Indian Minorities

A Critical Study

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Edited by
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Dedicated

To

My Father

Late Sri Dinkar Giri

(1 January, 1950-25 June, 2025)

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Introduction

More than a numerical concept, a minority is a relational term that refers to a disadvantaged group of people with regard to power, status and resources, compared to the dominant group in a society. In India, there are religious, linguistic, ethnic, Dalit, tribal and sexual minorities. However, these minorities are not always static but sometimes negotiable in response to changing situations. For example, nationally identified religious and linguistic minorities like Muslims, Sikhs and Christians are identified as state majorities in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Mizoram respectively, whereas nationally identified majority Hindus are state minorities there. Again, tribal minorities are majorities in many Northeast states. But, the condition of sexual minorities like people of LGBTQ community is more or less same, irrespective of place and situation. The diversity that produces out of the co-existence of such variety of people undoubtedly gives India a special charm but one cannot deny that this diversity sometimes also creates a complex web of social reality, giving rise to a conflict between majorities and minorities over the question of power and identity, exclusion and inclusion that bring many adverse and uninvited results, though the Constitution of India safeguards minorities with so many rights and provisions like Article 29 conserves the right to language, script, and culture and Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The National Commission for Minorities (NCM), the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) are also there to monitor these rights and provisions and address grievances but due to social prejudices, historical inequalities, political challenges and structural discrimination, minorities are often deprived of their minimum rights and provisions.

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The present book, divided into four sections- "Indian Minorities: Religious and Linguistic Perspectives", "Indian Minorities: Dalit and Tribal Perspectives", "Indian Minorities: Gender and Sexual Perspectives" and "Indian Minorities: Intersectional Perspectives", having nine, eight, eight and seven chapters respectively, is prepared in a way as it can give a detailed and comprehensive idea of Indian minorities to its readers. The opening chapter "Negotiating Identity: Muslim Women, Religion, and the Secular State in India" by Tahira Khatoon engages with the politicisation of Muslim women as political subjects in India. It explores the twin forces operating on the agency of Indian Muslim women: one, the sense of ownership claimed by religious groups over their day-to-day existence, and two, the overreach by the Indian State to protect them as rights-bearing citizens in a secular setup. The paper discusses how these developments are reflected upon by the Muslim community and how governing ideological regimes are working within the constitutional and secular framework to protect the identity of Muslim women as representatives of the largest religious minority in India. There is an assertion from feminist scholarship and women's movements, both within the Muslim and progressive forces, which has thickened the debate as to how far the politicisation of Muslim Women has actually benefited them.

Next Monamie Mukherjee explores language and the politics of forced migration in reference to India's treatment of Bengali minority Migrants. Marginalisation in the context of forced migration denotes the systematic relegation of displaced persons to the periphery of social, economic, and cultural life within receiving communities. It captures the ways in which their precarious displacement status—shaped by limited legal protection, socio-economic insecurity, and social stigma—intensifies barriers to meaningful participation and inclusion. As a result, forcibly displaced individuals often find themselves excluded from key institutions, opportunities, and decision-making processes, reinforcing their vulnerability and constraining their capacity to integrate fully into the host society. For instance, analysis of some current Indian situation reveals that migrant labourers from India who have been forcibly sent to Bangladesh in the recent past during the middle of 2025, endure a form of 'structural marginalisation', rooted in contested citizenship,

identity profiling, and the absence of secure legal status, dynamics that result in socio-economic exclusion, human rights abuses, and a systematic deprivation of legal protections. Recent evidence strongly supports such a characterisation. Migrant labourers originating from states such as West Bengal, Odisha, and Maharashtra have been subjected to large-scale detentions in which they are apprehended without adequate investigation and summarily expelled across the Bangladesh border. Such extra-legal "pushbacks" circumvent procedural safeguards, contravene constitutional and international human-rights norms, and leave those targeted effectively stateless or trapped in a condition of profound legal insecurity. This article seeks to examine selected dimensions of this troubling reality, critically analysing the gaps and vulnerabilities within fundamental human-rights protections.

The chapter "Muslim Politics in West Bengal (2006–2021): An Exploratory Study" by Dr. Chinmay Sar surfaces how the Indian Constitution safeguards the cultural rights of minorities, yet the political experience of Muslims continues to be marked by exclusion and marginalization. In West Bengal, these issues became more visible after the publication of the Sachar Committee Report (2006), which revealed deep socio-economic deprivation among Muslims. This chapter seeks to examine the trajectory of Muslim politics in West Bengal during 2006–2021, focusing on their participation, organizational dynamics, and influence on state politics. Using an explorative research methodology, the study draws on electoral data, government reports, and organizational records to analyze Muslim political mobilization, while interrogating the narrative of the "Muslim vote bank."

Dr. Hemali Sanghavi's "Theory of Middleman Minorities: Case Study of the Jains in Mumbai" explores the implications of the theory of Middleman minorities proposed by Sociologist Blalock in case of the Jains in Mumbai. The study probes into the limitations of the theory and a number of factors such as the migration, the dominant position and responses towards the position of the Jains in Mumbai.

Next Dr. Sana Farooqui explores how Muslim women in India face double marginalization- one for their gender and other for being a member of religious minority. The discourse on minorities in India

often foregrounds issues of religion, caste, and ethnicity, yet the intersection of gender and minority identity remains an area that requires deeper scholarly engagement. Muslim women in India experience a unique form of marginalization shaped simultaneously by their gender and religious identity. This chapter explores the concept of "double marginalization," examining how Muslim women negotiate socio-cultural, political, and educational challenges within a predominantly patriarchal and majoritarian society. Drawing on feminist theory and minority discourse, the study analyzes how structural inequalities, cultural stereotypes, and limited access to opportunities shape the lived realities of Muslim women. The chapter also examines literary and socio-political narratives that reflect the struggles and agency of Muslim women in contemporary India. By situating Muslim women within broader debates on minority rights, gender justice, and social inclusion, this chapter argues that empowering minority women requires intersectional policies and inclusive social frameworks that recognize the complexity of their identities.

Next "Historical Roots of Marginalization — Colonial Policies and Postcolonial Realities" by Gargi Tyagi and Dr. Raf Raf Shakil Ansari examines the historical roots of minority marginalization in India by tracing how British colonial administrative practices constructed and institutionalized religious and linguistic identities. Drawing on scholarship by Sengupta (2017), Groff (2016), Bhattacharya (2023), Zaman (2024), and others, it argues that mechanisms such as the census, personal law codification, communal electorates, and linguistic standardization transformed fluid social identities into rigid categories that served colonial governance. These classificatory systems not only produced distinct "minority" communities but also generated competitive communalism that persisted into the postcolonial era. The chapter further analyzes how these colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary socio-political challenges, ranging from linguistic exclusion and spatial segregation to the politicization of religious identities. By highlighting the continuities between colonial and postcolonial structures, the study underscores the need to rethink minority policy frameworks beyond inherited colonial categories and towards more inclusive and equitable governance.

Priyal Srivastava's "Revisiting the Horrors of the Kashmiri Pandit Exodus" presents a historical re-examination of the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Valley in 1989–90, drawing exclusively on official reports, government documents, human rights records, parliamentary debates, newspaper archives, and demographic data. As a numerically small Hindu minority in the region, Kashmiri Pandits experienced targeted killings, intimidation, and severe insecurity during the rise of militancy in the late 1980s. The study revisits these events by analysing the political climate, administrative failures, and socio-economic shifts that contributed to the community's mass departure. Using archival sources such as records from the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly, Ministry of Home Affairs reports, National Human Rights Commission documents, and contemporaneous press coverage, the chapter reconstructs the chain of events that led to the exodus. It examines patterns of threats, assassinations of prominent Pandit officials and civilians, and the collapse of local governance that left minority households vulnerable. The chapter also traces the immediate aftermath, including refugee registration data, camp conditions in Jammu and Delhi, and state-led relief measures. Central to this reassessment is the question of how historical records document suffering, fear, and policy responses while also revealing silences, contradictions, and contested narratives. The study highlights how the lack of early intervention, inadequate protection, and administrative paralysis intensified the crisis for a community already demographically marginal in the Valley. By grounding the analysis solely in verifiable historical material, this chapter aims to separate documented events from later political interpretations. It argues that a historically informed understanding of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus is essential to discussions on minority rights, internal displacement, and the responsibilities of the state toward vulnerable communities.

Next chapter "Faith and Language as Identity: Negotiating Space for Religious and Linguistic Minorities in Modern India" by Chheangkhy Hok and Sona Thoeurn examines the intersection of faith and language as dual axes of minority identity in modern India. It argues that religion and language operate not merely as cultural expressions but as political instruments shaping inclusion, recognition, and be-

longing. Through qualitative analysis of constitutional frameworks, policy documents, and community narratives, the study reveals that India's pluralism is sustained by negotiation rather than harmony, where secularism remains contextual, and linguistic federalism unevenly realized. Case studies of Urdu-speaking Muslims, Tamil regional assertion, Christian educational institutions, and tribal language revival illustrate how minorities balance autonomy with integration. The findings highlight the coexistence of religious liberty and cultural nationalism as both creative and conflictual forces. The chapter concludes that authentic pluralism requires moving from protection to participation, where faith and language become shared authorship of India's collective identity.

The chapter "A Move towards 'Final Solution': Rejection of Communalism and Religious Fanaticism in Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions*" by Dr. Dipak Giri deals with Mahesh Dattani's award winning play *Final Solutions* which has framed its theme on communal disharmony as widely and commonly seen among people of the Hindus and Muslims in India against each others, right from the time of the post-partition riots to contemporary India. The psychosis that had been well-pervasive all over the country among the Hindus and the Muslims, after the partition of the country, still has not lost its continuous neurotic reactions to even the most inconsequential of events and happenings of present India. The chapter explores how the questions in the Dattani's *Final Solutions* raised about identity of Muslims in India draw attention to their feeling of suffocation as they are not assimilated into society, but the reason, as it is also pointed out in the play, is that they are not ready to blend-in into a massive society for fear of losing their identity to an amorphous mass. Feeling of belonging to the minority community forms the basis of their socio-cultural identity. This way, discrimination also leads to identity crisis. The chapter also studies how the play tries to find solution to end all unrest and violence happening in form of communalism giving us the message that religion is just something superficial as mask and ought to be donned or taken off at will.

Dr. Ashrafuzzaman Chowdhury discusses how Dalits undergo caste based atrocities in India, though they account for more than 200

million of total population of the country. Dalits have been deprived politically, culturally, economically, educationally and socially since millennia under the influence of Hindu orthodox laws. Dalits are the worst affected sections because of the perpetual social discrimination and caste based atrocities existing in the society. Dalits suffer from atrocities both from the wider Hindu society that ostracizes them and also from state authorities. They suffer from arson, attacks, rape, torture, stigmatization and ostracization, murder and mass killings. The main objective of the study is to highlight the various types of atrocities and finds out the legal measures available relating to atrocities on Dalits.

Dr. Girish Kousadikar's chapter "Dalit Women; Triple Minority" explores Dalit women as triply marginalized in terms of caste, gender and economic class. The chapter mainly deals with Baby Kamble's autobiographical work *The Prisons We Broke* and Baburao Bagul's story 'Mother'. Bagul's story "Mother" represents an individual hardship faced by the Dalit protagonist, whereas Kamble's literary work stands for collective psyche of a marginalized group. However, both works explore and express trajectory of the marginalized minority within minority, i.e. Dalit women.

Next chapter "Humanity on the Margins: A Critical Re-reading of *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand" by Merry Baghwar studies Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and shows how this novel was the first book to portray the Dalits' suffering with rhetorical questions and an undisguised fury that foregrounds the socio-political realities of caste-based discrimination in colonial India. The chapter argues that it is Indians who are discriminating against Indians on grounds of caste, creed, colour, gender, etc. It delves into a critical study of Indian minorities through the lens of Mulk Raj Anand's narrative on Bakha, a young Dalit boy positioned at the lowest rank of the caste hierarchy. This chapter aims to expose the structural mechanisms of exclusion that regulate everyday life for marginalized communities. It does not depict Dalits as passive victims but as individuals desiring dignity. The research delves deeper into the ways that Anand's novel subverts hegemonic power, dynamics, and foreshadows current conversations about social justice, minority rights, and the politics of representation. The critical

analysis makes the case that untouchability is still a potent literary intervention that both records the historical suffering of Indian minorities and calls for a re-evaluation of caste inequality in contemporary India.

Dr. Rudrashis Datta's chapter explores how Indian tribal art, having been trapped between traditions and transition, is suffering existential question in today's globalized world. Indian tribal art represents one of the most vibrant and diverse expressions of indigenous creativity in the world. Rooted in ritual, mythology, and daily life, these forms articulate a deep connection between human communities and their natural environments. However, the rapid expansion of globalization, market commodification, and cultural homogenization has posed significant challenges to the survival and authenticity of these artistic traditions. Datta's chapter examines the complexities involved in preserving and conserving Indian tribal art in the twenty-first century. It investigates how traditional practices are being reinterpreted under the pressures of urbanization, tourism, and digitization while exploring community-based and institutional strategies for safeguarding cultural heritage. The study argues that the preservation of tribal art must move beyond the binaries of 'tradition' and 'modernity' to embrace dynamic models that respect cultural autonomy, promote sustainable livelihoods, and encourage ethical cross-cultural engagement. Drawing from anthropological, museological, and postcolonial frameworks, the chapter rethinks preservation as a living dialogue between past and present—a process where cultural continuity coexists with creative reinvention.

The chapter "Power, Identity, and Marginalisation: A Critical Study of the Banjara Community as a Tribal Minority in India" by Rathod Rajender and Prof. Nagendra Ambedkar Sole analyses the Banjara community as a tribal minority through the interconnected themes of power, identity, and structural exclusion. Despite being constitutionally recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in numerous states, the Banjaras continue to confront structural disadvantages caused by colonial criminalization, caste based hierarchies, landlessness, restricted public service access, and limited political participation. By contextualizing Banjara reality within broader discourses on minority rights, the study highlights the ongoing disparity between the constitutional aim