment extending reservations to private schools, colleges, and training institutions, and rhetoric suggesting a commitment to social justice within the context of economic liberalization. Implementation and shaping attitudes remain the greater challenges, however, to effect true rights realization. While incremental progress has been made, caste discrimination does remain entrenched and the continuing struggle promises to be a long one. While international attention has constituted a major gain, the struggle will no doubt continue to center on the state and domestic policies. The ultimate lesson to take from the recent advances made in domestic and international awareness and advocacy efforts is that the Dalit rights movement consists of a profoundly committed base and, as it enjoys greater support internationally and achieves greater organization and reach, promises to continue to make strides towards diminishing caste discrimination and entrenched inequality.

Annotated Bibliography

Alam, Javeed. 2009. "Democracy in India and the Quest for Equality." *Community Development Journal* 44 (3): 291-304.

Annotation: Alam discusses the expansion of democracy in India since 1990, with particular

attention to the growing rights and political and social participation of Dalits, “Other Backward Castes” (OBCs), and women. He contrasts the evolution of democracy in India with that of the West, focusing on the impact of communitarian identities versus the West’s individualistic approach to democracy. Alam asserts that the existence of substantial conflict both within and between communitarian groups representing historic caste divisions perpetuated through contemporary socio-economic inequalities fosters an “oligarchy of the privileged.” This constitutes a significant hindrance to the development of broad-based democracy in India. Alam concludes that in order to deepen India’s democracy, deprived communities such as Dalits and women must become the bearers of entrenched rights.

Anti-Slavery International. 2001. “The Enslavement of Dalit and Indigenous Communities in India, Nepal and Pakistan through Debt Bondage.” Available Online: <http://idsn.org/uploads/media/ASIBondedLabour.pdf>.

Annotation: This report on the enslavement of Dalit and indigenous communities in South Asia to the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights details the relationship between caste discrimination and bonded labor in India, Nepal, and Pakistan. It provides background on the history of caste discrimination in the three countries and the entrenched practices of caste-based bonded labor. A brief description of the relative legal structures put in place to combat caste discrimination and bonded labor in each country is included, as well as an analysis of the effectiveness of these measures. In addition, the authors describe the responses of each government to the persistent practice of caste-based bonded labor, concluding with a list of recommendations to the Sub-Commission.

Chalam, K.S. 2008. *Modernization and Dalit Education: Ambedkar’s Vision*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Annotation: Chalam discusses Dalit education and economic empowerment through the lens of the philosophy and writings of the Dalit activist Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the authors of India’s constitution and a preeminent figure in the early Dalit movement. Chalam provides a comprehensive explanation of Ambedkar’s philosophies on these subjects, linking them to historic and contemporary domestic policy impacting Dalits in India. The most useful element of the book is the nuanced analysis of contemporary economic and educational inequities, including the relationship between policy and persistent caste inequality, and the impact on the Dalit population.

Clifford, Bob. 2007. “Dalit Rights are Human Rights: Caste Discrimination, International Activism, and the Construction of a New Human Rights Issue.” *Human Rights Quarterly* 29 (1): 167-193.

Annotation: Clifford presents a comprehensive discussion of the efforts of Dalit activists to promote the inclusion of caste discrimination as a human rights issue within the international community. Poor organization among Dalit groups and a lack of human rights terminology to account for caste-motivated discrimination, including in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, impeded Dalits from making human rights claims until the 1990s. Clifford provides a detailed account of the changes within the Dalit activist community, including the establishment of robust nationwide and international networks and improved rhetoric focused on state culpability for caste-based discrimination. He also touches on the roles of various actors, including UN organs, international NGOs, and individual states, in

precipitating the inclusion of caste- and work-based discrimination as human rights. In conclusion, Clifford addresses the implications that this recognition has for human rights theories, international politics, and, most importantly, the advocacy efforts of similar minority groups such as the Burakumin of Japan and various groups in West and East Africa.

Eide, Asbjorn, and Yozo Yokota. 2003. "Prevention of Discrimination: Discrimination Based on Work and Descent." United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Available Online: <http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/%28Symbol%29/E.CN.4.Sub.2.2003.24.En?Opendocument>.

Annotation: This report to the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights serves to expand on the original "Gooneskere Report" submitted to the Sub-Commission in 2001. Unlike the Gooneskere Report, this follow-up submission does not focus specifically on India's Dalit population. It expands upon the work of the first report by describing additional groups that suffer discrimination as a result of work or ethnic/caste descent. It provides a comprehensive description of common features of different cases of discrimination based on work and descent. This allows a reader familiar with the characteristics of untouchability practices to understand the commonalities between Dalit rights violations and those experienced by other minority groups. Given the growing transnational advocacy efforts of Dalit movements, the inclusion of Dalit rights within wider human rights' dialogues, especially that of discrimination based on work and descent, is pertinent.

Gaiha, Raghav, Ganesh Thapa, Katsushi Imai, and Vani S. Kulkarni. 2008. "Has Anything Changed? Deprivation, Disparity, and Discrimination in Rural India." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 14 (2):113-125.

Annotation: The authors analyze endemic poverty and inequality among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in rural India, utilizing data collected between 2004 and 2005 for the 61st National Sample Survey. Characteristics such as location, education level, and land ownership are analyzed in addition to structural differences, namely the return on characteristics, including endowments from affirmative action programs, such as income gains from education. Although conclusions regarding discrimination are difficult to draw from the data, the authors suggest that group identity may constitute a hindrance for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, both in terms of self-perception, which may undermine motivation, and the negative perception of employers and members of non-scheduled castes. The authors assert that group identity must be accounted for when designing effective affirmative action policies.

Ghose, Sagarika. 2003. "The Dalit in India." *Social Research* 70 (1): 83-109.

Annotation: Ghose presents a comprehensive and fluid history of Dalits in Indian society, focusing specifically on India's social landscape, government policy, and the evolution of Dalit political activism. She focuses on affirmative action policies that have aided Dalits in making minor inroads within the civil service, legislature, and educational spheres. Ghose

analyzes the entrenched social hierarchies of the caste system, as well as widespread cultural and religious beliefs and practices, and asserts that these factors contribute to the continued isolation and oppression of India's Dalit populations. Moreover, she suggests the affirmative action measures that promote the advancement of Dalits within the public sector, political sphere, and education system play the paradoxical role of supporting traditional negative perceptions of Dalits. To usurp this separateness and merge with the mainstream would both hinder contemporary Dalit activism and risk the further contempt of upper castes. Ghose concludes that, in effect, "the empowered Dalit remains socially trapped."

Gooneskere, Rajendra Kalidas Wimala. 2001. "Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Indigenous Peoples and Minorities." United Nations Economic and Social Council. Available Online: <http://wcar.alrc.net/mainfile2.php/Documents/48/>

Annotation: This working paper details discrimination based on work and descent. It was undertaken after the United Nation Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights issued a ground-breaking declaration that discrimination based on work and descent is a form of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law. Gooneskere discusses India's Dalits, in addition to touching briefly upon issues faced by similar groups in several other countries. He presents a succinct history of untouchability, focusing on Indian domestic policy and the obligations of the state under international law. The working paper presents a comprehensive legal framework that would be useful for anyone who is interested in addressing discrimination based on work and descent, specifically within the Indian context.

Gorringer, Hugo. 2005. "'You Build Your House, We'll Build Ours': The Attractions and Pitfalls of Dalit Identity Politics." *Social Identities* 11 (6): 653-672.

Annotation: Gorringer, a lecturer in sociology at the University of Edinburgh, provides a thoughtful analysis of how the politics of identity impacts the Dalit movement in India. Identity presumes the preeminence of a singular characteristic of a group of people, resulting in "a caricatured version of the world in which one characteristic of a group is over-determined." Gorringer draws on particular examples from the eastern state of Tamil Nadu to demonstrate how caste-based mobilization fails the movement. He concludes by suggesting that a strategy that appeals to human rights discourses would allow Dalit rights groups to establish global coalitions, thereby broadening and strengthening their human rights claims.

Hardtmann, Eva-Maria. 2009. *The Dalit Movement in India: Local Practices, Global Connections*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Annotation: Hardtmann provides a detailed contemporary history and analysis of the Dalit movement in India. She presents a far-ranging study of the movement that includes: investigation of tensions within the movement; the national, international, and global contexts of the movement; the role of the Indian government; academic discourses within India; the UN discourse; and the Global Justice Movement. Hardtmann further analyzes the mechanics of various elements of the Dalit movement—organizational structures, local practices, varying discourses, and the nature of the movement at different levels. The breadth and depth of information provided results in a comprehensive and useful picture of the contemporary Dalit movement in India.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2006. "The Impact of Affirmative Action in India: More Political than Socioeconomic." *India Review* 5 (2): 173-189.

Annotation: Jaffrelot, Director of the Centre for International Studies and Research at Sciences Po, provides a detailed account of affirmative action in India over the last century. He focuses on the political impact of affirmative action, a policy initiated by the British Raj in the late 19th century. Jaffrelot asserts that policy efforts to increase quotas have historically met with strong resistance from upper castes, yet today large proportions of state and national civil services are reserved for Dalits and OBCs. Despite this progress, positive discrimination policies have resulted in political, rather than social and economic, transformation. The presence of Dalit and OBC individuals in positions of power has encouraged Dalit and OBC constituencies to further pursue the attainment of political power and has prompted sociopolitical coalitions between these and other disadvantaged groups within Indian society. Jaffrelot concludes that as the political significance of these groups increases as a result of legislative quotas, socioeconomic change may finally follow.

Jeffrey, Craig, Roger Jeffrey, and Patricia Jeffrey. 2004. "Degrees without Freedom: The Impact of Formal Education on Dalit Young Men in North India." *Development and Change* 35 (5): 963-986.

Annotation: The authors provide an in-depth analysis of the relationship between formal education and employment opportunities in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Using qualitative and quantitative findings, the authors demonstrate that Dalit men reap the benefits of increased educational attainment in the form of "cultural capital," such as increased confidence within their communities. The authors' findings indicate that this progress is not accompanied by increased employment opportunities, which effectively negates the cultural gains. The lack of secure employment has resulted in a loss of confidence and an increasing unwillingness of families to invest in male education. The authors conclude that educational gains will not foster significant change until substantial material redistribution takes place within Indian society.

Lerche, Jens. 2008. "Transnational Advocacy Networks and Affirmative Action for Dalits in India." *Development and Change* 39 (2): 239-261.

Annotation: Lerche addresses two main Dalit movements that have evolved rapidly over the past two decades: the Dalit political party, Bahujan Samaj (BSP), and the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, an umbrella organization consisting of Dalit activists and international NGOs. Lerche provides a detailed chronicle of the evolution of both movements. In addition, he critiques the effectiveness of transnational movements, given India's neoliberal political landscape and the nature of international human rights discourse. The article is a useful resource for understanding the benefits and drawbacks of pursuing social change via domestic political avenues or, alternatively, through transnational advocacy networks, and how either strategy may impact the Dalit movement moving forward.

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Annotation: Lerche provides a critical analysis of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) labor policy towards ending forced labor, focusing particularly on a 2005 ILO report entitled "A Global Alliance to End Forced Labor." Following an overview of the report content, Lerche offers a critical assessment of ILO policy in light of globalization and the underlying relationship between capitalism and forced labor. Using India as a case study, Lerche draws on India's policy of neo-liberalization as it relates to the prevalence and persistence of forced labor, concluding that the ILO's goal of "decent work for all" falls short in its failure to address the underlying economic factors of forced labor.

Michael, S.M., ed. 1999. *Untouchable: Dalits in Modern India*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

Annotation: This collection of essays looks at Dalit issues through a primarily sociological and economic lens. The volume is divided into four parts dealing with: the origins and development of untouchability within Indian society; the difference between Dalit and upper-caste visions of Indian society; the day-to-day realities of Dalits, focusing on social and political organization; and the economic condition of Dalits. Part Three, which deals with Dalits and development, is particularly useful in understanding the entrenched inequalities facing Dalits today. One essay focuses on India's New Economic Policy (NEP) and details how current policy promotes systemic inequalities stemming from persisting social structures. Another essay focuses on rural case studies, by far the most dramatic examples of entrenched inequality at the local level. As a whole, this volume provides a variety of perspectives on many elements of Dalit discrimination.

Moon, Vasant. 2001. *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Annotation: Vasant Moon's autobiography paints a vivid picture of one *vasti* (urban neighborhood or slum) of Dalits in Nagpur, Maharashtra during the era of India's independence (1947). Moon's account is useful both in understanding the lived experience of Dalits and elements of the Dalit social movement from the local/micro level as opposed to the more prominently presented macro/state or national level. His experiences depict historic and continuing legal and economic inequities on a very intimate level, in addition to describing in detail the far-reaching social inequality faced by Dalits. This account is particularly useful in contextualizing broader themes and trends discussed in prevalent literature on Dalit issues and political and social activism.

Narayan, Badri. 2009. "Shattered Dreams: The Longing for 'Post-Independent India'." *Asian Studies Review* 33: 443-453.

Annotation: Narayan, of the Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute in Allahabad, explores the contemporary status of Dalits through the moving narratives of several Dalits. The narratives focus on the role played by Dalit communities in India's movement for independence and the subsequent expectations instilled by Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of a caste-free society. The narratives serve as a useful barometer of the hope of Dalit communities at the time of Indian independence and of the subsequent disillusionment that resulted from affirmative action policies that reaped little reward for most Dalits. The narratives reveal how this disillusionment resulted in Dalit communities' loss of confidence in the state's ability to represent their interests. This has carried through to a nationally

significant contemporary Dalit political movement.

Narula, Smita. 1999. "Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's 'Untouchables.'" New York: Human Rights Watch. Available Online: <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1999/india/>

Annotation: Narula's report on behalf of Human Rights Watch provides a broad window into the entrenched caste-discrimination that impacts the daily lives of India's 250 million Dalits. A series of case studies depicts the myriad ways in which Dalits' economic, social, civil, and political rights continue to be violated, often with impunity. The report focuses on the breadth and frequency of caste-motivated violence and the widespread dearth of an effective state response. In many cases, caste violence occurs with the collusion, if not the participation, of state officials such as local police. Narula also discusses the evolving Dalit rights movements, which have frequently been met with repression, including the government's attempt to criminalize peaceful social activism.

Naumann, Michel. 2008. "Commonwealth, Democracy, and (Post-) Modernity: The Contradiction Between Growth and Development Seen From the Dalit Point of View." *Round Table* 97 (399): 851-55.

Annotation: Naumann addresses the relationships and contradictions between growth, development, and democracy in India with respect to the Dalit population. He investigates these relationships while taking into account attitudes of the Commonwealth toward Indian government policies-- but the reader need not be interested in the perspective of the Commonwealth to draw useful meaning from the article. Naumann explores the Indian government's focus on good governance in the quest for growth, concluding that this neglects the true aims of democracy and largely disenfranchises the Dalit population by rendering them inconsequential. This focus on economic growth, concentrated among the burgeoning middle class, by both the government of India and the international community, rather than widespread development, perpetuates the "invisibility" of Dalits at both levels. Naumann convincingly employs economic indicators, such as stagnant employment rates and incomes, to demonstrate the lack of improvement in Dalit quality of life as other Indian socioeconomic groups flourish with India's rapid economic development.

Ninian, Alex. 2008. "India's Untouchables: The Dalits." *Contemporary Review* 1689: 186-192.

Annotation: Ninian presents a concise overview of the history of untouchability in India, connecting the historical evolution of caste-based discrimination to the current status of Indian Dalits. He describes the nature of untouchability practices facing Dalits, who comprise 16-20 percent of India's population, particularly in rural areas where caste division remains entrenched. Ninian analyzes constitutional provisions and policy measures undertaken by the Indian government towards Dalit inequality, including affirmative action measures designed to help Dalits socially, economically, and in the realm of education. Despite these measures, he asserts that the status of Dalits has remained largely the same. India's 200 million Dalits are among the 700 million Indians earning less than \$1000 per year, a fact that the author suggests will seriously impact India's attempt to become a global economic superpower.

Prove, Peter. 2003. "Caste and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Lutheran World Federation.

Annotation: This background paper details the controversy and debate surrounding the inclusion (delineated or implied) of caste discrimination in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(UDHR) and of the 1965 United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The author presents the position of Indian representatives, as well as other actors, on the inclusion of caste in the UDHR, which India favored, and the interpretation of caste discrimination as included under the auspices of the ICERD, which India contested in its reports to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). He delves particularly into the eventual inclusion of “descent” as a category of racial discrimination, which, despite later objections by Indian representatives, was in fact introduced in an amendment to the Convention proposed by Indian delegates and eventually unanimously approved by the General Assembly. Though the paper refrains from commentary, this revelation is significant in analyzing Indian domestic policy toward caste discrimination.

Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights. 2010. “Understanding Untouchability: A Comprehensive Survey of Practices and Conditions in 1589 Villages.” Washington: Navsarjan Trust and Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights.

Annotation: The report, a collaboration between the Navsarjan Trust and the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights, represents the first comprehensive effort to collect data on untouchability practices across a statistically significant area (1,589 villages in the Indian state of Gujarat). Prior to this study, a lack of sufficient data perpetuated an underestimation of the degree to which untouchability is practiced across India and the severity of the practices; this resulted in a lack of political will to combat untouchability, as well as impunity for the perpetrators of grave abuses, the most severe of which include caste-motivated rape and murder. The report offers a succinct overview of untouchability, followed by a discussion of the study methodology, a comprehensive analysis of the data, and suggestions for how the study findings and methodology can be used to both improve service delivery to Dalit populations and to effect policy change. The study, while providing a comprehensive picture of the daily lived experiences of Dalits, also offers insight as to how the Dalit rights movement may evolve in the future.

Sengupta, Amit. 2006. "Untouchable India." *Index on Censorship* 4, 82-84.

Annotation: Sengupta provides a brief but powerful description of the conditions of Dalits in the village of Burj Jhabber in the state of Punjab, India. He profiles Bant Singh, a Dalit activist and singer, whose unique story provides a stark contrast to what Sengupta terms the “archetypal conditions” of Burj Jhabber’s Dalits. Sengupta provides a useful window into both the violence and injustice that Dalits continue to face and the local dynamics of the Dalit struggle for economic and social justice. His account suggests that Punjab is ripe for resistance, and even violence, similar to movements that have recently occurred in states such as Bihar.

Shah, Ghanshyam, ed. 2001. Dalit Identity and Politics. Edited by Simon R. Charsley and G. K. Karanth. Vol. 2, *Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Annotation: The second volume in a series, this collection includes thirteen essays on a wide range of topics of both historic and contemporary relevance to the issue of Dalit rights. The ultimate aim of the contributors is to examine the nature of Dalit politics and the challenges faced by the political movement in contemporary India. About half of the essays focus on the history of untouchability and Dalit activism, while the other half deal with contemporary issues and personalities in the movement. The topics covered include history, relationships between religious groups, economics, politics, literature, and sociology—namely, Dalit identity. Together, the essays in this volume

provide an important foundation for understanding contemporary Dalit rights' issues and political activism.

Smith, Peter. 2008. "Going Global: The Transnational Politics of the Dalit Movement." *Globalizations* 5 (1): 13-33.

Annotation: Smith provides a comprehensive analysis of the Dalit movement over the last two decades. The movement has recently become a major transnational effort, evolving from disjointed locally-oriented organizations into domestic and international networks such as the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). Smith describes how targeted participation in the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism, the 2004 World Social Forum, and the 2006 Asian Social Forum led to a strategy focused on globalizing awareness of casteism in order to precipitate domestic change in India. This strategy has already wrought success in deepening UN involvement in caste-discrimination issues and in prompting countries such as Canada, France, Greece, and the UK to seriously address the issue. Smith concludes that while the movement continues to face obstacles from within and without, the transnational political growth discussed is a major step forward.

Thorat, Sukhadeo, and Katherine S. Newman, eds. 2010. *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Annotation: Contributors to this edited volume focus on the repercussions of caste-based economic description, both as it impacts Dalit populations and overall development and economic health in India. The authors use a variety of current data to paint a detailed picture of the discrimination Dalits face in various markets, particularly labor, and in the delivery of public services such as health and education. The data also portrays the consequences of caste discrimination as reflected in the inequality of access to capital assets, business, employment, education, health services, and widespread poverty. This volume targets the under-researched economic elements of caste discrimination, fostering a more holistic picture of individual Dalit realities and the impact of perpetual caste discrimination on overall economic progress in India.

Waughray, Annapurna. 2010. "Caste Discrimination and Minority Rights: The Case of India's Dalits." *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 17 (2): 327-353.

Annotation: In this article, Waughray investigates the classification of Dalits within Indian domestic law, as well as within international law. Caste discrimination has been prohibited under international law since 2000 and included under the umbrella of racial discrimination by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination since 1996, yet Dalits are not legally classified as a minority under Indian law. Waughray analyzes the provisions on "Scheduled Castes" and "Scheduled Tribes" (the Indian government's classification of Dalits) and minorities, respectively. In addition, arguments for the inclusion of Muslim and Christian Dalits within domestic provisions such as affirmative action based on caste are addressed in the article. Waughray concludes by calling for a reexamination and reclassification of the legal categories pertaining to caste discrimination. This article provides context regarding the domestic and international legal context of Dalit rights that is crucial to understanding contemporary Dalit issues and activism.

Yokota, Yozo, and Chin-Sung Chung. 2009. "Final Report of Mr. Yozo Yokota and Ms. Chin-Sung Chung, Special Rapporteurs on the Topic of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent."

United Nations. Available Online:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/11session/CRP/A-HRC-11-CRP3.pdf>

Annotation: This report on the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights presents a revised draft of the Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, produced during an informal expert consultation organized by the International Dalit Solidarity Network in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. The report presents perhaps the most detailed definition of discrimination based on work and descent of any United Nations document thus far. It concludes with recommendations that the Human Rights Council undertake the study of discrimination based on work and descent and that the council adopt the draft Principles and Guidelines and submit them to the General Assembly for adoption. The report is a comprehensive and critical tool in understanding the international human rights dialogue concerning discrimination based on work and descent.