

QUARTERLY

AMBEDKAR VISION

VOL: 06
ISSUE: 02
JUL.-SEP. 2023



**RIISING CONCERNS AS INCIDENTS OF
CUSTODIAL DEATHS
OF DALITS AND MUSLIMS
CONTINUE UNABATED**




Ambedkar Society for South Asia

QUARTERLY AMBEDKAR VISION

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The 'Ambedkar Vision' is an effort to take forward the mission initiated by great social reformer and activist Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, to end the caste based discrimination and exploitation on the basis of social status or religion and to create caste free society. The Ambedkar Vision is trying to knock at the doors of the political powers of the region and also concerned international forums by highlighting the atrocities being committed against the oppressed and marginalized classes. We expect our readers to join us in this endeavor through their opinions and mentors as a contribution to public awareness & understanding of the issues of marginalized communities of South Asia.



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Ambedkar Society for South Asia



from
the Editor 

We welcome all our viewers in the July-September edition of Ambedkar Vision, is a great way to address important issues. In this edition we give space to diverse range of articles that includes Dismantling of Democracy in India, which discusses the concerning developments in India and their potential global impact. Emphasize the importance of a thriving democracy and its relevance beyond national borders. Ambedkar's Legacy in the UK, highlight the efforts to renew Ambedkar's fight for caste legislation in the UK. Recognize the global relevance of fighting caste-based discrimination. California's Ban on Caste Discrimination, applaud California for taking a progressive step in addressing caste discrimination and acknowledge its potential to set a precedent for other regions. Custodial deaths and violence against Dalits and Muslims express concern about the persistent issues of custodial deaths and violence, stressing the urgency of addressing these issues to ensure justice and equality. The Manipur Crisis discusses the ongoing crisis in Manipur and the need for a peaceful resolution to restore stability. Manual Scavenging and government accountability is to question the government's stance on manual scavenging and the need for transparency in addressing this inhumane practice. Safety of Dalits in India this article examines the safety concerns of Dalits across various regions in India, emphasizing the importance of collective efforts to ensure their well-being. Intolerance against Dalits in Nepal, acknowledge the rise of intolerance against Dalits in Nepal and the importance of addressing this issue at a regional level. Bangladesh's Education Success highlights the achievement of Bangladesh's minority communities in education and underlines the value of diversity and inclusion. Pakistan's proactive approach in launching a probe into church attacks emphasized the importance of religious freedom and tolerance. In this edition we highlight the common thread in these articles - the pursuit of equality and justice. Emphasize the need for global solidarity in addressing these challenges and celebrating triumphs. Our utmost effort is to encourage readers to engage with these critical issues and be part of the solution.

California is first US state to pass ban on caste discrimination

Chloe Kim



California's legislature has become the first in the US to approve a bill banning caste discrimination.

Legislators said the measure would protect people of South Asian descent who allege unfair treatment. The governor must now decide whether to sign the bill into law. Seattle became the first US city to ban caste discrimination in February. The caste system in India dates back over 3,000 years and divides Hindu society into rigid hierarchical groups.

The measure, which passed and was sponsored by Democratic state senator Aisha Wahab, who said it would add caste as a protected category in the state's anti-

discrimination laws alongside gender, race, religion and disability.

"We shined a light on a long-hidden form of discrimination thousands of years old, invisible shackles on the wrist of millions of people," said Ms Wahab, who is the first Muslim and Afghan-American woman elected to the state legislature.

Five Republican state senators voted against the legislation, arguing that discrimination was already illegal under state law.

The office of Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, said he would evaluate the bill when it reaches his desk. Some Hindu groups argued the caste system is not a serious issue in North America.

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) wrote on social media: "This divisive bill that still implicitly singles out/targets South Asians must be vetoed @GavinNewsom!"

Some Dalit (formerly untouchables) activists have dismissed those claims, saying they have experienced discrimination from people of a privileged caste.

In 2020, the technology company Cisco was sued by the state after two high-caste Indian managers allegedly discriminated against a Dalit engineer, paying him a lower salary.

RISE IN CONCERNS AS INCIDENTS OF CUSTODIAL DEATHS OF DALITS AND MUSLIMS CONTINUE UNABATED

In a series of disturbing incidents, two individuals lost their lives in police custody, reminding us of the need for accountability from criminal justice departments. The cases have raised serious questions over the treatment of detainees and have sparked demands for a thorough investigation into these deaths from the family and loved ones of the deceased. In the first incident, Saikul Khan, a 27-year-old recently married youth, was taken into custody by the police in Alwar, Rajasthan. On the 23rd of July, 2023, his family was informed by the police and upon visiting him, they were met with the shocking discovery of his lifeless body. Saikul was a student preparing for government job exams with no criminal record according to his family.

The family claims that he went missing at night, leaving them clueless about his whereabouts. After about 18 hours, the family received a call from the Cyber Crime cell, informing them that Saikul was involved in a cybercrime case and urging them to come to the police station. Upon meeting him, the family was shocked to find Saikul gravely injured and they allege that he had been tortured by the police while in custody. Saikul pleaded with his family members to take him away and prevent his return to custody. The family asserts that Saikul died while in police custody after they met him at the hospital, as reported by Bharat TV.

His loved ones also allege that he was subjected to torture while in custody, which resulted in severe injuries. The family is now seeking justice and demands for an impartial investigation into the events leading to his death rise. In another heart-breaking incident in Chennai, Sridhar, a 25-year-old Dalit man, died shortly after being questioned by the MGR Nagar police. This marked the third such incident in Chennai in the past two years, further heightening concerns over the treatment of detainees in police custody.

According to the News Minute, Sridhar passed away only a few hours after being interrogated by the MGR Nagar police in Chennai on the 13th of July 2023. The police initially brought Sridhar in for questioning regarding a theft on 12th July and requested him to return the following day. Accompanied by his wife, Manju, Sridhar went to the police station on 13th July and returned home around 1:15 pm. However, he soon complained of chest discomfort and subsequently he was rushed to KK Nagar Government Hospital where he later succumbed to his death. Sridhar was a sanitation worker.

The report by News Minute also notes that Sridhar's family members want answers about the circumstances surrounding his death and are eagerly waiting for the post-mortem report. The post-mortem was conducted at Rajiv Gandhi Government Hospital and was completed on the 14th of July, 2023. Meanwhile, the police have made a



statement stating that Sridhar experienced seizures which was what led to his death. The police also said that Sridhar was brought to the ESI hospital but was already deceased when he suffered the seizures. His wife Manju has filed a police complaint and an investigation into Sridhar's death is currently ongoing.

Adding to the grim toll of custodial deaths in India, Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, witnessed the tragic loss of Mohammad Ashfaq Khan. The police deemed Ashfaq Khan suspicious only because he had a previous criminal record, according to his family. The neighbouring family who suspected him of stealing from them has been accused of assaulting him before the police took him into custody. Ashfaq's family further claims that the police took him into custody without informing them and that he was already injured due to alleged beatings by the family members who suspected him of stealing.

The family further alleges that the police officials left him for dead at the hospital after subjecting him to torture during his detention. In response to mounting pressure, the police have promised an impartial investigation and vowed to take strict action against any officials found culpable, according to a news report by Johar News, Hazaribagh that surfaced on Twitter in 18th of July, 2023.

These incidents have once again reignited the debate surrounding police brutality and the need for systemic reforms to ensure the safety and fair treatment of detainees. According to a report by Sabrang India, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reported in the Rajya Sabha that there has been a significant increase in custodial deaths across the country. Over the past three years the number of deaths while in police custody has risen by more than 60% and in the last two years, the increase has been even more alarming, reaching 75%. The data has further highlighted specific states where such cases have seen a drastic rise. For instance, in Maharashtra the number of custodial deaths has increased by a staggering ten times, while Kerala and Bihar witnessed a threefold increase. In Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka the numbers have doubled and have further raised serious concerns about the treatment of detainees in police custody.

Source: Sabrang India

The Manipur Crisis in Numbers: Four Months of UNENDING VIOLENCE

Yaqut Ali

It has been four months since violence erupted between the Kuki and Meitei communities in Manipur, which claimed the lives of around 200 people and left more than 70,000 people displaced.

The violence has resulted in extensive damage to religious institutions, long hours of digital blackout and overcrowded relief camps, but a lack of effective government response.

The Wire has compiled data from various sources to provide a concise overview of the crisis.

Duration of internet shutdown since May 3: 3,050+ hours

A digital blackout lasting over 3,050 hours has severely disrupted information sharing, education and online classes.

The number of lives lost: 200+ in the past 4 months

According to reports, more than 200 people have died, out of which 45 deaths occurred due to lack of medical care in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi.

The number of people forcibly displaced due to the violence: 70,000+

At least 10,000 children have been staying in relief camps. These relief camps are overcrowded and are experiencing food shortages, as most people are heavily reliant on rice and lentils. They need volunteer help.

For instance, a relief camp in Naorem Birahari College houses more than 300 people. The government provides them with 400 grams of food daily, which is insufficient.

Moreover, although the government has promised to provide temporary houses to the displaced people, only a few have been built.

Long summer vacations for three months

The continuing violence has extended summer

vacations to three months. On June 1, Union home minister Amit Shah had promised to formulate a plan for online education; however, it is still to be seen when these promises will be fulfilled.

Nearly 50 students of NIT Manipur had been demanding that classes be held online and also raised this issue with their dean, but didn't get any response from him.

The number of arms looted from police armouries: 4,000+

Reports say 4,000 weapons and 50,000 rounds of ammunition had been looted from the police and state armoury.

The number of active gun licences: 35,117 (the highest in the Northeast region)

A Right to Information query by The Wire revealed that firearm licenses under the N. Biren Singh government were the maximum issued in the Northeast region, before the violence began. The active number of gun licences stand at 35,117, up from 26,836 in December 2016.

The number of churches destroyed: 500+

Government data shows that over 220 churches have been destroyed. If we take United Christian Forum's data, it exceeds 500.





Christian bodies claim that over 350 churches were destroyed. Notably, there were no church attacks in Manipur before the May 2023 violence. A petition claims that 642 places of worship were demolished.

PM Modi broke silence after 78 days

The prime minister spoke about the Manipur violence on July 20, 2023, for only 36 seconds, after a shocking video of naked women being paraded by a mob went viral. The video raised numerous questions regarding the impact of the violence on women and the role of the police.

The number of rallies held in Karnataka campaign amid Manipur violence: 19

While campaigning in Karnataka, Prime Minister Modi held 19 rallies and six road shows. The last rally was held on May 8, 2023. Meanwhile, in Manipur, chief minister Biren Singh informed the media that 60 people died, 231 were injured and 1,700 houses were burned.

The number of Zero FIRs: 11,414

There have been 11,414 Zero FIRs, out of which 6,621 were converted to regular FIRs and 4,766 were original FIRs filed within their original jurisdiction.

The cases of property destruction: 4,694

At least 4,694 cases of property destruction have been reported during the ethnic violence in the state.

The duration of the one-day Manipur session: 11 minutes

The one-day session of the Manipur assembly lasted just 11 minutes on August 29, 2023. The state's 10 Kuki MLAs, including two cabinet ministers, did not attend the session.

The number of Kuki families in the state's capital,



Imphal: 0

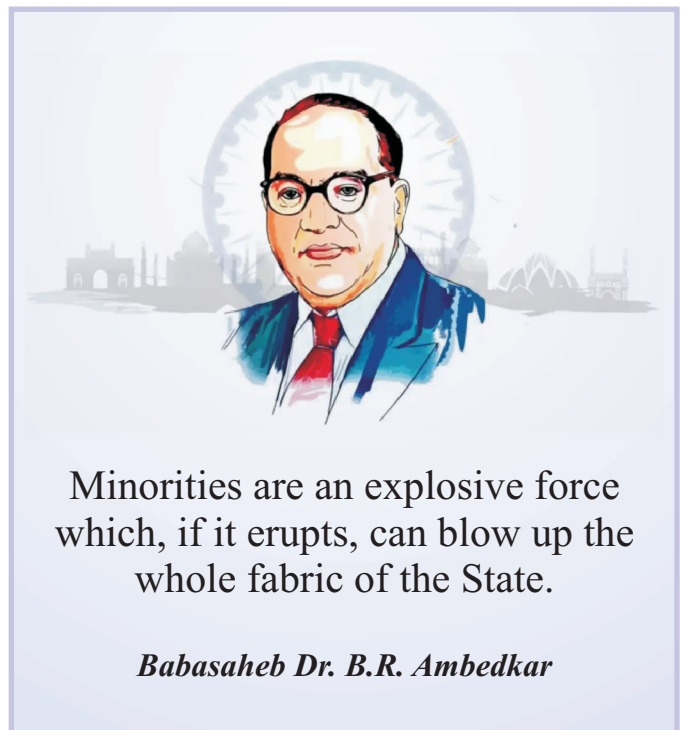
No Kuki families are currently living in the state capital, Imphal.

After the violence escalated, Kuki families left Imphal and Meitei families left Churachandpur. However, a few Kuki families still residing in Imphal's New Lambulane area were forcefully evacuated by the central and state forces on the night of September 2, 2023.

The number of governments in Manipur: 2

The BJP argues that the concept of “double-engine” involves having two engines or two governments, one at the state level and one at the capital, to aid in the governance process.

(Courtesy: The Wire.)



Minorities are an explosive force which, if it erupts, can blow up the whole fabric of the State.

Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Pakistan arrests 146 as it launches probe into church attacks

Abid Hussain



Authorities in Pakistan have launched a probe and arrested at least 146 people in the Punjab province a day after a Muslim mob torched five churches and attacked dozens of houses belonging to the local Christian community over claims of blasphemy, the province's top police official has told Al Jazeera.

"We are continuing our operations to detain others involved," Inspector General of Punjab Police Usman Anwar said on Thursday, a day after hundreds of people went on a rampage attacking Christian properties and places of worship in Jaranwala city in Faisalabad district - about 115 kilometres (71 miles) southwest of the provincial capital, Lahore.

Local reports said torn pages of the Quran, with alleged blasphemous content written on them, were discovered near Jaranwala's Isa Nagri (Christian colony) area, triggering one of the worst spells of violence against the minority community in recent years.

The Salvation Army Church in Jaranwala was among the five churches vandalised. Videos on social media showed a handful of men on the roof of the church, the largest in the city, attacking its front facade and attempting to dislodge the cross on top. Some of the purported videos on X showed police officials standing amid the crowd of onlookers as the attackers continued vandalising the churches.

Houses, businesses and graveyards belonging to the Christian community were also targeted as violence gripped the city of 230,000.

Thousands of additional police and paramilitary troops have been deployed to control the violence in the South Asian nation, which has been facing an unprecedented political and economic crisis.

Punjab's Information Minister Amir Mir claimed that an initial investigation into the alleged desecration of the Quran revealed the incident was a "well thought-out conspiracy to inflame public sentiments". He did not elaborate on his claims.

"Security of the churches has been tightened and a large number of security personnel have been deployed," Mir said in a series of posts on X, the social platform formerly known as Twitter.

Farooq Masih, a truck artist who lives next to one of the churches in Jaranwala, said he was shaken by the violence.

"My entire house is completely torched, there is nothing left there that could be salvaged. I don't even have a chair

to sit on. Everything has turned to ashes," Masih, 47, told Al Jazeera.

Several local and international rights organisations also spoke out against the violence. "There is no space in Islam for violence," Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, the Chairman of the All Pakistan Ulema Council, posted on X.

"I live in this house with my three brothers, and we have a total of 19 members in this house. I don't have any idea what are we going to do now, all we have is just faith in God."

Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar condemned the violence and called for action against those involved in the attacks.

"I am gutted by the visuals coming out of Jaranwala, Faisalabad. Stern action would be taken against those who violate law and target minorities," said Kakar in a post on X.

Rehab Mahamoor, the South Asia researcher for Amnesty International, called on authorities to "urgently ensure the protection of the minority Christian community in Jaranwala is in accordance to their needs and wishes".

Rabiya Javeri Agha, the chairperson of Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights, said the incident was "not an isolated one" and "attacks against minorities and vulnerable groups have been happening repeatedly with impunity".

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said the state had "failed to protect its religious minorities" and "allowed the far right to permeate and fester within society and politics".

Blasphemy remains one of the most sensitive topics in Pakistan, where even mere allegations of committing the crime can trigger violence.

International and local rights groups have said that accusations of blasphemy are often wielded to settle personal scores, with Pakistan's minorities often bearing the brunt.

"The existence of blasphemy laws continue[s] to embolden groups and individuals who threaten, attack or attempt to kill the accused, or anyone connected, including members of their community," Amnesty's Mahamoor said in a statement.

She called on authorities to repeal the law and put in place "effective safeguards" against its abuse.

Source: Aljazeera

The Dismantling of Democracy in India Will Affect the Whole World

Arundhati Roy



I thank the Charles Veillon Foundation for honoring me with the 2023 European Essay Award. It may not be immediately apparent how delighted I am to receive it. It's even possible that I am gloating. What makes me happiest is that it is a prize for literature. Not for peace. Not for culture or cultural freedom, but for literature. For writing. And for writing the kind of essays that I write and have written for the past 25 years.

They have mapped, step by step, India's descent (although some see it as an ascent) into first majoritarianism and then full-blown fascism. Yes, we continue to have elections and for that reason, in order to secure a reliable constituency, the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party's message of Hindu supremacism has relentlessly been disseminated to a population of 1.4 billion people. Consequently, elections are a season of murder, lynching and dog-whistling - the most dangerous time for India's minorities, Muslims and Christians in particular.

It is no longer just our leaders we must fear, but a whole section of the population. The banality of evil, the normalisation of evil is now manifest in our streets, in our classrooms, in very many public spaces. The mainstream press, the hundreds of 24-hour news channels have been harnessed to the cause of fascist majoritarianism. India's Constitution has been effectively set aside. The Indian Penal Code is being rewritten. If the current regime wins a majority in 2024, it is very likely that we will see a new Constitution.

It is very likely that the process of what is called "delimitation" - a reordering of constituencies - or gerrymandering as it is known in the US, will take place, giving more parliamentary seats to those Hindi-speaking states in North India where the BJP has a base. This will cause great resentment in the southern states and has the potential to balkanise India. Even in the unlikely event of an electoral defeat, the supremacist poison runs deep and has compromised every public institution that is meant to oversee checks and balances. Right now, there are virtually none, except a weakened and undermined Supreme Court.

Let me thank you once again for this very prestigious prize and for the recognition of my work -although I must tell you that a lifetime achievement award makes a person feel old. I'll have to stop pretending that I'm not. It's a great irony in some ways to receive a prize for 25 years of writing warning about the direction in which we were headed - that was not heeded, but instead often mocked and criticised by liberals and those who considered themselves "progressive" too.

But now the time for warning is over. We are in a different phase of history. As a writer, I can only hope that my writing will bear witness to this very dark chapter that is unfolding in my country's life. And hopefully, the work of others like myself lives on, it will be known that not all of us agreed with what was

happening.

My life as an essay writer was not planned. It just happened.

My first book was *The God of Small Things*, a novel published in 1997. That happened to be the 50th anniversary of India's independence from British colonialism. It had been eight years since the Cold War had ended and Soviet communism had been buried in the rubble of the Afghan-Soviet war. It was the beginning of the US-dominated unipolar world in which capitalism was the uncontested victor. India realigned herself with the United States and opened her markets to corporate capital.

Privatisation and structural adjustment were the anthem of the free market. India was taking her place at the high table. But then in 1998 a BJP-led Hindu nationalist government came to power. The first thing it did was to conduct a series of nuclear tests. They were greeted by most people, including writers, artists and journalists, in a language of virulent, chauvinistic nationalism. What was acceptable as public discourse suddenly changed.

At the time, having just won the Booker Prize for my novel, I had inadvertently been cast as one of this aggressive New India's cultural ambassadors. I was on the cover of major magazines. I knew that if I didn't say something, it would be assumed that I agreed with all of this. I understood then that keeping quiet was as political as speaking out. I understood that speaking out would be the end of my career as the fairy-princess of the literary world. More than that, I understood that if I didn't write what I believed regardless of the consequences, I would become my own worst enemy and would possibly never write again.

So, I wrote, to save my writing self. My first essay, *The End of Imagination*, was published simultaneously in two major mass-circulation magazines, *Outlook* and *Frontline*. I was immediately labeled a traitor and anti-national. I received those insults as laurels, no less prestigious than the Booker Prize. It set me off on a long writing journey, about dams, rivers, displacement, caste, mining, civil war - a journey that deepened my understanding and entwined my fiction and nonfiction in ways that they can no longer be separated.

I will read a brief excerpt from one of the essays in my book *Azadi*, which is about how these essays live in the world. It's called "The Language of Literature":

"When the essays were first published (first in mass-circulation magazines, then on the internet and finally as books), they were viewed with baleful suspicion, at least in some quarters, often by those who didn't necessarily even disagree with the politics. The writing sat at an angle to what is conventionally thought of as literature. Balefulness was an understandable reaction, particularly among the taxonomy-inclined, because they

couldn't decide exactly what this was - pamphlet or polemic, academic or journalistic writing, travelogue or just plain literary adventurism?

To some, it simply did not count as writing: "Oh, why have you stopped writing? We're waiting for your next book." Others imagined that I was just a pen for hire. All manner of offers came my way: "Darling, I loved that piece you wrote on the dams, could you do one for me on child abuse?" (This actually happened.) I was sternly lectured (mostly by upper-caste men) about how to write, the subjects I should write about and the tone I should take.

But in other places - let's call them places off the highway - the essays were quickly translated into other Indian languages, printed as pamphlets, distributed for free in forests and river valleys, in villages that were under attack, on university campuses where students were fed up of being lied to. Because these readers, out there on the front lines, already being singed by the spreading fire, had an entirely different idea of what literature is or should be.

I mention this because it taught me that the place for literature is built by writers and readers. It's a fragile place in some ways, but an indestructible one. When it's broken, we rebuild it. Because we need shelter. I very much like the idea of literature that is needed. Literature that provides shelter. Shelter of all kinds."

Today it is unthinkable that any mainstream media house in India, all of whom live on corporate advertisements, would publish essays like these. In the last 20 years, the free market and fascism and the so-called free press, have waltzed together to bring India to a place where it can by no means be called a democracy.

In January this year two things happened that serve to illustrate this in a way that nothing else probably could. The BBC broadcast a two-part documentary called India: The Modi Question and a few days later, a small US firm called Hindenburg Research which specialises in what is known as activist short-selling published what is now known as the Hindenburg Report, a detailed expose of shocking wrongdoing about India's biggest corporation - the Adani group.

The BBC-Hindenburg moment was portrayed by the Indian media as nothing short of an attack on India's twin towers - Prime Minister Narendra Modi and India's biggest industrialist, Gautam Adani, who was, until recently, the world's third-richest man. The charges laid against them aren't subtle. The BBC film implicates Modi in the abetment of mass murder. The Hindenburg Report accuses Adani of pulling "the largest con in corporate history". On August 30, the Guardian and the Financial Times published articles based on incriminating documents obtained by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project that further substantiate the Hindenburg Report.

Indian investigation agencies and most of the Indian media are in no position to investigate or publish these stories. When the foreign media does, its easy then, in the current atmosphere of pseudo hyper-nationalism, to portray it as an attack on Indian sovereignty.

Episode 1 of the BBC film The Modi Question is about the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom which raged through the state of Gujarat

after Muslims were held responsible for the burning of a railway coach in which 59 Hindu pilgrims were burned alive. Modi had been appointed - not elected - chief minister of the state only a few months before the massacre. The film is not just the murdering, but also the 20-year journey that some victims made through India's labyrinthine legal system, keeping the faith, hoping for justice and political accountability.

It includes eyewitness testimonies, most poignantly from Imtiyaz Pathan, who lost ten members of his family in the "Gulbarg Society massacre" in which 60 people were murdered by a mob, including a former Member of Parliament Ehsan Jaffri who was dismembered and burnt alive. He was a political rival of Modi's and had campaigned against him in a recent election. It was one of several similarly gruesome massacres that took place over those few days in Gujarat.

One of the other massacres - not in the film - was the gang rape of 19-year-old Bilkis Bano and the murder of 14 members of her family including her 3-year-old daughter. Last August, on Independence Day, while Modi addressed the nation about the importance of women's rights, his government, on the very same day, pardoned the rapist-murderers of Bilkis and her family who had been sentenced to life imprisonment. They had spent most of their jail time out on parole. And now they are free men. They were greeted with garlands outside prison are now respected members of society and share the stage with BJP politicians in public programmes.

The BBC film revealed an internal report commissioned by the British Foreign Office in April 2002, so far unseen by the public. The fact-finding report estimated that "at least 2,000" people had been murdered. It called the massacre a pre-planned pogrom which bore "all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing." It said reliable contacts had informed them that the police had been ordered to stand down. The report laid the blame squarely at Modi's door. After the Gujarat pogrom, the US denied him a visa. Modi won three consecutive elections and remained Gujarat's chief minister until 2014. The ban was revoked after he became Prime Minister.

The Modi government has banned the film. Every social media platform complied with the ban and has taken down all links and references to it. Within weeks of the film's release the BBC's offices were surrounded by the police and raided by tax officials.

The Hindenburg Report accuses the Adani Group of engaging in a "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme", which - through the use of offshore shell entities - artificially overvalued its key listed companies and inflated the net worth of its chairman. According to the report, seven of Adani's listed companies are overvalued by more than 85%. Modi and Adani have known each other for decades. Their friendship was consolidated after the 2002 Gujarat pogrom.

At the time, much of India, including corporate India recoiled in horror at the open slaughter and mass rape of Muslims that was staged on the streets of Gujarat's towns and villages by vigilante Hindu mobs seeking "revenge". Gautam Adani stood by Modi. With a small group of Gujarati industrialists he set up a new platform of businessmen. They denounced Modi's critics and supported him as he launched a new political career as "Hindu Hriday Samrat", the Emperor of Hindu Hearts. So was born what is known as the Gujarat Model of "development": violent

Hindu nationalism underwritten by serious corporate money.

In 2014, after three terms as chief minister of Gujarat, Modi was elected prime minister of India. He flew to his swearing-in ceremony in Delhi in a private jet with Adani's name emblazoned across the body of the aircraft. In the nine years of Modi's tenure, Adani became the world's richest man. His wealth grew from \$8 billion to \$137 billion. In 2022 alone, he made \$72 billion, which is more than the combined earnings of the world's next nine billionaires put together. The Adani Group now controls a dozen shipping ports that account for the movement of 30% of India's freight, seven airports that handle 23% of India's airline passengers and warehouses that collectively hold 30% of India's grain. It owns and operates power plants that are the biggest generators of the country's private electricity.

Yes, Gautam Adani is one of the world's richest men, but if you look at their roll-out during elections, the BJP is not just India's, but perhaps even the world's richest political party. In 2016 the BJP introduced the scheme of electoral bonds to allow corporations to fund political parties without their identities being made public. It has become the party with by far the largest share of corporate funding. It looks very much as though the twin towers have a common basement.

Just as Adani stood by Modi in his time of need, the Modi government has stood by Adani and has refused to answer a single question raised by members of the opposition in Parliament, going so far as to expunge their speeches from the parliament record.

While the BJP and Adani accumulated their fortunes, in a damning report Oxfam said that the top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth. Seventy three per cent of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1%, while 670 million Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1% increase in their wealth. While India is recognised as an economic power with a huge market, most of its population lives in crushing poverty.

Millions live on subsistence rations delivered in packets with Modi's face printed on them. India is a very rich country with very poor people. One of the most unequal societies in the world. For its pains, Oxfam India has been raided too. And Amnesty International and a host of other troublesome NGOs in India have been harassed into shutting down.

None of this has made any difference whatsoever to the leaders of Western democracies. Within days of the Hindenburg-BBC moment, after "warm and productive" meetings, Prime Minister Modi, President Joe Biden and President Emmanuel Macron announced that India would be buying 470 Boeing and Airbus aircraft. Biden said the deal would create over million American jobs. The Airbus will be powered by Rolls Royce engines. "For the UK's thriving aerospace sector," PM Rishi Sunak said, "the sky is the limit."

In July Modi travelled to the US on a State visit and to France as the Chief Guest on Bastille Day. Can you even begin to believe that? Macron and Biden fawned over him in the most embarrassing manner, knowing full well that this would be spun into pure campaign gold for the 2024 general elections in which Modi will stand for a third term. There is nothing they would not

have known about the man they are embracing.

They would have known about Mr Modi's role in the Gujarat pogrom. They would have known about the sickening regularity with which Muslims are being publicly lynched, how some lynchers were met with garlands by a member of Mr Modi's cabinet and the precipitous process of Muslim segregation and ghettoisation. They would have known about the burning down of hundreds of churches by Hindu vigilantes.

They would have known about the hounding of opposition politicians, students, human rights activists, lawyers and journalists, some of whom have received long prison sentences, about the attacks on universities by police and suspected Hindu nationalists, the rewriting of history textbooks, the banning of films, the shutdown of Amnesty International India, the raid on the India offices of the BBC, the activists, journalists and government critics placed on mysterious no-fly lists and the pressure on academics, both Indian and foreign.

They would have known that India now ranks at 161 out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index, that many of the best Indian journalists have been hounded out of the mainstream media and that journalists could soon be subjected to a censorial regulatory regime in which a government-appointed body will have the power to decide whether media reports and commentary about the government are fake or misleading. And the new IT law that is designed to shut down dissent on social media.

They would have known about the sword-wielding, violent Hindu vigilante mobs who regularly and openly call for the annihilation of Muslims and the rape of Muslim women.

They would have known about the situation in Kashmir, which beginning in 2019 was subjected to a monthslong communication blackout - the longest internet shutdown in a democracy - and whose journalists suffer harassment, arrest and interrogation. Nobody in the 21st century should have to live as they do, with a boot on their throats.

They would have known about the Citizenship Amendment Act passed in 2019 that barefacedly discriminates against Muslims, the massive protests that it touched off and how those protests only ended after dozens of Muslims were killed the following year by Hindu mobs in Delhi (which, incidentally, took place while President Donald Trump was in town on a state visit and about which he uttered not a word). They would have known about how the Delhi police forced grievously injured young Muslim men who were lying on the street to sing the Indian National Anthem while they prodded and kicked them. One of them died subsequently.

They would have known that at the same time they were feting Modi, Muslims were fleeing a small town in Uttarakhand in northern India after Hindu extremists affiliated with the BJP marked X's on their doors and told them to leave. There is open talk of a "Muslim-free" Uttarakhand. They would have known that under Modi's watch, the state of Manipur in the India's North East has descended into a barbaric civil war. A form of ethnic cleansing has taken place. The Centre is complicit, the state government is partisan, the security forces are split between the police and others with no chain of command. The internet has been cut. News takes weeks to filter out.

Still, the world's powers choose to give Modi all the oxygen he needs to destroy the social fabric and burn India down. To me, this is a form of racism. They claim to be democrats, but they are racists. They don't believe their professed "values" should apply to non-white countries. It's an old story of course.

It doesn't matter. We will fight our own battle - and ultimately we will win our country back. However, if they imagine that the dismantling of democracy in India is not going to affect the whole world, they must indeed be delusional.

For all those who believe India is still a democracy - these are a few of the events that have happened just over the last few months. This is what I meant when I said we have moved into a different phase. The time for warnings is over and we must fear sections of the people as much as we fear our leaders:

In Manipur where a civil war rages, the police, which is entirely partisan, handed two women over to a mob to be paraded naked through a village and then gang-raped. One of them watched her young brother being murdered before her eyes. Women who belong to the same community as the rapists have stood by the rapists and have even incited their men to rape.

In Maharashtra an armed Railway Protection Force Officer walked down the corridor of a train, shooting Muslim passengers and calling on people to vote for Modi.

A hugely popular Hindu vigilante, often photographed hobnobbing with top politicians and policeman, called on Hindus to participate in a religious march through a densely populated Muslim-majority settlement. He is the prime accused in the murder of two young Muslims who were tied to a vehicle and burned alive in February.

The town of Nuh abuts Gurgaon, where major international corporations have their offices. The Hindus in the march carried machine guns and swords. The Muslims defended themselves. Predictably, the march ended in violence. Six people were killed. A 19 year-old imam was butchered in his bed, his mosque vandalised and burnt. The response of the state has been to bulldoze all the poorest Muslim settlements and cause hundreds of families to flee for their lives.

The prime minister has had nothing to say about any of this. It is election season. Next May there will be a general election. It's all part of an election campaign. We are braced for more bloodshed, mass killing, false-flag attacks, pretend-wars and anything to further polarise an already-polarised population.

I have just watched a chilling little video filmed in a classroom of a small school. The teacher makes a Muslim child stand by her desk and asks the rest of the students, Hindu boys, to come up one by one and slap him. She admonishes those who haven't hit him hard enough. The action taken so far has been that the Hindus in the village and the police have pressurised the Muslim family not to press charges. The Muslim boy's school fee has been refunded and he has been taken out of school.

What's happening in India is not that loose variety of internet fascism. It's the real thing. We have become Nazis. Not just our leaders, not just our TV channels and newspapers, but vast sections of our population too. Large numbers among the Indian Hindu population who live in the US and Europe and South Africa support the fascists politically as well as materially. For

the sake of our souls and for those of our children and our children's children, we must stand up. It doesn't matter whether we fail or succeed. That responsibility is not on us in India alone. Soon, if Modi wins in 2024, all avenues of dissent will be shut down. None of you in this hall must pretend you didn't know what was going on.

If you permit me, I will end by reading a section from my first essay, *The End of Imagination*. It's a conversation with a friend about failure - and my personal writer's manifesto.

"I said in any case hers was an external view of things, this assumption that the trajectory of a person's happiness or let's say fulfilment, had peaked (and now must trough) because she had accidentally stumbled upon 'success'. It was premised on the unimaginative belief that wealth and fame were the mandatory stuff of everybody's dreams.

You've lived too long in New York, I told her. There are other worlds. Other kinds of dreams. Dreams in which failure is feasible. Honourable. Sometimes even worth striving for. Worlds in which recognition is not the only barometer of brilliance or human worth. There are plenty of warriors that I know and love, people far more valuable than myself, who go to war each day, knowing in advance that they will fail. True, they are less 'successful' in the most vulgar sense of the word, but by no means less fulfilled.

The only dream worth having, I told her, is to dream that you will live while you're alive and die only when you're dead. (Prescience? Perhaps.)

'Which means exactly what?' (Arched eyebrows, a little annoyed.)

I tried to explain, but didn't do a very good job of it. Sometimes I need to write to think. So I wrote it down for her on a paper napkin. This is what I wrote: To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never, to forget."

Let me thank you again for the honor of this award. I loved the part in the prize citation in which it says, "Arundhati Roy uses the essay as a form of combat."

It would be presumptuous, arrogant and even a little stupid of a writer to believe that she could change the world with her writing. But it would be pitiful if she didn't even try.

Before I go... I just want to say this: This prize comes with a lot of money. It will not stay with me. It will be shared with the very many impossibly courageous activists, journalists, lawyers, filmmakers, who continue to stand up to this regime with almost no resources. However grim the situation is, please know that there is a tremendous fight back.

(Arundhati Roy was awarded the 45th European Essay Prize for lifetime achievement on the occasion of the French translation of her essay Azadi - Liberté, Fascisme, Fiction on September 12. Courtesy: Scroll.in.)

Bangladesh minorities outperform Muslims in functional literacy

Emran Hossain



Minorities in Bangladesh have outperformed the majority Muslims in functional literacy despite socio-economic challenges. Whether in rural or urban areas, minorities were found more functionally literate than Muslims, said the Literacy Assessment Survey, released by the state-run Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

In all four areas - reading, writing, numeracy and perceptual skills - of functional literacy, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians, who account for less than 9 percent of the South Asian nation's population of over 165 million, top the survey, the government agency responsible for statistics and census data said.

“Minorities are always for getting a firm social footing and education is the best way for it,” said Serajul Islam Choudhury, a former professor at Dhaka University. The survey whose findings were released on July 18 was conducted among 81,920 participants across all 64 districts in the Muslim-majority country.

Educationists and minority leaders pointed out two main reasons for minorities doing better than majority Muslims despite their socioeconomic challenges, including access to education and employment and forced eviction from their land. Their access to quality education force them to take education seriously, the educationists said.

“Christians performed better because of Churches, particularly the Catholic Church, running schools almost everywhere,” said Jyoti F. Gomes, secretary of the Bangladesh Catholic Education Board of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh.

“There is also the community pressure that all children must go to school,” he said. There are 1,000 educational institutions across Bangladesh run by the Catholic Education Board, claimed Jyoti. “Christian educational institutions are considered the best in any given area where many students compete to get a seat,” said Shankar Dominic Gomes, principal of St. Joseph School and College, Bonpara in the northern Natore district.

At St Joseph School and College, nearly 90 percent of its 3,500 students are Muslims. Ethnic minorities in

Bangladesh's plains like Santal, Garo and Oraon also benefited from Christian educational institutions, according to the survey

District-wise, Hindus achieved their highest 95 percent functional literacy in Sylhet, a northeastern district bordering India. The highest functional literacy that Muslims could achieve anywhere in Bangladesh was 82 percent in the capital Dhaka division. Buddhists and Christians in rural Barishal, a coastal division, were found to be 100 percent functionally literate. Their counterparts in the urban areas of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Rangpur districts were also found to be 100 percent functionally literate.

Historically, Hindus were ahead of Muslims in education in Bangladesh because of their better socio-economic conditions. Dhaka University had a greater number of Hindu students than Muslims even during Pakistan rule after 1947, said Kajal Bandyopadhyay, who taught English at Dhaka University. “But, the Hindus fell behind gradually as they lost land and livelihoods,” said Bandyopadhyay, also a former leader of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council.

Hindu leaders believe many minorities are now serious about their education because they want to leave Bangladesh to escape repression. An interesting point in the survey was the emergence of Hijras (hermaphrodites). Recognized as the third gender in Bangladesh, they possessed more ICT (information, communication and technology) skills than females.

In nine of the 12 ICT skills, they outperformed females. They edged out males in two ICT skills - transferring files or applications and using the Excel program.

Hijras in Bangladesh do not have access to any formal education and live in isolated clusters. Most of them live by begging.

Source: UCA News

Manual scavenging: Instead of trying to stop practice, Govt of India 'fudging' figures

Bezwada Wilson

It is unfortunate that the Government of India (GoI) has once again lied on the deaths in sewer and septic tanks. How can the government claim that there is no manual scavenging when people continue to die in sewer and septic tanks?

The Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) has objected to the data tabled by the Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale on the number of persons who died while cleaning sewer and septic tanks in 2023. The Minister has reported that 9 persons died in 2023. SKA has said that figures are grossly incorrect. This year from January 2023 till now, 58 Indian citizens have lost their lives while cleaning sewers and septic tanks, while the government has reported this figure to be just nine. SKA has placed the deaths of these 58 persons in public domain.

The Union Minister has also underreported on the data of deaths in sewer and septic tanks for the last five years to be 399. SKA says, these numbers are not factual. It reflects the apathy to such deaths of vulnerable citizens of this country.

The statement of the Minister that there is no manual scavenging in the country is false and misleading. SKA states the country cannot be declared free of manual scavenging when so many citizens are being killed in sewer and septic tanks. The casteist practice

is prevalent across the country under the definitions of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act, 2013. SKA is demanding fresh survey of manual scavengers to eliminate this atrocity.

The demand of SKA is that Union Government should present correct facts in front of the nation regarding deaths happening in sewers and septic tanks. It should also tell, what has been done so far to prevent such incidents.

The Supreme Court of India, in its order in 2014, has directed to give a compensation of Rs 10 Lakhs for such deaths. 1,315 deaths happened after the SC order and the families of only 266 persons who were killed in sewer and septic tanks have received this compensation. It means that, despite the Supreme Court Judgment, almost 80% victim families have not been given the mandatory compensation.

Since 11th May 2022, SKA has been running a nationwide campaign #Stop Killing Us against the killings in sewers and septic tanks. The campaign has completed 442 days of daily protests across the country. But ironically, instead of trying to stop such killings and making this country free from manual scavenging, the government is putting more efforts on fudging the facts. This is highly deplorable.



From Ayodhya to Trivandrum, are Dalits still unsafe in India?



Murder, violence, discrimination and humiliation is what Dalits continue to face today, from the rural lands of UP to the hallowed land of Ayodhya to cities of Kerala even known for more progressive values; the violence against Dalits continues, unabated through the first half of September 2023.

CJPTEAM

Violence against Dalits continues to rise. Whether it is in the upper levels of the government or it is in the streets or in one's own home; Dalits remain unsafe. These attacks continue to take place regularly and often even get under-reported as it is almost become normal. Sabrang India brings to you the weekly roundup of atrocities against Dalits this week and looks at whether proactive actions have been taken against these cases by law enforcement officers.

Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh

In Ayodhya, where the BJP government is building the Ram Mandir, a horrifying incident of violence against Dalits has emerged where Dalit women were subjected to a vicious attack by men from the Thakur community. The video of the injured women emerged on social media on September 14.

In response to this incident, the police has stated on Twitter that they have initiated legal proceedings and is actively pursuing appropriate actions.

Despite the severity of the attack, coverage of this story has mostly remained limited to social media and alternate media so far.

Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh

In the early hours of morning, the village of Mohideenpur in Uttar Pradesh (UP) was witness to a horrifying act of violence against some members of the most downtrodden group in India. Three members of a Dalit family were killed in cold blood as they lay asleep their hut. Hori Lal, a 62-year-old farmer, his 22-year-old daughter, Brijkali and her 26-year-old husband, Shiv Sagar, all fell victim to this brutal murder that has shaken the village and turned it upside down, according to the Mooknayak.

The incident is said to have been motivated by an alleged property dispute between Hori Lal and his neighbors, who belong to the Other Backward Classes category.

In the aftermath of the murder grief-stricken and angry public protested the murder by setting things on fire and breaking property. The houses of the alleged perpetrators, who had fled the scene, were also set ablaze after the horrifying murder was discovered.

Law enforcement officials responded to the scene upon receiving reports of the triple murder and the developing situation as Kaushambi's Superintendent of Police, Jitendra Srivastava, confirmed that the situation is now

under control, but four suspects remain at large, their whereabouts unknown, “The names of four people have come out as the accused. They are absconding. We are in search of them. We are collecting all the information.”

To prevent further worsening of the aggravated situation, police presence has been deployed in the village.

Trivandrum, Kerala

In Kerala, a Dalit man was slapped and abused for having secured the tender to provide sweets offered at the acclaimed Sabarimala Temple. It is noted that Dalits face violence and hurdles especially in professions where they are required to handle food. Indian society's pre-occupation with caste has made it difficult for Dalits to work and live with dignity.

The two accused are now facing serious charges for their alleged assault and casteist verbal assault on a Dalit man and are currently on the run. Travancore Devaswom Board had given the tender to the victim, Subi, to prepare unniyappam, a traditional sweet fritter offered at the Sabarimala temple. However, the professional success that should have been celebrated instead resulted in garnering humiliation and violence. Subi is from the Pulaya community which classified as a Scheduled Caste in Kerala.

The incident occurred on September 2 when Subi was targeted by the accused individuals, identified as Ramesh alias Krishnankutty and Jagadeesh. These two men were enraged at the fact that a Dalit man had gotten the tender to prepare the sweet according to The Newsminute. Ramesh and Jagadeesh allegedly threatened him against entering the temple, spat on him and slapped him across the face, all in the presence of witnesses.

According to The Newsminute, the victim was standing in the parking lot of the Devaswom Board office in Nanthancode when the accused men confronted him and launched a series of casteist slurs and insults. According to reports by the Times of India, they also questioned how Subi could have gotten tender and said that the temple belonged to “Hindus and not Pulayas.”

The Thiruvananthapuram police has booked Ramesh and Jagadeesh under Sections 294(b) (dealing with obscene acts and songs) and 34 (pertaining to acts committed by several persons with a common intention) of the Indian Penal Code. Additionally, they were charged under Section 3(1) (s) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. As of now, the police are actively pursuing the absconding



accused, ensuring that justice is served in this disturbing case of caste-based discrimination and violence.

Kashmir

A Dalit IAS officer Ashok Parmar from Jammu & Kashmir has asserted that he has been harrassed due to his caste location of a Dalit. The officer claims to have been transferred half a dozen times in the past year, according to The Mooknayak.

Several parties have spoken in his favour. For instance, the Congress' spokesperson PawanKhera has raised questions about the treatment of the officer and said that the move is to apparently hide a multi-crore JalJeevan Mission scam in the region. They have also questioned why the National Commission for Scheduled Castes has not taken action on his complaint.

The JJM scheme was instituted to deliver clean drinking water to all rural households via tap connections by 2024.

Khera has also further asked, “Why, in the wake of his exposé, was a Dalit IAS officer subjected to harassment and targeting? Why did those officers involved in embezzlement and financial misconduct, who burdened the public treasury and harmed our citizens, receive promotions?”

He further questioned why, despite complaints lodged with the Home Ministry and calls for a CBI investigation, the Jammu and Kashmir administration and the Narendra Modi government have not initiated a thorough inquiry into the multiple irregularities and alleged corrupt practices in the implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission.

The Congress spokesperson also questioned the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, asking why they haven't issued a show cause notice to the Lieutenant Governor's office despite the serious allegations of

harassment, intimidation and mistreatment made by the Dalit IAS officer. He suggested that, following a proper investigation, charges under the SC-ST (Prevention of) Atrocities Act should be applicable.

The National Conference leader, Omar Abdullah has also asked for an impartial enquiry to be taken in the allegations by Parmar, according to Mooknayak.

The IAS officer has approached the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and has sought redressal for the harassment at the hands of the Jammu and Kashmir administration. While the J&K administration has denied the allegations by Parmar in a press conference they have held earlier. Parmar has claimed there were irregularities in the pipe supply tendering process, but Jal Shakti Department Additional Chief Secretary Shaleen Kabra has maintained that all work allocations and pipe material procurement have been conducted transparently through the tendering process since 2019. He has asserted further that every transaction is accessible on the department's website.

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

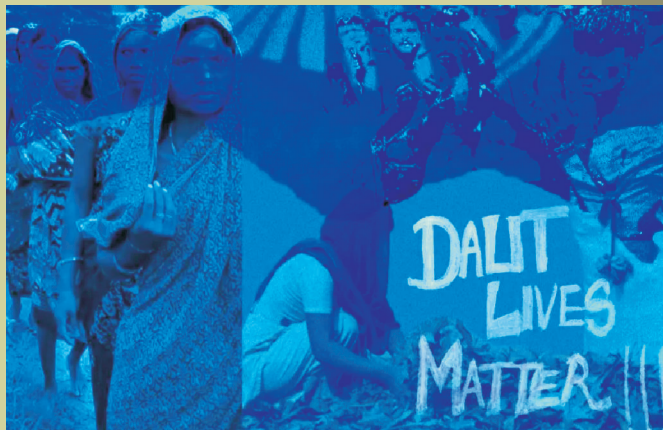
News emerged on 14 September of an elderly Dalit man being kidnapped and beaten by a local BJP leader led gang in Chopda Kalan Village. The village falls under SukhiSevaniya police station limits in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The BJP leader is also said, too, have allegedly urinated on the man when he asked for water. The men took him in an SUV and beat up the Dalit man when he told encroachers to get off government land. They beat him up again and locked him in a room after that, according to Times of India.

The Superintendent of Bhopal (rural) has said that seven people have been arrested so far.

Bharatpur, Rajasthan

A government school teacher in Bharatpur district was apprehended by the police on Saturday for reportedly assaulting a Dalit student who was studying in 7th grade merely because the child used water from the staff's water cooler. The boy was also assaulted with casteist slurs, reportedly. This incident occurred after the student drank water from a container reserved for the staff, according to Outlook India.

The 12-year-old victim claimed that three students took water from the container intended for the staff, however only he was the only one to be subjected to physical violence. He recounted, that after the Morning Prayer, students came out of the classroom. Due to some accident while filling water, students ended up spilling



some water due to which there was a shortage and students had to take water from the staff's cooler. He continued, narrating, that two of his classmates and he filled water from the staff's cooler in their bottles. However, he was only one who was beaten.

The victim's brother from Bhimnagar Pahariya Ambedkar Colony, spoke to Times of India stating that, "When my brother attended school on Friday, he was brutally assaulted by the teacher for drinking water from a container meant for the staff. Gangaram also used casteist slurs and attacked the child with sticks and blows, leaving marks on his back."

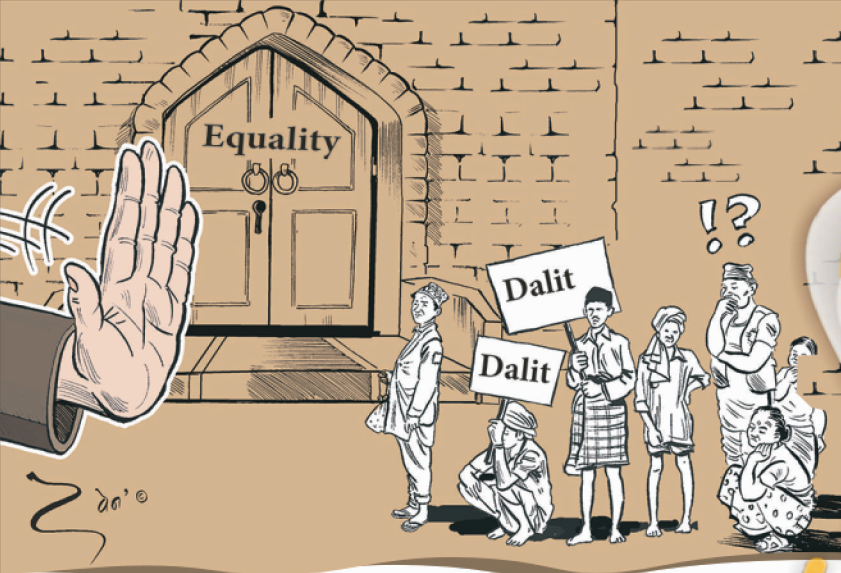
He mentioned that the victim's father had succumbed to silicosis in 2012 and his mother had passed away from typhoid in 2013. Singh's complaint also reportedly said that the school officials had come to his house the following day and asked to resolve the issue by providing monetary incentive of 2 lakhs.

The enraged family members and villagers gathered at the government school protesting against the incident and the accused teacher, Gangaram Gurjar. The police soon arrived at the school, rescued him from the crowd and took him to the police station.

Superintendent of Bharatpur Mridul Kachawa I has confirmed the teacher's detention, "The teacher has been detained and a case has been registered based on the complaint."

The crowd also attempted to block the state highway but was dispersed by the police. A police officer mentioned that a committee led by an official has been appointed to investigate the matter. "A committee has been established to probe the incident. Based on the committee's findings, appropriate action will be taken."

Courtesy: Sabrang India



Rising Intolerance against Dalits in Nepal

Hari Prasad Shrestha

I remember those days of three decades ago, when one of my Brahmin friends of western Nepal married a Dalit girl of Kathmandu by confronting the intense resistances from his family members and society as well. It was a love marriage and luckily the marriage ceremony took place in Kathmandu amid a small number of friends and relatives. Such marriages were almost impossible and dangerous to be performed not only in those days but also at present, if it were out of Kathmandu, especially in small towns and villages of Nepal.

After this marriage, most of his relatives broke relationships with him and he spent an uncomfortable life, faced unbearable criticisms with adverse environments. However, recently, with surprise, I heard good news about my friend that his mother who was against the marriage of her son, accepted the marriage and started to live with her son and daughter-in-law with no feeling of discrimination and disregard. The reason and driving force behind this change in his mother was her loneliness after her caretaker elder son and daughter left for the USA and settled there. Whatever be the reason, the acceptance of such marriage was a rare indication of change in the social mindset

In Nepal, there are two classes of people, one is the upper castes and class, which is high and forward and another is the indigenous or backward group - all those other than the people of the upper caste. The majority of diffident communities come from the population of indigenous groups under backward group. The forward castes Brahmin, Kshatriya including Vaishnava have social and economic rights, which the many indigenous, Sudra and the Dalits (untouchables) did not have.

The majority of Dalit community in Nepal are still suffering from extreme discrimination and inequality both in society and state level since many decades except recently some percentages in state appointments and political positions have been reserved by the law.

Predetermined circumstances like gender, caste, race, place of birth, family origins and the social groups of a person should not help determine people's status. But people are biased on these issues on a widespread scale not only in Nepal but in most of the South Asian nations where it has become a chronic problem.

There is some sort of discrimination with the minorities in almost every country of the world, however the discriminations against the Dalits in the countries of South Asia are completely different, full of cruelty, untouchability and violence. South Asian countries have around 200 million Dalits and one estimate puts the number of Dalits at 13.09 % out of the total population of Nepal.

Dalits are still considered the discriminated and oppressed communities and suffer from the restriction on the use of public amenities, deprivation of economic opportunities, discriminated in the religious and cultural spheres and neglected by the state and society in general.

The Government of Nepal is obliged to take measures to prohibit caste-based discrimination and untouchability under international human rights laws. The promulgation of a much anticipated new constitution of Nepal in late 2015 partially ended a prolonged political transition and the decade-long Maoist insurgency. However, ethnicity remains a contentious issue in both politics and economy.

Recently the police filed criminal arson and caste-based discrimination cases in Jumla against 21-year-old Himmat Giri, who allegedly torched the house of Mukunda Nepali, a Dalit, for eloping with his sister.

This incident serves as a reminder of the 2020 Rukum West incident in which six Dalit youths were killed over an inter-caste love affair. The 21-year-old Nabaraj BK, had gone from Jajarkot to Rukum West to bring a 17-year-old

girl, belonging to a so-called 'upper caste', as his bride when the locals attacked them and chased them towards the Bheri River. The Dalits were also formerly referred to as untouchables, a term that is now understood as offensive.

Dalits were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth varna, also known by the name of Panchama. Dalits predominantly follow Hinduism, with significant populations of the adherents of Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam. Scheduled castes is the official term for Dalits as per the constitutions of India and Pakistan.

Untouchability remains a curse in most of the rural areas of South Asian countries and if it is a Dalit and a woman, the level of mistreatment is two-fold. The standard of awareness is low; people still believe that allowing a Dalit inside a house will bring bad fortune.

Dalits are being denied access to vital resources, such as public water taps, as well as temples, restaurants and other public places. Occupational segregation impedes access to employment, with Dalits restricted to traditionally assigned occupations, including road-sweeping, leatherwork and even forced sex. Despite the Government's commitment to abolish such practices, many Dalits remain trapped in bonded labor relationships.

There has been negligible change in Dalit rights. Especially women, children, the disabled and the elderly are more vulnerable. Poor people other than untouchables are better in society. Poor people have been excluded only based on their economic conditions, but the Dalits are excluded socially, culturally, religiously, economically and politically as well.

The current Nepali legislation meets international obligation to a certain extent. The Interim Constitution guaranteed the right to equality, providing that there shall be no discrimination against any citizen based on caste and further prohibited untouchability in any form, establishing liability of the perpetrator and entitling the victim to compensation.

The local level election law of Nepal has tried to bring some changes in Dalits representation at the local level. It includes a mandatory provision on electing at least one Dalit woman in the post of ward committee member.

Likewise, the local poll law has reserved four seats for women and two seats for candidates hailing from the Dalit or marginalized communities in the village councils. In the case of a municipality, five seats have been reserved for women and three for Dalits or the marginalized, while the number is at least three in the event of the district coordination committee.



During recent local government polls, thousands of Dalit men and women have been elected to the local bodies, which has been an achievement in the history of gender and class equity and bringing Dalit in the political mainstream.

Popular singer Prakash Saput's latest song 'Damai Maharaj' has been released on YouTube which narrates the problems of the Dalits entering temples. Saput is seen in the guise of a Purnavacha Pandit. He comes to recite Puranas during a week organized for temple reconstruction. And the issue of caste untouchability has been strongly raised.

Dalits contributed to every political change in Nepal, however violence against them and their conditions for better and dignified life have never changed. There are also laws for equal participation, equal rights and non-discrimination for all oppressed communities including Dalits but in practice, the implementation of prevalent laws are very weak and consequently religious conversions of Dalits are high in Nepal.

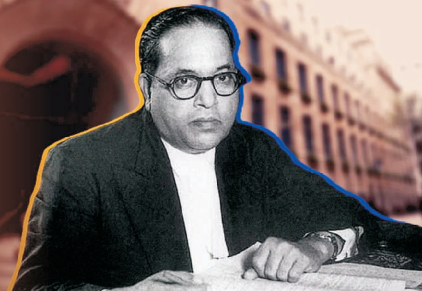
Madhesh, Sudur Paschim and Karnali are highly vulnerable provinces for the Dalits compared to other provinces. There is still a lot to be done to end the rampant discrimination against the Dalits. The Dalits have a lower social network, limited access to better jobs and opportunities and when a crisis occurs, they can be costly for them. The Dalits need greater equity, more efficient economic support, reduced discrimination, more social and political support and better institutions for their upliftment.

It is necessary to provide special economic opportunities to the Dalit community similar to the special economic incentives given to the Thakalis by the state for their upliftment. Special financial packages and special protections from the state are also needed for the Dalits.

Source: myrepublica

After US, Ambedkarites in UK Renew Their Fight for Caste Legislation

Tejas Harad



A 68-year-old man of Indian origin in the United Kingdom, Amrik Bajwa, was sentenced to 18 weeks in jail in April this year for posting a TikTok video in which he was abusing Dalit women and threatening to rape them.

Santosh Dass, an Ambedkarite activist and chair of Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance, who has been lobbying for a legislation against caste discrimination in the UK, told The Quint that the man, a Jat Sikh, was sentenced under the Communications Act but could not be charged under the provisions of the country's Equality Act 2010 because it doesn't recognise caste as a protected category.

Dalit activists and Ambedkarites in the UK are fighting for the enactment of legislation against caste discrimination for about two decades but their struggle hasn't fructified yet.

A conference was organised in the University of Oxford last month to discuss this issue in which Dass and others who have been campaigning for the legislation for the last few years such as Lord Richard Harries of Pentregarth, Annapurna Waughray and Meena Dhanda participated.

"Labour and Liberal Democrats, as far as I know, are still committed to including caste in the 2010 Equalities Act and steps have been taken and will continue to be taken to ensure that this is part of their policy. Whether it should actually appear in their manifestos is another matter, but it needs to be part of what they intend to achieve if they come to power. That is, if they are committed to removing all forms of discrimination," Harries said in his keynote speech.

Equality Act 2010

The UK's anti-discrimination statute mentions nine protected categories - age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

It mentions caste as well in the sub-clause relating to race, however, only as a promise that the government, in the future, will amend the act to make caste an aspect of race. In 2013, through an amendment, this obligation was turned into a duty. But, even after a decade, the UK government hasn't fulfilled the promise.

On the contrary, Tory MP Bob Blackman, whose Harrow

East constituency has a significant population of British Indians, has been demanding the repeal of this clause.

The Hindu right, who have been vociferously opposing inclusion of caste in the Equality Act, have Blackman's ear. They deny that anyone practises caste discrimination in the UK and characterise any effort to legislate on the matter as Hinduphobia.

Satish Sharma, General Secretary of the National Council of Hindu Temples, had told the BBC in 2017, "There has been this assumption that Hindus are casteist and I have recently heard what I think is an outrageously prejudicial term, where groups who are not Dalits are now being referred to as 'caste supremacists'."

University Spaces Important in the Struggle

Meena Dhanda, Professor of Philosophy and Cultural Politics at the University of Wolverhampton, told The Quint that many upper caste Sikhs too support the Hindu right in their opposition to the legislation.

She says that if the Labour Party comes back to power in the next term, the advocacy for legislating caste as a protected category will receive an impetus. She further states that trade unions, university students and academics will have to be involved for wider engagement on the issue.

"Of late, more and more Dalit students are coming to the UK for higher education and they are making their presence felt [by speaking out against caste and discrimination]. This forces people to take note," she says.

The student body of the SOAS University of London recently added caste to its equality and diversity policy.

The Indian students, who were involved in organising the conference in Oxford on 23 June, are working towards introducing caste to their university's equality policy. A roundtable was arranged for this purpose involving a number of stakeholders, including faculty, students union, administration and even the mayoral office of the Oxford city council.

Simple Rajrah, a PhD scholar at the university and who also moderated the roundtable, told The Quint,

Shireen Azam, another PhD scholar at the university and

one of the organisers of the conference, told The Quint that since Oxford is a university town, it has a huge South Asian student population. She added that they plan to work towards creating awareness about caste discrimination and its manifestations on a campus like Oxford.

"We will focus on increasing visibility on this issue with concerted campaigns with the union as well as further deliberations with the administration," Rajrah said.

In May, India centre at the University of Oxford launched a fully-funded Savitribai Phule Graduate scholarship for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and first-generation students applying to the university for postgraduate studies.

Dass said that a large number of Indian students are getting visas to study in the UK. However, a person flying from India to the UK doesn't leave caste mid-air and therefore she hopes that, following the US universities like Brown, University of California and others, more and more UK universities will add caste to their equality policies. However, what Dass hopes the most is that caste is legislated as a separate protected category in the Equality Act 2010 as it will outlaw caste discrimination in the fields of education, employment and provision of public goods and services across the UK.

A Long History of Anti-Caste Activism in the UK

The word caste entered the 2010 anti-discrimination law after a long campaign by numerous Dalit and Ambedkarite organisations in the UK. In her essay 'The Campaign to Outlaw Caste Discrimination in Britain' in the book *Ambedkar in London*, Dass notes that the anti-caste activism in the UK can be traced back to the 1970s, if not earlier.

However, it really picked up pace in late 1990s and early 2000s when a number of Ambedkarite organisations were formed one after the other, some of which still continue their work. The major among them were Dalit Solidarity Network UK, Voice of Dalit International, Caste Watch UK and Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance.

After Dalit activists started campaigning for legislation prohibiting caste discrimination, Savarna Hindus claimed that discrimination on the basis of caste didn't take place in the UK. This necessitated the need for surveys and reports to establish the empirical reality of caste. One of the first such reports was published by the Dalit Solidarity Network UK in 2006 titled 'No Escape: Caste Discrimination in the UK'; the foreword for this report was written by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who has been a staunch supporter of the caste discrimination legislation.



More reports were published in later years such as 'A Hidden Apartheid: Voice of the Community' (2009), 'Caste Discrimination and Harassment in Great Britain' (2010) and 'Caste in Britain: Socio-legal Review' (2014). The 2019 BBC documentary 'Hindus: Do We Have a Caste Problem?' was also instrumental in taking the discussion forward.

While the Ambedkarites won a big victory by getting the word caste included in the Equality Act, the progress on actually outlawing caste discrimination has stalled in the years after.

In 2015, a 39-year-old Adivasi woman, Permila Tirkey, was awarded almost £184,000 in unpaid wages after she won the case against her British Indian employers Pooja and Ajay Chandhok. Tirkey was brought to the UK from Bihar to work as a domestic servant. However, she was made to work dawn to dusk, seven days a week and was paid bare minimum wages. *Tirkey v Chandhok* was a landmark case because it acknowledged the "low caste" status of Tirkey as a factor in the treatment meted out to her by her upper caste employers.

However, the UK government has since been arguing that this case shows that there is no need for a separate legislation on caste as the current law is enough to deal with cases of caste discrimination.

"The judgment of the Employment Appeal Tribunal in *Tirkey v Chandhok* shows that someone claiming caste discrimination may rely on the existing statutory remedy where they can show that their "caste" is related to their ethnic origin, which is itself an aspect of race discrimination in the Equality Act," Penny Mordaunt, the then Minister for Women and Equalities, told the parliament in 2018.

However, Dass argues that the concept of ethnic origin cannot accurately capture the empirical reality of caste. "We need a separate category for caste," she asserts.

Source: The Quint



Ambedkar Society for South Asia
