

Book Review

Book Name: Caste: A Global Story

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Caste in the World

Suraj Yengde is a Dalit writer who is globally acclaimed for his scholarship on caste, race, and religion. He has edited the collection of essays *The Radical in Ambedkar* (2018), which brings forth Dr. Ambedkar's revolutionary ideas. His best-selling *Caste Matters* (2019), freshly looks upon the dynamics of caste violence, discourse of love, identity, and resistance. Recently, his new book, *Caste: A Global Story*, published in October 2025, traces the story of anti-caste struggle from India to across the world and addresses the persistent gap of research on caste from a global perspective. In May 1916, at Columbia University, Dr. Ambedkar presented the paper *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development*, in which he writes that "if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem" (6). Dr. Ambedkar compared untouchability with race and tried to present the case of caste and untouchability on the global front. In a letter to Black activist and writer Dubois, Ambedkar mentioned the similarity between the problems of Negroes and untouchables. DuBois showed sympathy for Dalits and acknowledged their problem. In this context, Yengde's work further advances the research on the impact of caste in foreign countries.

In the introduction of the book, Yengde argues, "Caste has typically been approached and studied as an external institution, but rarely from the perspective of those deeply affected by social inequality and economic disadvantage imposed by the system. The external interpretation and perception of caste have often hindered understanding of the lived experience" (20-21). This study reviews the travelogues of ancient observers like Megasthenes, Fa-Hien, and Al-Biruni to examine their early accounts of untouchability, providing a long-term perspective on how this 'inhuman institution' was recorded by outsiders. From an insider's view, he traces the journey of Indian anti-caste schools from the Lokayata and Buddhist to lower caste poets like Ravidas and Chokhamela, who exposed the inequity of the priest class. This legacy was forwarded by social reformers such as Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar, who launched protests against the inhuman

practice of untouchability and discrimination. They vigorously challenged the Shastras through their writings and inculcated anti-caste consciousness in society.

In the first chapter, “Colonial Dalitality,” Yengde looks at caste with various theoretical lenses employed by F.G. Bayle, Louise Dumont, and S.V. Ketkar, who defined caste on the basis of birth, rituals of purity and pollution and inheritance. A prominent scholar, Nicholas B. Dirk, claims caste as a colonial construct that is a result of rigid classification done by the British government for the census. However, the British used classification to understand Indian society and frame policies on that basis. Bahujan thinkers like Jotiba Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, and Periyar re-read the theological texts and revealed the root causes of untouchability and the caste system embedded in scriptures. Further, Yengde shifts from a theoretical stance to the political activism of the Dalit Panther movement and Sahab Kanshi Ram, who united Dalits and protested against injustice. Kanshi Ram founded social organizations like BAMCEF, DS4 (Dalit Shoshit Sangharsh Samiti), and a political party, BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party). In this context, Yengde contemplates, “There is great diversity in Dalit organization. But a common position has been that of reinterpreting history and bringing it to the service of the Bahujans” (44).

In the second chapter, “Affairs of Caste,” the author sheds light on the origin of Dalit literature and its response to Black literature, which sets the stage for recognizing caste and untouchability as inhuman as race. Dalit writings first emerged in the genre of periodicals and newspapers. In 1872, the newspaper Sooryodhyam was established by Adi Dravida Pandit Thiruvencasamy; this was followed by the publication of two journals in Tamil by Pandit Ayothee Thass: Dravida Pandian in 1876 and Oru Paisa Tamizhan in 1907. Similar publications soon emerged in various other regional languages. Dr. Ambedkar expressed his thoughts through periodicals like Janata, Samata, and Mooknayak, which shaped the minds of future writers. Yengde explored the role of MN Wankhede’s Asmitadarsh magazine in 1968, raising consciousness and preparing Dalit intellectuals for future writings. Its editors, R.G. Jadhav, Prof. Raymane, Prof. Gangadhar Pantwane, and Sukhram Hirawale, worked to bring diverse perspectives forth and filled the gap of scholarship on the literature of caste and race comparative study, especially Waghmare, who closely studied Black literature and “communicated to his Marathi readers how effective it can be in changing society and influencing culture. Through his citations of African American writers, Waghmare alerted the Dalit community to the need to come to terms with the significance of literature and the extraordinary power of public opinion in bringing about change” (71).

In the third chapter, Race and Caste, Yengde draws a comparison between race and caste, which exposes the nature of violence against Dalits and black people. He interrogates their parallel histories of oppression, framing shared trauma as a foundational catalyst for global resistance and the collective pursuit of egalitarianism. Although cases of human rights violations against the subaltern have increased in the world, this is a serious threat to the universal values of equality, liberty, and fraternity. For instance, George Floyd’s lynching and violence against Dalits in

different states of India are alarming. Untouchables and Black people are treated like inferior subhumans everywhere. Yengde comments about the condition of Dalits in India “Casteism, colorism, and religious hatred in India are Brahmanical instruments of the dominant castes for holding down Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, Christians, and many others” (98). In the USA Dalit diaspora is active and founded VISION (Volunteers in Service to India’s Oppressed and Neglected) was a pioneering organization led by Dalits who sympathized with the African American struggles for equality and liberty.

The last chapter, *The Dalit Republic of Diaspora* studies the role of caste on the island of Trinidad, where Indians were migrated in search of work during the colonial period. Most of them were Dalits who migrated and settled there to escape the wretched life of indignity in India. They reconstructed their identity and established themselves economically. Here, caste is absent from the social discourse, because “most Trinidadians who identify as Hindu are liberal in their politics and faith” (154). Although Yengde finds, “Caste has been corporatized in the form of cultural institutions, subcaste associations, and religious bodies. For ritualistic purposes, caste is pervasive and one of the most reliable markers of difference” (153). He interacted with the Sanatani Hindu organization SWAHA and revealed how the right-wing RSS and VHP are working to consolidate their Hindu identity against other majoritarian religions. They interpreted the caste order in a positive manner, which is based on the Guna and Karma. He met with Pandit Amar Sreeprasad and Sadhuji Chamar from lower castes, who denied the existence of discrimination in their surroundings, except for some incidents. But “It (caste) is a subtle presence and crops up most prominently in ritualism, religion, group affinities, marriages, and positions of power” (194). In the last chapter, “Cosmopolitan Dalit Universalism,” he explores how the Dalit diaspora is responding to Dr. Ambedkar’s call to “Educate, Agitate, and Organize.” He covered Ambedkar International Missions in the UK, Malaysia, Kuwait, the USA, and the UAE, working against caste discrimination and oppression. Ambedkarites in Middle Eastern countries have adopted passive strategies like giving back to society by contributing to the education of poor Dalits. However, the Dalit diaspora in the USA and UK uses protest as a means to fight against discrimination and the Indian government’s indifference towards atrocities. Yengde concludes the book by suggesting remedies for injustice:

The Dalit struggle does not need to be reminded of the principle of universal dignity that has always been its foundation. It does not need to be reminded of the core methods of Black Lives Matter, which match Ambedkar’s call for the oppressed to educate, organize, and agitate. It is rather the dominant caste who need to recognize that they are carriers of a social and religious creed that cannot tolerate human equality. It is they who need to do more to educate themselves about their privileges and violent prejudices, to organize and agitate against the caste system rather than for it. (257)

In conclusion, the book exposes caste dynamics across the world and examines the Dr. Ambedkar International Mission's role in raising consciousness about caste injustice in foreign countries. It proposes methods to address the caste problem and calls for universal solidarity between Dalits and Blacks to eradicate the inhuman institution from the world. Thus, this work enriches existing Dalit scholarship by analysing caste from a global lens and suggests a deeper investigation into the impact of caste on indentured labourers.

References

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