

# Visibility through Distributive and Corrective Justice: A Reading of Munshi Premchand's "The Woman Who Sold Grass" and M.M. Vinodini's "The Parable of the Lost Daughter"

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## Abstract

This essay takes a look at Munshi Premchand's short story "The Woman Who Sold Grass" ("Ghaaswali", 1929) that represents the harassment of a Dalit woman grass cutter that is not reported to the police so that no corrective justice is offered although the woman herself criticizes the caste-based assessment of her identity. The harasser, the upper-caste landlord Chain Singh, offers a form of reparation that resembles distributive justice for a Dalit family after observing the Dalit woman being verbally harassed by working-class "lower-caste" coachmen. M.M. Vinodini's short story "The Parable of the Lost Daughter" (translation first published in 2013) is also examined for its representation of upward mobility and distributive justice for a young Dalit Christian woman who belongs to a working-class family and becomes a research scholar but decides to conform to Brahmanical practices on her way to empowerment and to erase her Dalit Christian identity. This seems to imply that distributive justice in India perhaps encourages compliance with upper-caste practices and fortifies the patriarchal category of caste itself. Her abuse by the father and brother-in-law of her close friend encourages her "return" to the patriarchal category of caste. The essay concludes by referring to Dr Ambedkar's speech "We Too Are Human" that argues for the extermination of the Hindu caste hierarchy. The essay concludes that the visibility of Dalit and "lower-

caste” communities, especially women, and their literature and cultural forms has to be amplified through the visible operation of corrective and distributive justice against all attempts to obliterate them.

**Keywords:** Dalit Women, Hindu patriarchies, Munshi Premchand, M.M. Vinodini, Corrective and Distributive Justice, Reparation, Literature on Caste

Article 15 of the Indian Constitution highlights a case of the antagonism between the arrogance of hierarchical caste-conforming Hinduism and the rank-antipathetic fundamental doctrines that shape the Constitution. The article debars the state from inflicting discrimination in relation to one’s “religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth” and from permitting discrimination related to these aspects in public spaces (6-8). The state or the mode of organization of the public activities of the people occupying a particular territory is seen to be separate from the private lives of the people occupying the same territory and the state is required to protect the freedom to such privacy to a viable extent. But since such private activities including religious practices such as untouchability do have an impact on public practices such as public interaction, the right to freedom of religious practices such as untouchability does not exist under Article 17 of the Indian Constitution (9). The state can also ameliorate the individual knowledge and private income of the “lower” castes of Hinduism through reservations and affirmative action in educational institutions and in the economic sphere (*The Constitution of India* 7-9). But the state has not interfered yet to eliminate casteism in Hinduism by citing the state’s right to do so because it has the right to carry out social reform under Article 25 of the Constitution (9). In colonial India, the British pursued a policy of non-interference in the religions of the colonized except where decisions for “religious and moral improvement” such as the freedom from bondage of Dalit labourers (Prakash 143, 224) and the division of the electorate (Kane 52-60) in a period when colonial “instruction” on democratic practices was being offered would appear to be compatible with colonial objectives of eliciting support for colonial rule. Dr Ambedkar, who was the leading creator of the Indian Constitution, was dejected about the persistence of Dalit oppression in independent India and recommended the conversion to other religions of Hindu Dalits (Omvedt 55). The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules

of the Government of India announced after the adoption of the Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989 and amended many times until 2018 today permits compensation of upto eight lakh and twenty-five thousand rupees for Dalit victims of murder, rape and other offences and crimes (“The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes Amendment Rules”, 2016, 16-28). But upper-caste violence against Dalits, particularly against Dalit women, continues despite the corrective justice measures (punishments and compensation under the law) and the distributive justice policies (related to reservations in government jobs and offices as well as educational institutions and the production of employment and educational opportunities) prepared and designed by the Government of India. The accessibility of Dalit literature and cultural forms, including literature and cultural forms that are engendered by Dalit women, might have made other Indians cognizant of the oppression of Dalits, including Dalit women, but such accessibility does not seem to attain visibility as an orientation against the violation of Dalits, including Dalit women.

There seems to be a separation between the public prohibitions against casteism imposed by the state and the freedom granted to hierarchize caste in the private practice of religion which seems to encourage brutality against “lower castes” for all perceived violations of the religious hierarchy which are seen as related to a desire for the status of the upper castes. Under the current practice of orthodox Hinduism, even intercaste marriage, which is permitted under the law, has not helped to demolish the caste hierarchy as only women may climb up or down the hierarchy because caste is a patriarchal category; men do not lose or gain caste through intercaste marriages. “Lower caste” or Dalit women who are raped or assaulted or harassed are seen not only as “impure” or “polluted” by upper-caste Hindus but as seeking to gain status through their alleged “loose” interaction with other castes and are therefore abused by those seeking to defend the caste hierarchy of private Hindu practices.

This essay takes a look at Munshi Premchand’s short story “The Woman Who Sold Grass” (“Ghaaswali”, 1929) that represents the harassment of a Dalit woman grass cutter and seller in her occupational space that is not reported to the police so that no corrective justice is offered although the woman herself criticizes the caste-based assessment of her identity. The harasser, the upper-caste landlord Chain Singh, offers a form of reparation that resembles distributive justice for a Dalit family

after observing the Dalit woman being verbally harassed by working-class “lower-caste” coachmen but that justice does not appear to be feminist. M.M. Vinodini’s short story “The Parable of the Lost Daughter” (translation first published in 2013) is also examined for its representation of upward mobility and distributive justice for a young Dalit woman who belongs to a working-class family and becomes a research scholar but decides to conform to Brahmanical practices on her way to empowerment and to erase her Dalit identity about which she is embarrassed. Her sexual harassment by the Brahmin brother-in-law of her close friend encourages her “return” to the patriarchal category of caste. This seems to imply that distributive justice in India perhaps encourages compliance with upper-caste practices and fortifies the patriarchal category of caste itself. The essay concludes by referring to Dr Ambedkar’s speech “We Too Are Human” that argues for the extermination of the caste hierarchy that shapes all Hindu beliefs and practices. It could perhaps be questioned whether the erasure of the hierarchy will prevent the violation of Dalits and other “lower-castes” as the representation of the young Dalit woman in “The Parable of the Lost Daughter” draws attention to the caste-based understanding of her Dalit identity although her family and she are (casteless) Christians. The essay concludes that the visibility of Dalit and “lower-caste” communities, especially women, and their literature and cultural forms has to be amplified through the visible operation of corrective and distributive justice against all attempts to obliterate them.

The sexual harassment of the Dalit woman who cuts grass to earn money, Mulia, by the upper-caste Thakur landlord, Chain Singh, would have been punishable under the Indian Penal Code of 1860 existing before Independence if it had been reported to the police although it would have been classified under the general category of sexual offences. The new Indian penal code adopted in 2023, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, also lists the punishments to be awarded for assaults or the use of criminal force with the aim of “outrage” of the modesty of a woman, sexual harassment (including “unwelcome and explicit sexual overtures” and “a demand or request for sexual favours”) as well as rape (23-27). But there was/is no punishment for religious beliefs that permit the hierarchization (discriminatory by itself) of castes in private Hindu practices. The Indian Constitution explicitly forbids untouchability although the word is not used in any section of the new penal code. Mulia does not report the harassment experienced by her on account of the intersectional forces of caste, gender

and class. This might represent a fear that the Thakurs would probably be able to influence the colonial police and the courts in their favour; she also thinks that violence might be instigated by Mahaveer's anger at the dishonour inflicted on his wife if she were to disclose the harassment to him – "he'd [Mahaveer] be out for the Thakur's blood, and who knows what would happen then!" (40). It is possible to state that Mulia would have been seen as a seeker of corrective justice if she had reported the harassment by Chain Singh to the police, as corrective justice pertains to an injustice inflicted by one person on another. But the larger problem of how Dalits and women are harassed and abused in relation to private religious practices that have result in their historical deprivation with respect to economic, political and social equality (a problem of distributive justice) would not be addressed. This problem is addressed to a certain extent by legislative decisions on reservations and special programmes for the underprivileged and marginalized castes and people that have been designed after Independence. The British Government of India Act of 1935 had earlier reserved seats for the scheduled castes in the Federal Assembly (220) and in the provincial assemblies (245). The question that could be asked is whether the Indian state's reservation policies and special programmes for the underprivileged have proven to be sufficient as indemnity or reparations for the injustice inflicted on Dalits, including Dalit women, throughout history and how distributive and corrective justice can work unitedly and effectively today.

Scholars such as Kaimipono David Wenger and others have studied claims for indemnity or reparations for slavery in the United States. Wenger has argued that "the structure of the legal system is designed to address wrongs, and slavery combines many of the most terrible wrongs imaginable – theft, imprisonment, assault, murder" (249). He has also argued that it is difficult to apply for corrective justice with respect to slavery and that reparation claims against enslavement are made more often in relation to distributive justice in laws such as the "forty acres and a mule" announced for freed slaves that was not given (251). Law and the concept of property are, according to Wenger, "a tool(s) of the masters" and are created to ensure the defence of the elites (263). Since there was no law preventing the government from supporting slavery before the thirteenth amendment, the government itself cannot not be forced to pay compensation and it is the legislatures that have been named by the courts as the institutions that can plan reparations and compensation (Wenger 252).The

US House of Representatives and the Senate apologized for the practice of slavery in 2008 but have not agreed to pay any compensation for the existence of the practice in the past (Wenger 255). There are laws supporting affirmative action (similar to Indian reservation policies) in many states of the United States but there has so far been no move to pay for the wrongs committed in the past which continue to damage the present lives of African Americans. It might perhaps be *contra bonos mores* (against good morals) not to arrange for such compensation even if such compensation seems impractical and an example of tokenism. The obstacles against the granting of reparation claims for slavery in court rather than through the legislature are similar to those against the granting of reparation claims in the case of oppression under the caste hierarchy in Hinduism as the government cannot be held responsible for the existence of the historical caste hierarchy. The state has arranged for future-oriented reservations and other distributive justice measures but no compensation has been paid for discrimination in the past or for the private hierarchization of caste that does affect people's behaviour in public. A rape and harassment complaint by a Dalit, including a Dalit woman, might be tried under the penal code and compensation paid as a corrective measure but the complaint is not processed for reparations specifically with respect to the historical oppressive private practices related to caste oppression that still exist even if the hierarchy might be considered publicly immoral.

The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention website defines crimes against humanity (human rights crimes) as acts including murder, rape, sexual slavery and other crimes that are "part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population" and that such acts "must be committed in furtherance of a State or organizational policy to commit an attack". It is also stated that the "plan or policy does not need to be explicitly stipulated or formally adopted and can, therefore, be inferred from the totality of the circumstances" (<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/crimes-against-humanity.shtml>). Upper-caste Hindu violence against Dalits and Dalit women in India does not comprise isolated incidents and has continued in post-Independence India and involves the violation of human rights, for which reparations could perhaps be demanded *pro bonis moribus* (in support of good morals). Jo-Anne Wemmers has argued that reparations can be "healing or therapeutic" in human rights crimes and that "one must consider how reparation is obtained and how it affects victims individually and

collectively". She has asserted that reparation procedures "should not constitute a secondary victimization by inflicting further harm or suffering on victims" (1). Hugo van der Merwe has examined the effect of reparations in restoring "individuals' [victims'] relationships, with their families and their community, and their worldview". Reparations may also prevent the avoidance of the realization of human needs such as food and housing and might indicate the state's advocacy of the "needs and rights of citizens". They may also help victims to "rebuild social capital, cultural resources and affiliations" (202).

In Premchand's story "The Woman Who Sold Grass", Chain Singh makes an attempt to pay the indemnity for the oppression of a Dalit man and a Dalit woman under the patriarchal norms of Hinduism. The upper-caste landlord's proposal to pay the indemnity or reparation for the economic and social oppression of Mahaveer and Mulia evolves from his aspiration that he might thereby reconstruct the patriarchal caste order of Hinduism to prevent the violence and dishonour experienced by Dalit men and women that is inflicted by upper-caste men such as Chain Singh himself on Mahaveer and Mulia and by all men on Mulia when she works outside her domestic space. There is no feminist solution suggested in the text but Chain Singh's aspiration is generated by Mulia's disparaging argument that Chain Singh had defaced the patriarchal caste order of Hinduism through his acts of dishonour and violence against a married Dalit woman. Chain Singh had pleaded for "kindness", that is for Mulia's interest in commencing an extramarital relationship with him. Mulia attacks him for harassing her even though he is a married man – Chain Singh calls marriage "only a game". Mulia argues that Chain Singh has failed in his patriarchal duty as a married Hindu man who has to defend the Hindu patriarchy with its caste hierarchy in relation to the observance of the norms of marriage. By harassing her, Chain Singh is also marring the honour of another married Hindu man, Mahaveer, as Mulia is Mahaveer's wife – "Still, if my man spoke to your woman like this, how would you feel? Wouldn't you be ready to chop his head off? Speak! What do you think –that Mahaveer is a Chamar so there's no blood in his veins, he has no sense of shame, no idea about his dignity" (43).

Mulia contends that her sexual harassment by Chain Singh is instigated by his caste-biased desire to inflict violence against a "chamarin, from the lower caste" since the upper castes think that "women from the lower caste, with a little threatening and tempting, can be easily caught in your

fist". Chain Singh rebuts her accusation by saying – "It's not a matter of high or low birth. Everybody is equal. I'm willing to place my head at your feet". She asks him to prove his so-called belief in the equality of all castes by harassing a Kshatriya woman as a Thakur because she believes that his "head won't be left standing" if he does so (43). She accuses upper-caste men such as him of inducing or stimulating the extramarital affairs of upper-caste wives with employees such as "a syce, a coachman, a water-carrier, a priest and a cook" who are "diversions for the rich" as the wives wish for reprisal against their husbands who "go around losing their hearts to chamarins and kaharins". Mulia also asserts that Mahaveer is a more virtuous Hindu husband than the unfaithful Chain Singh as he "would never even glance at another woman" and as he would "still treat me the same way" even if her beauty was "diminished" by pox or blindness (44). But she does not complain to the colonial police and no action to enforce corrective justice by punishing Chain Singh is taken.

Following his encounter with Mulia, who condemns Chain Singh for violating the Hindu patriarchal norms for married men and for his inadequacies as a Hindu male and is able to make him withdraw his interest in harassing her, the landlord strives to become an acceptable Hindu male through his familial "kind-hearted", "serious" and "patient" (45) interest in his labourers. He also notices that Mulia's husband Mahaveer, who is "not in the prime of his life" (39), is in straitened circumstances because lorries have reduced his income as an ekkawala. Mahaveer's lack of occupational mobility on account of his lack of education and Dalit status is indicated when Chain Singh suggests that Mahaveer take up agriculture – the only other option for which he seems to be eligible. Mahaveer is unable to consider an alternative occupation because he cannot take up tiring physical work, perhaps on account of his age. Chain Singh, who had "grabbed" Mulia's hand and appealed to her for "pity"(39) at the outset, also notices that Mulia has to tolerate verbal harassment by "lower caste" coachmen when she sells grass at the marketplace and is able to oppose such harassment without anxiety, perhaps because the harassers do not belong to the wealthy upper castes. This appears to engender Chain Singh's desire to protect the Hindu patriarchal caste order under which women have to serve as housewives or unpaid managers of their husbands' properties. Like most poor Dalit men, Mahaveer allows his wife Mulia to work as a contributor to the family's income but according to Chain Singh, this jeopardizes her honour as a married Hindu woman as she has to

endure sexual harassment in the fields and at the marketplace. So he decides to “repent”, apparently on “behalf” of the Hindu patriarchy, for pauperizing a Dalit man such as Mahaveer and his family such that his wife has to work outside the home in violation of the Hindu code for married women. He seems to offer a form of reparation that seems to be similar to the reservations in government jobs accessed by Dalits under the distributive justice policies of the Indian government. He offers Mahaveer a salary of a rupee a day so that he may travel by Mahaveer’s ekka whenever required and tells him – “Don’t send your wife with grass to the market. Your honour is my honour. And whenever you need more money, don’t hesitate to come and get it” (51). Although Mulia thinks that Chain Singh is “repenting” as an individual – “You’re [Chain Singh] still fulfilling an obligation you took on by seizing my arm” (52) – because he had violated a Hindu woman’s honour, there is no public acknowledgement of his crime or the granting of any corrective punishment to him. His conventional patriarchal understanding of honour makes him focus on Mahaveer and does not include any steps to reform society to become respectful towards working women or the necessity of asking for their consent. Although Mulia was not “oblivious to all that laughter and talk” (52) or verbal harassment that was inflicted on her when she sold grass, whether or not she would have liked to continue working is not stated in the story. The absence of most women from the public places and workplaces of colonial India was not the acceptable aim of government policies in independent India. Indian government policies have focused on empowering Dalit men and women through corrective and distributive justice measures. But as Clarinda Still has argued, the upward class mobility of Dalits often leads to conformity with upper caste practices such as those related to the gendered code of honour of married Hindu women so that Dalit women who worked outside their homes in the past now work inside their homes as housewives (5), as Mulia does at the end of Premchand’s story that was written in colonial India. What materializes is the invigoration of the category of caste itself as work outside the home is still seen by Dalit men as the cause for the abuse of Dalit women by upper caste men (Still 14), as the constitutional freedom provided to women of all castes to work outside the home seems to be forgotten.

In the 1990s, Dalit feminists and other third wave Indian feminists accentuated the need for intersectional analysis to assess the various forces shaping the oppression and identities of Indian

women. Dalit feminists questioned and contested “casteist sexism” and looked for “new scopes for coalition across identities, communities, regions and religions” (Pan 10). Anandita Pan has argued that “in mainstream Indian Feminism and Dalit Politics, caste and gender are considered two individual and mutually exclusive categories defining ‘women’ and ‘dalits’ respectively” and for this reason “dalit women and their concerns get erased or subsumed” (23). According to her, “Dalit Feminism’s difference ... is articulated through the idea of intersectionality” (24). Pan also mentions the 2009 declaration of the National Federation of Dalit Women which describes the three alarming oppressions against which dalit women have to struggle: “gender, as a result of patriarchy; class, being from the poorest and most marginalized communities; and caste, coming from the lowest caste, the ‘untouchables’” (30). As Pan and other scholars argue, the term “patriarchy” refers to dual patriarchies: brahmanical and dalit” (Pan 33). Under the relationship between the two patriarchies, the dalit patriarchy is less powerful than and is oppressed by the brahmanical patriarchy. Pan asserts that there are “differences among women, and between men and women” who are Dalit (30).

In M.M. Vinodini’s story “The Parable of the Lost Daughter”, the distributive justice meant for Dalits in the form of expanded educational opportunities offered by the government appears to have been effective in producing the upward mobility of Suvarthavani, a young Dalit Christian woman whose parents are a rickshaw-driver and carpenter and a domestic help. The Indian Dream of the Constitution seeking to offer “justice, social, economic and political”, “liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship”, “equality of status and of opportunity” and “fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation” (1) seems to be linked to the dream of Suvarthavani’s parents that she “would have a life that was unlike theirs” and that she would be “happy and respected”. Like other Indian citizens whose actions are propelled by the Indian Dream, they “believed that education alone helped a person achieve” happiness and respect (Vinodini 167). Suvarthavani, who belongs to a small village near Guntur, does seem to attain professional advancement as she becomes a research scholar who also works part-time at the Ambedkar Open University in Hyderabad, after being awarded her master’s degree in Rajahmundry. Her affection for Telegu literature induces her to devote herself to the study of the same. Even though the state seems to function effectively in providing educational opportunities to a young woman from a historically

oppressed community, it could be questioned whether it encourages Suvarthavani to see Telegu identity as divergent from Dalit identity because of the texts prescribed for study to bachelor's and master's students. The representation of her curriculum does not seem to include any references to Dalit oral traditions. The study of classical literature in Telegu requires a knowledge of Sanskrit which is associated with Brahmanical traditions and Suvarthavani seems to aim towards the rejection of her Dalit identity not only in "borrowing heavy and dusty Sanskrit tomes from the library" and in "attending locally held events of traditional classical literature" but also in concealing "details of the food they [Dalits] cooked and ate at home" while discussing "how her mother made brinjal curry, sambhar and coconut-and-lentil chutney, like the food she had seen her friends bring for lunch" and in "wearing a red thread around her wrist like she had seen many Hindus do" (168).

Suvarthavani and her family members are Christian but this does not help her to see herself as a casteless Indian as Dalit converts to Christianity still find that they cannot escape historical definitions of their identity. Their identities are thus shaped not only by the Brahmanical and Dalit patriarchies but also by the Indian "upper caste" Christian patriarchy. The inception of Suvarthavani's friendship with Gayatri in Rajahmundry boosts her discomfort about her Dalit identity as Gayatri is a traditional Brahmin who does not apply turmeric to her friend's feet at a religious event because "Brahmins should not touch the feet of harijans [Dalits]" (170). Suvarthavani appears to feel honoured when Gayatri's other guests think that her friend "doesn't look like a harijan girl at all" (169). Her desire for Brahmanical practices deforms her relationship with her parents – "she began to dislike the way they spoke, their habits, their work, everything annoyed her now" (170). Her brother Zachariah highlights her animosity against the Dalit Christian identity from which she is trying to withdraw – "You stopped eating [beef] not because you don't like it anymore, but just so that you can tell your friends that you don't eat beef" (166). When she wishes to live at Gayatri's parents' home in Hyderabad for a short time even though Gayatri has emigrated to the United States, she tries to conform to Brahmanical practices that are associated with daughters of the family – she puts a sticker bottu (a bindi or red dot) on her forehead and removes the cross pendant which represents her Christian identity from the chain around her neck (171). She admires Gayatri's father, Piratla Subramaniam, because he is a Telegu writer of novels, plays and stories on "oppressed castes,

exploited classes, the poor and the needy, lonely women, prostitutes” (172) and on intercaste marriages. It would appear as though Piratla Subramaniam is interested in achieving corrective and distributive justice for Dalits but Suvarthavani discovers that there is a scission between Gayatri’s father’s views on Dalits as a writer and his views as a Brahmin husband and father. At home, he uses the names of Dalit communities such as the Malas and the Madigas as derogatory terms when he wishes to criticize the actions of the members of his family. He calls his wife a “rotten old whore”, a “mala bitch”, a “madiga bitch” and a “Christian bitch” when she fails to make carpenters fit a bolt on the main gate (176). Suvarthavani’s experience of being abused by Piratla Subramaniam concurrently with his abuse of his wife – “[h]e abused her caste, her religion, and the women of her community, and the men of her community” (177) – restores her to the patriarchal category of caste from which she had wished to be liberated. Earlier, Gayatri’s brother-in-law had sexually harassed her because he had assumed that she was “not a traditional girl” as she was Christian while his wife and sister-in-law were “too orthodox” and not “free”. According to him, Christian women in urban areas “don’t propose such sentimental nonsense as marriage” and he states that he is “friendly [has sexual relationships] with many Christian girls”. He also compares them with “women from the harijanwada” [Dalit women] in the rural areas because “it’s so thrilling to take these women in the sugarcane fields or amidst the maize fields” (174-75). Suvarthavani regrets the regard that she had displayed earlier for Brahmanical “customs” and “their language” and questions herself – “Why could she not respect her own language and culture?” (176). She cannot exterminate the caste hierarchy by fleeing from her Dalit identity and by denying her Christian beliefs– an action that resembles racial passing by blacks earlier in the United States because they appeared to be white and therefore denied their black ancestry to escape the segregation and discrimination that they experienced as blacks. Suvarthavani may have undermined Brahmanical practices by engaging in them as a Dalit and trying to “pass” as Brahmin but she decides next to take pride in her identity as a Dalit Christian who opposes the abuse of her identity. She wears her cross pendant with a little Jesus on her chain again and also disposes of her bottu packet. As she leaves, Gayatri’s mother reminds her that she has “forgotten” her bottu but Suvarthavani announces with pride – “No, Mother. I haven’t forgotten. I am a Christian girl. I am a dalit girl”. (177). No corrective justice measures are taken because

Suvarthavani does not report Piratla Subramaniam's and his son-in-law's abusive behaviour to the police and distributive justice seems to have been accomplished only in the areas of education and employment in Suvarthavani's life. Her decision to "return" to her patriarchal caste identity might make the reader recall the Christian parable of the prodigal son who returns to his father and is welcomed back even though he has recklessly misused his share of his father's property and impoverished himself. The decision does seem to reinforce the segregated categories of caste as distributive justice measures have not been able to end caste bias in social interaction or to change upper-caste interpretations of Dalit women's behaviour and identities.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar had argued for the abrogation of the caste hierarchy in Hinduism in his speeches and writings. In a speech delivered on 25 December 1927 during the Mahad satyagraha when Dr Ambedkar led a protest by Dalits to demand access to the water of the Chavadar lake in Mahad, Maharashtra, the Dalit leader and leading originator of the Indian Constitution had said that "the inequality in Hindu society stunts the progress of individuals and in consequence stunts society". He had also argued that "the same inequality prevents society from bringing into use powers stored in individuals". He had contended that in order to invigorate Hindu society, "we must uproot the four-castes system and untouchability, and set the society on the foundation of the two principles of one caste only and of equality" (30). Suvarthavani's experience might make the reader question whether the abolition of the caste hierarchy will end discrimination against those who formerly belonged to the "lower castes". Will it ever be possible for Indian Hindus to call themselves only Hindus without also belonging to a particular caste?

The visible operation of corrective and distributive justice to enhance and ameliorate the visibility of Dalit and "lower-caste" communities, especially women, and their literature and cultural forms might perhaps make an eventual abolition of the caste hierarchy in the private practice of religion easier. Today, most television shows, sitcoms, news features and documentaries, barring a few exceptions, focus on upper-caste names, perhaps because the Dalit population of India is understood to be a minority. Literature syllabi in schools and universities do include Dalit texts but Indian Hindu identity is still associated only with Brahmanical or Sanskritic culture, so that "authentic" Indianness and its "origin" is not associated with Dalits and other minority populations.

Distributive justice that seeks to empower Dalits, including women, should attend to Dalit contributions to Indian culture in the past even if such contributions were made by the so-called “ordinary” Dalit women and men resembling Eklavya, who was scapegoated by Drona for his favourite pupil Arjuna in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. A clue to our national understanding of “authentic” Indianness as unaffected by Dalit and other minority identities can be found in the naming of the Arjuna awards which are offered at the national level while a few states offer the Eklavya awards. The Union as well as the state governments of the Indian state have also been slow in administering corrective justice. According to the National Crime Records Bureau data on the court disposal of crimes/atrocities against Dalit women and minor girls from 2014 to 2019, the pendency percentage of rape cases was 86.9 and of cases related to insults to the modesty of women 88.6 (All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch or AIDMAM and National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights or NCDHR 53). A report by a Dalit women’s organization in Haryana, the Swabhiman Society, in 2020 said that “the Haryana government has utilised only around 36% of the total amount allocated to it under the Nirbhaya Fund” (30). It also mentioned that “compensation was received by the rape victims only in seven out of the 37 cases in this study in which a police complaint had been filed” and that it “was not received in 62% of the cases” (31). As in literary texts such as Premchand’s “The Woman Who Sold Grass” and M.M. Vinodini’s “The Parable of the Lost Daughter”, in real life too it is the visible implementation of corrective and distributive justice that will impede all attempts to obliterate the lives of Dalits, including women, and other minorities.

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