

Buddhism and Dalit Migrants: Interrogating Everyday forms of Counter-hegemonic Assertion

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Religion and its various practices are essential aspects of culture and often used as a means of assertion and resistance against dominant notion of religion. Recent literature on migration studies has begun to study various aspect of culture and significant of religion but still there are some aspects of religion, which could not be addressed.

Drawing upon original ethnographic research among, Dalit migrants in Mumbai, this paper examine significance of Buddhism and its various practices in everyday form of socio-cultural assertion among Dalit Migrants. The theoretical lens for this paper is Gramsci's concept of 'Cultural Hegemony and counter-Hegemony'. Based on the author engagement in the field, this paper highlights that the socio-cultural assertion of Dalit migrants in the city is not merely caused by identity politics but is linked to the city as a space of liberation from caste which provide them favorable condition to engage with various symbolic cultural practices in form of religious practices. The changing religious practices of Dalit migrants by adopting Buddhism are not merely influencing their life at destination (city) but also at source (village).

This paper aims to examine changing religious practices from Hinduism to Buddhism among Dalit migrants and its influence in their everyday life at source and destination. Further, this paper explores their issues and challenges in process of adopting Buddhism and its practices; and their negotiation strategy to overcome from those issues. In addition to that, this paper also tries to understand the significance of 'attire and decoration' in various occasion and life events of Dalit migrants and how this 'attire and decoration' is symbolizing everyday form of counter-hegemonic assertion.

Key words: Dalits, Migration, Buddhism, Caste, and Hegemonic-assertion.