

# Leveraging Knowledge Management to bridge the caste divide in India: A focus on Hindu Dalits.

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**Abstract.** Cultural studies reveal a rich tapestry of human experiences worldwide, prompting us to critically examine societal structures through various lenses. This paper delves into the complex social landscape of India, where ancient traditions coexist with aspirations for change. It specifically focuses on the plight of Indian Dalits, exploring the challenges they face in a deeply religious nation marked by caste-based segregation. By juxtaposing the ideas of sociologists Peter Berger and Andrew Linklater, this study aims to stimulate critical thinking about the Dalit experience. Through a comprehensive literature review, the paper highlights the potential of knowledge management as a tool to address this pressing issue.

**Keywords.** India, Knowledge Management, dalits.

## 1. Introduction

Given the rise of increasingly sensitive agendas concerned with the quality of life of social minorities around the world, contemporary societies have become too complex to accept any interventions based on reductionist and fundamentalist discourses and ideas. This is corroborated by Morin (2010), who states that isolated knowledge does not explain the world, and the practice of dialogicity between knowledge is necessary in building an equitable society.

This summary delves into the social context of the Republic of India, where, according to the latest report released by Amnesty International, discrimination incited by social stratification based on castes is still a common problem in Indian megacities, despite domestic laws, such as the 1950 Constitution itself, mandating the abolition of any type of discrimination based on this form of social division. (Amnesty International, 2023).

In this regard, Dalits, a segment of the population also labeled as the "untouchables", represent the lowest stratum of Indian society. Although castes were formally abolished by the 1950 Constitution, this social group continues to be persecuted and prevented from enjoying basic human rights, such as

access to health, quality education, decent jobs, etc. This is a pertinent and relevant issue insofar as it is the duty of epistemic communities to bring these issues to light with the aim of improving the living and working conditions of communities around the world.

It is a transdisciplinary problem, largely because it would require an effort from various fields of knowledge, such as economics, culture and civilization of peoples, law, and education, for example, to be solved. That said, it is also clear that the field of Knowledge Management, allied with important theorists around International Relations, can be useful in building solutions to the organic resolution of the problem. In this sense, this summary aims to understand the problem faced by Dalits in India from the perspective of Andrew Linklater's Cosmopolitan Theory.

This preliminary study aims to assess the significance of knowledge management in addressing the identified issue. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study relies on a comprehensive review of specialized literature and official documents from governmental and international organizations.

## 2. India's caste system and the Dalits

The Republic of India, a nation located in the southern part of the Asian continent, has a very complex social organization. In the country, governmental institutions face numerous challenges, among them is the task of safeguarding cultural traditions and forms of social organization built under the aegis of the dogmas of the Hindu religion, combining them with the new social demands of a country that aspires for change and that represents, alone, about 15% of the planet's population.

The adaptation of these dogmas to the reality of modern India has encountered barriers, especially when more conservative groups sought to impose fundamentalist interpretations of the Vedas, the four sacred books of the Hindu religion. In them, the social division into castes is proposed, which, according to the religion's imagination, originate from the body of the creator of the universe, the God Brahma, and that this division would represent the dharma (destiny) of everyone.

For them, Hindu society is inexorably divided into four main castes: the Brahmins, represented by priests and scholars, at the top of the hierarchy; the Kshatriyas, represented by warriors and rulers; the Vaishyas, represented by farmers, merchants, and artisans; and the Shudras, represented by manual laborers. In addition, the caste system is based on heredity, with no mobility within the hierarchical structure, that is, the caste is the same until the end of life.

However, the 4 castes do not encompass the entire Hindu community. The so-called Dalits, also known as the "untouchables", are excluded from this system. The conservative interpretation of Hinduism preaches that the Dalits represent the dust under the feet of the God Brahma, and that for this reason they are destined to perform work considered despicable, such as cleaning streets and sewers, collecting garbage, and handling the dead. More orthodox Hindus believe and spread the idea that even the shadow of a Dalit can leave a person of impure caste, which would require a series of purification rituals to restore the body and soul.

It is important to mention that caste-based marginalization was gradually prohibited from India's independence in 1947, until years later, when it became a crime through provisions in the 1950 Indian Constitution. The Constitution was a landmark for the Dalits, considering that its text was written by one of them, the politician and social reformer Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. In addition, also representing the Dalits, we can highlight the name of the famous Indian activist Mahatma Gandhi, who served as an inspiration for civil rights movements around the world.

It is true that the community in question has made great strides in relation to its rights, such as the enactment of the Prevention of Atrocities Against Dalits Act (1956) and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. In addition, bringing it to a more current context, according to a report released by the BBC News agency, the creation and promotion of quotas in state institutions for Dalits has reduced the gaps in education, income, and health.

However, despite this group being legally protected, the reality is substantially different, as seen in the information provided by the Report on the State of Human Rights in the world, published by Amnesty International in April of this year. The document points out that Dalits, adivasis, and other marginalized groups continued to face violence and entrenched discrimination, with women and girls suffering specific attacks on their sexual and reproductive rights. Despite the formal prohibition of manual scavenging, more than 300 people have died cleaning sewers and septic tanks since 2018. (Amnesty International, 2024, p.128)

Violence also comes in the form of veiled prejudice that prevents this segment of the population from guaranteeing decent means of subsistence, from attending temples without being prevented from entering and performing their religious rites, from frequenting swimming pools and public squares without fear of being rejected. In short, it is essential that issues like this be brought to the fore, even if their spatial focus is far from the researcher's reality, mainly because the function of science is the progress of humanity in a cosmopolitan model.

### 2.1 A sociological and knowledge management analysis

As previously seen, the union of diverse areas of knowledge, in a transdisciplinary context, outlines various fronts for the resolution of contemporary problems. In this sense, a reference author in the field of International Relations (IR) will be introduced here, namely the British theorist Andrew Linklater, who has developed a highly referenced theory for the contemporary field of IR.

Linklater's Cosmopolitan Theory seeks to transcend the limits of the nation-state and promote a more just and inclusive global political community. The author argues that the political community should expand beyond national borders, including more and more people in a common project of justice and mutual respect.

For Linklater (1982), a cosmopolitan sentiment is necessary through a moral universalism, because, according to him, a state will only achieve peace when all others are functioning according to cosmopolitan principles. His main objective is to

establish a mutual consciousness to promote the maintenance of human dignity and its basic rights. In general, this theory aims to reduce inequalities, respect diversity, and avoid any type of sociocultural hierarchy.

In his work "Men and Citizenship in the Theory of International Relations," Linklater seeks to adapt Immanuel Kant's thought to the moment of the work, reformulating the idea of a social contract with a collective responsibility within the scope of expanded citizenship. The author continues to defend the radical transformation of the political world towards a condition in which all human beings live according to the imperatives rooted in common rational nature (LINKLATER, 1990, p.99).

The postulates presented above allow for an analysis of the problem presented in this summary insofar as Andrew Linklater's Cosmopolitan Theory highlights how hierarchical systems, such as the caste system in India, violate the principles of justice and equality that are fundamental to a cosmopolitan global community. Moreover, the situation of the Dalits is the result of deep structural inequality, rooted in a caste system that has historically denied these groups basic rights and opportunities.

It is evident that archaic India is being replaced by new customs and traditions, which can also be analyzed based on the lessons of the American sociologist Peter Berger, who analyzed how knowledge is socially constructed and how different forms of knowledge shape worldviews, such as family, school, and church. In this sense, everything that shaped/shapes the social actions against the Dalits was constructed through the segregating interests of those at the top of the power structures.

### 3. Conclusion

The issue of caste-based inequality, with Dalits occupying the lowest position in the hierarchy, is one of the most complex challenges facing contemporary India. Knowledge management (KM) emerges as a strategic tool to address this problem, promoting social inclusion and transforming the realities of these marginalized groups. KM, therefore, is not merely a technical tool, but a social transformation instrument that can contribute to the construction of a more just and equitable society in India.

Management, that is, the handling of knowledge areas, can structurally promote improvements in the quality of life for this segment of the population. It is clear from what has been said here that this is one of the paths to follow, not the only one; and it will neither be easy nor quick. The fact is that education, also from an institutional standpoint, is the starting point for overcoming this problem.

It is possible to promote the overcoming of historical inequalities and build a more promising future for all

Indian citizens. It is essential that this strategy be implemented in a participatory and collaborative manner, with the active participation of Dalits themselves, particularly in educational institutions in the country.

It is through KM that the practical application of the postulates of the aforementioned authors can be carried out, thus reducing inequalities and restructuring a society that yearns for change.

The effective implementation of knowledge management in Dalit communities requires a robust investment in quality education. It is necessary to offer lifelong learning opportunities, equipping individuals with the skills needed to actively participate in society. In addition, KM can be used to strengthen civil society organizations working with Dalits, providing them with access to information and resources to support their struggles for rights. By empowering Dalits with knowledge, their capacity to negotiate better living and working conditions, challenging existing power structures, is increased.

Implementing knowledge management strategies to address caste-based inequalities in India is fraught with challenges, including resistance from entrenched privileged groups, resource constraints, and the imperative for profound institutional reforms. Nonetheless, prospects for progress are encouraging. The rising awareness of the significance of social inclusion, coupled with advancements in information and communication technologies, presents new avenues for knowledge dissemination and the fostering of a more equitable society. Over time, knowledge management can be instrumental in transforming India into a more just and prosperous nation, where all citizens can realize their full potential.

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