

QUARTERLY

AMBEDKAR VISION

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Five incidents in one week reveal the growing threat to religious freedom as far-right groups and police target minority communities



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

As we bring you this new edition of Ambedkar Vision, we are reminded of the pressing struggles that continue to shape the lives of marginalized communities across South Asia and beyond. This issue brings together powerful pieces that shed light on severe violations of religious freedoms, rising political and social tensions and the on-going fight for justice faced by Dalits, religious minorities and marginalized women. Through the lens of these articles, we explore the urgent need for action and the responsibility we all share in forging a path toward a more just and equitable world. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended that India be designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” due to severe violations of religious freedom. This recommendation comes as no surprise in light of the increasingly violent and discriminatory environment in India, where religious minorities, especially Muslims and Christians, face heightened persecution. In this issue, we discuss the implications of this designation and the call for international action to address the widespread violations that continue to undermine religious freedom in India. In another sobering report, we examine the week of escalating persecution where far-right Hindu groups targeted Christian gatherings in India. These coordinated attacks reveal the growing intolerance within India, fuelled by ideological extremism and political agendas that seek to suppress religious minorities. As the state remains largely silent on these incidents, the safety and security of religious minorities remain in jeopardy. This article looks at the broader implications of such attacks, including their impact on India's democratic foundations and international reputation. The bond between Savitri, a Dalit woman and Fatima, a Muslim woman, symbolizes the strength of interfaith and inter-caste solidarity in the face of divisive social forces. Their friendship and joint advocacy for women's rights offer hope for a society where religious and caste barriers are dismantled. This article explores their story, emphasizing the power of unity and the role of women in transforming societies. The article Geopolitical Tug-of-War delves into the complex realities surrounding the protection of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. Despite the country's long-standing tradition of interfaith coexistence, Hindu communities are increasingly targeted by religious extremists. We examine the role of both Bangladesh's government and international actors in securing the rights of religious minorities and ensuring their safety amid rising religious tensions. A critical analysis of whether Dr. Ambedkar's ideology aligns with or contradicts Hindu nationalist politics is a timely and necessary discussion. This article examines the philosophical and political foundations of Ambedkar's vision for an egalitarian society and contrasts it with the rise of Hindu nationalism, which seeks to entrench caste hierarchies and religious divisions. What does this ideological battle mean for the future of India's democracy and the fight for justice? Finally, we conclude with a reflection on the journey of Hindu minorities in Balochistan, as depicted in a documentary film. The film sheds light on the secure passage of Hindus to a Balochistan temple, showcasing the resilience of religious minorities in an often-hostile environment. This story of survival and resistance highlights the importance of protecting the cultural and religious rights of minorities, even in the most challenging geopolitical contexts.



'Severe violations of religious freedom': USCIRF recommends designating INDIA as 'Country of Particular Concern'

On 2 October, 2024, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released a damning report condemning Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government for its systematic repression of religious minorities, particularly Muslims.

Released on the International Day of Non-Violence, the report paints a bleak picture of the erosion of religious freedoms under Modi's leadership, highlighting escalating hate speech, discriminatory laws and violent attacks against religious communities.

This report is particularly significant because it comes shortly after Modi's visit to the US and while India's Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar, was still on a diplomatic tour of the country. It underscores the increasing hostility towards religious minorities in India, particularly in the run-up to the 2024 general elections.

The report specifically names Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and several members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as key figures inciting hatred against Muslims.

The USCIRF report provides an alarming account of the deteriorating conditions for Muslims in 2024. Hate speech has escalated, often led by top political figures, leading to lynchings, violence and vigilante attacks.

Prime Minister Modi has accused opposition parties of wanting to “wipe out the Hindu faith” and referred to Muslims as “infiltrators”, rhetoric that has fuelled violent actions across the country.

Amit Shah falsely claimed that opposition parties would impose Shari'ah law if elected, despite no such agenda

being present in their manifestos.

One notable incident in January 2024 followed the inauguration of the controversial Ram Temple in Ayodhya. BJP leaders, Nitesh Rane and Geeta Jain, made inflammatory speeches in Mumbai's Mira Road, urging Hindus to “ignite and retaliate” against Muslims, resulting in widespread violence. Another BJP leader, T. Raja Singh, called for the demolition of mosques and incited further unrest by accusing Muslims of “love jihad” and forced conversions.

Legal Discrimination and Oppression

The report highlights how Modi's government has weaponised the legal system to disenfranchise religious minorities. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), for instance, fast-tracks citizenship for non-Muslim refugees, effectively marginalising Muslims.

The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and anti-conversion laws, which have been enacted in several states, have further deepened the divide between religious communities.

The USCIRF's report warns that these laws create structural inequality. The UCC, for example, threatens the autonomy of minority communities, while anti-conversion laws provide cover for the state to arrest religious leaders and close places of worship. Combined with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), millions of Muslims face the possibility of statelessness.



A week of escalating persecution: Far-right Hindu groups target Christian gatherings in India

In recent times, India has been witnessing a dangerous shift where religious minorities, particularly Christians, are increasingly subjected to targeted violence.

What once were isolated incidents have now become systematic assaults driven by far-right Hindu groups such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal.

These groups accuse Christians of converting Hindus under coercion or deceit, a claim which has little to no basis but is often used to justify violent attacks.

The hostility against the Christian community is further exacerbated by the complicity of the state machinery, where the police, instead of protecting the vulnerable, are either passive spectators or active participants in these acts of persecution.

The United Christian Forum (UCF), which monitors hate crimes against Christians, noted that violence against the community has seen an alarming rise. In 2023, as per their report, over 687 incidents of violence were documented against Christians, depicting that an average of two Christians is attacked every day in India.

The UCF report had contained incidents ranging from vandalism of churches to outright harassment and detention of Christians for holding prayer meetings.

The issue has taken a political turn, with laws such as the anti-conversion legislation—present in several states—being used as tools to silence and intimidate Christian communities, despite the fact that religious conversions, particularly forced ones, are a rare phenomenon in India.

Furthermore, another recent report by the UCF

documented 161 in the first 75 days of with January 2024 g 70 reported cases, by 62 in February the first half of alone.

The report highlighted that burial denied to families even as cases have seen over 100 Indian arrested. Furthermore, according to the report, 122 pastors and other Christians from the community have been arrested so far on charges of religious conversion.

As per the said report, Chhattisgarh emerges as the state with the highest number of reported assaults against Christians and has recorded a shocking number 47 incidents. Sabrang India had also reported on March 14 how Chhattisgarh has witnessed rising attacks against Christians.

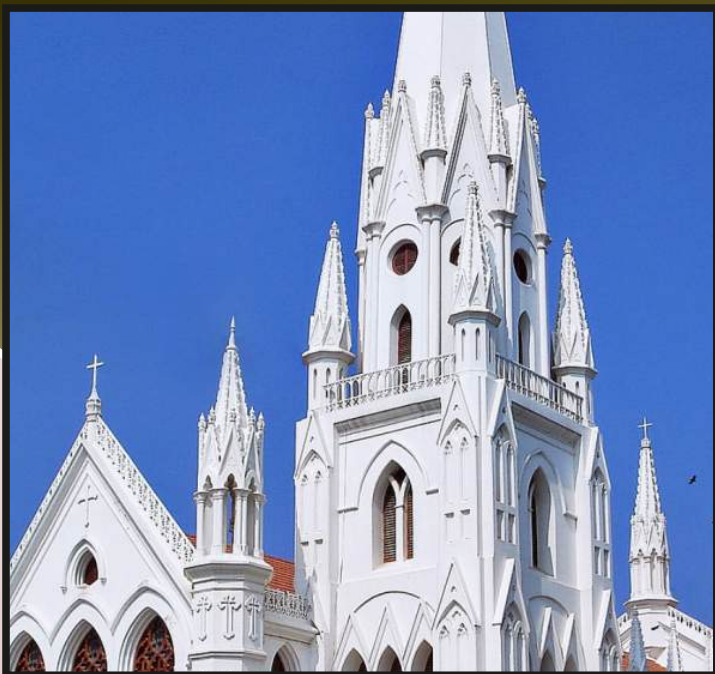
Following closely behind was Uttar Pradesh which has, according to the press release, seen 36 incidents of violence against Christians.

Between October 13 and October 20, 2024, five distinct incidents across various states painted a grim picture of the escalating persecution of Christians in India.

Each incident unfolded in a similar pattern: a peaceful Christian gathering was disrupted, claims of religious conversions were made, local Hindu nationalist groups intervened and the police either failed to act impartially or were complicit in the harassment.

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Details about the incidents:

October 13, Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh

On October 13, an incident unfolded in Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh, where police disrupted a Christian prayer meeting after a complaint was filed by Sarvesh Singh, the president of the National Gau Raksha Vahini. Singh, who is associated with a group notorious for its vigilante actions under the pretext of cow protection, accused the Christian gathering of engaging in conversions. In response, the police arrested a couple and detained several attendees, showing an immediate bias towards the complainant's accusations without any prior investigation.

This event follows a broader trend of Christians being targeted during religious gatherings in Uttar Pradesh, a state governed by a leadership known for its alignment with Hindutva ideology. In this charged environment, accusations of conversions are enough to disrupt lives, regardless of their veracity.

October 13, Jagatsinghpur, Odisha

Odisha, a state with a long history of communal tensions against Christians, has seen growing incidents of anti-Christian violence in recent years. In the district of Jagatsinghpur, members of the Bajrang Dal raided a Christian prayer meeting, accusing the attendees of engaging in religious conversions.

The attackers threatened extreme violence, including beating the Christians to death and even went as far as to threaten to strip the participants—a brutal attempt to

humiliate them for practicing their faith. Though the attackers were handed over to the police, their boldness reflects a belief in their immunity from legal consequences, especially since incidents of this nature are rarely followed by strong action from law enforcement. Instead of protecting the victims, the focus often shifts to investigating baseless claims of conversion, leaving Christians vulnerable to repeated attacks.

**Five incidents in one week
reveal the growing threat
to religious freedom as
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minority communities**

October 17, Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh

The hostility against Christians in rural India often comes in subtle but persistent forms, making it clear that they are considered outsiders. In Dhamtari, a Christian family seeking to perform a burial ceremony for a deceased loved one was met with resistance from members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal.

The two groups protested against the burial, arguing that Christians should not have the right to use the village cemetery, despite the fact that Christians have lived in the village for generations. The extremists demanded that the body be buried outside the village limits and it was only after the local administration intervened that the burial was allowed to proceed.

However, the family had to concede to the extremists' demands and bury the deceased outside the village. This denial of basic rights like burial underscores the deep prejudice faced by Christians in rural communities, where far-right groups operate with impunity, enforcing their own social codes.



October 17, Saharsa, Bihar

The anti-Christian sentiment in Bihar has been on the rise and the events in Saharsa further reflect this disturbing trend. VHP activists, accompanied by the local police, disrupted a Christian prayer meeting, confiscating religious items including Bibles and other Christian literature. A pastor was detained as well. This incident is a striking example of how local law enforcement often acts in tandem with Hindu nationalist groups, carrying out raids that target peaceful religious gatherings.

By confiscating religious texts and arresting leaders of the Christian community, the state not only violates the constitutional right to religious freedom but also sends a chilling message that Christians are not welcome to worship freely in their own country.

October 20, Amethi, Uttar Pradesh

In Amethi, a district known for its political significance, the police raided the home of a Christian family after local villagers complained about alleged religious conversions taking place under the guise of prayer meetings. The raid, based on unverified allegations, resulted in the detention of three members of the family. It is worth noting that Uttar Pradesh has become a hotbed for incidents where far-right groups, emboldened by the anti-conversion laws in the state, accuse Christians of coercing others into adopting their faith. These accusations rarely hold up under scrutiny, but the damage is already done, as families are subjected to raids, public humiliation and legal battles. The arrest of individuals based on unsubstantiated claims points to a broader strategy to intimidate and weaken religious

minorities, using the state apparatus to facilitate harassment.

Widespread implications: A threat to India's secular fabric

These incidents are not isolated; they are part of a broader narrative of rising religious intolerance and shrinking space for minorities, particularly religious minorities such as Christians. The concerted efforts of Hindu nationalist groups to monitor, disrupt and attack Christian gatherings are indicative of a larger strategy to suppress religious diversity. The central issue in all these cases is the allegation of religious conversions, a charge frequently used to justify violence. However, this claim often lacks evidence and in most instances, peaceful prayer meetings are falsely accused of being conversion drives.

The complicity of local police and the tacit support of political figures associated with right-wing ideologies fuel this atmosphere of fear. State governments, particularly those led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have emboldened these groups by either remaining silent or actively pushing anti-conversion laws that disproportionately target Christians and other religious minorities. Anti-conversion laws, present in over eight Indian states, provide the legal cover for extremists to launch attacks under the pretence of protecting Hinduism from external threats.

This state-backed aggression threatens not just Christians but the constitutional values of religious freedom and secularism, which India has long prided itself on. The sheer frequency of these incidents—at least five in just one week—points to a deeply rooted problem,

where vigilante justice has become normalised and religious persecution is institutionalised. This dangerous escalation threatens to tear apart India's pluralistic social fabric, as the line between religion and politics continues to blur, with minorities paying the heaviest price.

The week spanning mid-October 2024 serves as a grim reminder of the growing intolerance faced by Christians in India. As far-right Hindu groups intensify their campaign of harassment and violence, the state's silence and in some cases, its participation, further emboldens these actors. The police's involvement in these attacks is particularly alarming, as it reflects a breakdown of legal protections for religious minorities. If India is to preserve its democratic and secular identity, it must hold these groups accountable and ensure that law enforcement acts in the interest of justice, not ideology. Religious freedom is a cornerstone of India's Constitution and its erosion threatens the very foundations of the nation's democracy. The international community and civil society must urgently address this rising tide of religious persecution before it escalates further pushing India into deeper religious conflict.

Source: cjp

How?

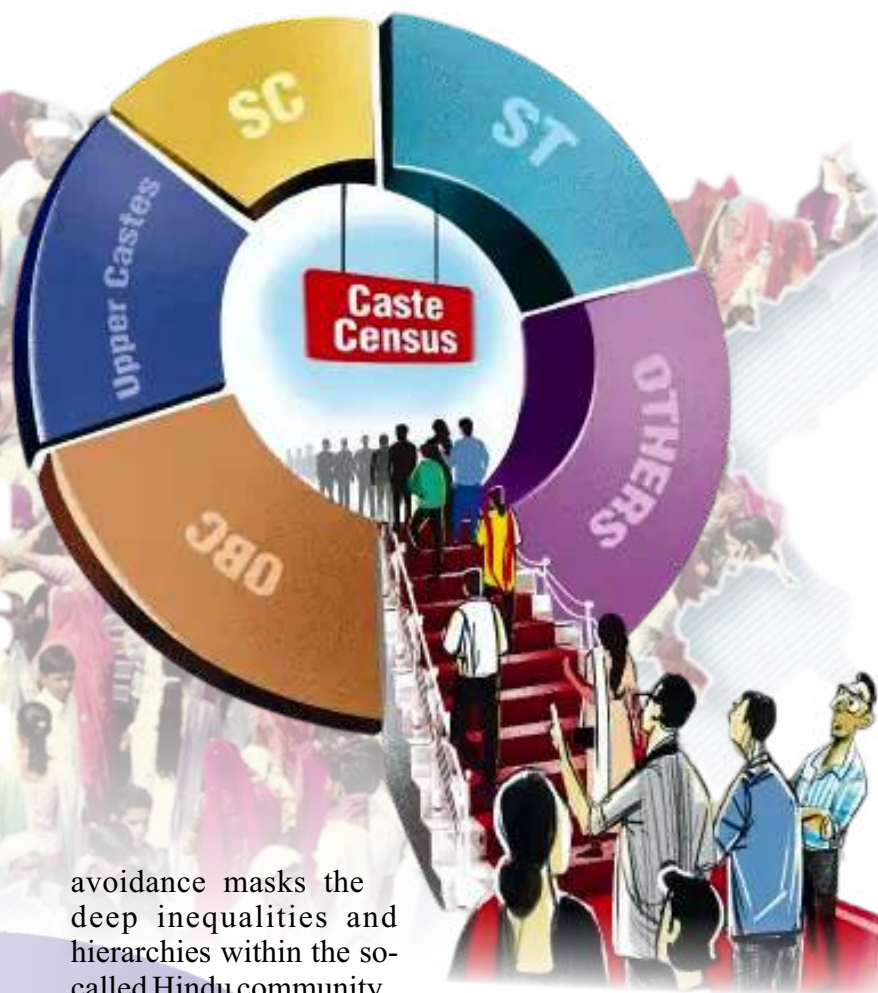
a Caste Census Can Lead Us Towards a Casteless India

In an earlier article, I discussed how Prime Minister Narendra Modi's slogan, "Ek Rahenge To Safe Rahenge (If we remain one, we will be safe)", is intended to oppose the idea of a caste census, which Rahul Gandhi has been championing as a key opposition leader. For the first time, a leader from the lineage of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi – leaders who historically resisted caste-based reservations and the enumeration of caste data – has taken a firm stand on the caste question. Rahul Gandhi now speaks like an Ambedkarite, frequently invoking the names of B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule and Periyar in his public speeches. He has made the demand for a caste census an unavoidable challenge for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-Bharatiya Janata Party government.

Gandhi likens the caste system in India to the hidden iceberg that sank the Titanic in the early 20th century. Just as the iceberg, concealed beneath the ocean's surface, destroyed the massive ship, the caste system, embedded in the social hierarchies of Indian society, has undermined India's potential as a nation. Previous governments failed to recognise this "hidden iceberg" and its destructive impact on the fabric of Indian society.

Gandhi is the first major leader from the Congress Party to acknowledge and confront this systemic problem.

Prime Minister Modi, himself from an Other Backward Castes (OBC) community, uses his caste identity to mobilise Shudra OBC votes. However, he claims that a caste census will divide Hindu society – a belief echoed by the RSS and some 'upper' caste intellectuals. These groups often avoid naming specific castes like Brahmin, Bania, Kayastha, Khatri or Kshatriya, preferring the vague term "Hindus" to describe their social bloc. This



avoidance masks the deep inequalities and hierarchies within the so-called Hindu community.

The term "Hindu" has become a mystical label, often used to obscure the historical exploitation of Dalits, Shudras and Adivasis by 'upper' castes. However, the caste census has the potential to reveal the realities of caste-based inequalities and foster unity, not division.

A caste census will identify individuals by their traditional social groups, often tied to specific occupations and provide an accurate count of their population. While critics argue that this will entrench caste identities, the reality is that caste-based discrimination already exists. A census will simply expose its extent. Crucially, the data will also show how many people have moved beyond their traditional caste occupations, illustrating social and occupational mobility.

For instance, Brahmins are traditionally associated with priesthood, a profession deemed 'pure', while Chamars are linked to leatherwork, considered 'impure'. These labels have perpetuated untouchability and discrimination for centuries.

Occupational change is therefore essential for reducing caste-based inequalities. If the census reveals that Chamars are entering professions like teaching or administration or that Brahmins are engaging in leatherwork, it will indicate progress toward a casteless society.

The ultimate goal is to eliminate caste-based discrimination and inequality. To achieve this, caste names must carry equal respect and inter-caste occupational mobility must become the norm. Schools, colleges and universities should promote the dignity of all professions and encourage occupational diversity.

A truly casteless society evolves when individuals shift into new occupations, acquire new skills and engage in inter-caste marriages.

Inter-caste marriages foster cultural exchange and reduce the rigid boundaries imposed by caste. Caste, after all, has also created significant divides in food habits, rituals and social practices.

B.R. Ambedkar proposed the idea of 'Annihilation of Caste', but few substantial theoretical frameworks have emerged since. The intellectual elite, predominantly Dwija (upper-caste), have largely ignored the issue, treating caste as if it does not exist.

Even during the Mandal movement of the 1990s, discussions were limited to the merits and demerits of reservation, rather than addressing caste as a systemic problem.

Reservation is not the cause of caste – it is a consequence. Addressing the root issue requires a deeper approach, akin to diagnosing and treating a cancer. Without dismantling caste-based discrimination, even reservations cannot create a level playing field.

Communists, meanwhile, focused on class over caste, leading to their political decline. In contrast, the RSS and BJP have used caste-based representation as a tool for electoral success.

However, the RSS's vision of Sanatana Dharma inherently upholds caste hierarchies and rejects spiritual democracy, preventing any real progress toward equality.

Historically, the Congress failed to recognise caste as a structural issue, leaving space for the RSS-BJP to rise to power. Rahul Gandhi's 'X-ray' analogy – calling for a caste census as a diagnostic tool – is a step toward addressing caste inequalities.

The caste census is not merely a tool for identifying inequalities but a roadmap for building a more equitable society.

A caste census would act as an X-ray of Indian society, followed by deeper analysis (a 'scan') and intervention (a 'biopsy').

The census would provide comprehensive socioeconomic data, highlighting areas of inequality. While caste identities may persist for some time, the immediate focus should be on eradicating caste-based discrimination and occupational stigma.

For example, the belief that a Brahmin's child should not engage in leatherwork or that a Dalit cannot become a temple priest must be challenged.

Accurate caste data would have other benefits as well. Castes with inflated perceptions of their population may face a reality check, while underrepresented groups may mobilise for a fair share of resources and opportunities.

Education, a critical driver of occupational change and inter-caste marriages, would gain renewed focus.

The caste census is not merely a tool for identifying inequalities but a roadmap for building a more equitable society.

By understanding and addressing caste-based disparities, India can move closer to Ambedkar's vision of a society where dignity, equality and opportunity transcend caste.



Source: The Wire

HRFP observed Human Rights Day 2024 achieving UN agenda 2030 through the theme of “Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now”!



Human Rights Focus Pakistan (HRFP) organized a Human Rights Day event on December 10, 2024, at Vision Hall, Faisalabad. The special event carries the theme of the United Nations: “Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now.” It emphasizes that the time to secure human rights is not tomorrow or someday in the future but right now. Civil society representatives, lawyers, religious leaders, political leaders, women leaders, youth, students and representatives of different fields actively participated in this program.

Naveed Walter, the President of Human Rights Focus Pakistan (HRFP) recalled the increasing violations of human rights and minority rights in Pakistan. He highlighted that recent incidents of persecutions, brutal violence, imprisonments, attacks on Christians and abduction of Christian and Hindu girls are alarming.

Naveed Walter said, the United Nations (UN) theme “Our rights, our future, right now,” focuses to bring human rights on a pathway for the solutions of challenges. These are possible if stakeholders play a vital role in promoting, protecting and implementing human rights and acting as agents of change in resolving issues, he added.

Naveed Walter said let's start with the ideas of struggle to bring the forces together with a single agenda of protecting against abuses, violations based on religion, gender, race and color. He added: “We emphasize the need to build a society where everyone can live in freedom, respect and dignity.”

James Lal expressed recognition of the urgency of addressing long-standing injustices, inequalities and rights violations, while looking forward to building a more inclusive and equitable global society. He showed also a grief-stricken by the recent violations against women, children and minorities.

John Victor said discrimination against students and dishonesty in the implementation of the 5% employment quota for minorities was dragging young people into the worst form of neglect. He added that minority students still lack student exchange programs and international opportunities.

Manzoor Anthony said the world still faces challenges that threaten the ideals enshrined in the declaration. Poverty, climate change, armed conflict, gender inequality and systemic discrimination continue to violate rights and limit opportunities for millions of people.

Participants from different fields including Bushra Younas, Sadaf Shadman, Nida Naeem, Mushtaq Masih and Aroosa Bibi also spoke, shared their stories and experiences.

HRFP's even speakers at the event called on everyone to contribute so that these rights can play a role in shaping a sustainable and inclusive tomorrow! Universality of human rights and how people can take responsibility to defend the rights of the vulnerable and take care of new generations for their rights and future. Particularly, it's also a need of time to make the changes in education systems that's promote peace and tolerance among students and younger generations to avoid these incidents, speakers added.

Human Rights Focus Pakistan (HRFP) raised on Human Rights Day that the minorities are being subjected to physical violence, false accusations for trapping them in the workplaces and murders in personal vendettas. HRFP urged that the increasing cases of discrimination with domestic workers, expelling them from jobs, false allegations of theft, physical violence, sexual abuses, force conversions and force marriages of minority girls, should be stopped. These challenges include hate speech, addressing misinformation and combating disinformation to reshape public opinion. Right Now, is a time to spark actions and reignite a global movement in support of human rights, HRFP added.

Shadman John (HRFP Program Coordinator) and Hamdosh Samuel (Field Coordinator) thanked the participants and distributed relevant material, which outlined the vision of driving social change and empowering marginalized groups so that they can raise their own voices against injustice.

Source: ANI News



Savitri and Fatima: *United Forever*

Erasures of historical events and even historical persons have been used to serve political and ideological ends of the powerful over the centuries. It is not a co-incidence that the first great emperor of Ashoka remained unknown in the land of his birth for more nearly two thousand years after his birth. It was only after the inscriptions on the pillars that he had distributed in different parts of his empire were deciphered by James Prinsep, a British colonial administrator in 1837 that the facts of his existence and his significance became known to his fellow Indians and were soon incorporated into the history books taught in schools. It is very probable that this erasure was the deliberate work of those who monopolized access to the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge and were committed to uphold and strengthen the Brahmanical order that ensured the continuance of this monopoly. That Ashoka was a Buddhist emperor who propagated Buddhist beliefs throughout his empire and beyond and developed important Buddhist sites that encouraged pilgrimages made this erasure essential for a Brahmanical revival.

In recent years, we are experiencing erasures and falsifications of history aimed at both demonizing and deflating the lives and achievements of various Muslim rulers as part of the RSS-led Hindutva project to establish a Hindu Rashtra. A recent event has now demonstrated that even social reformers are now threatened with extinction and erasure.

A well-known journalist, Shri Dileep Mandal, who gained recognition as a 'Bahujan' propagandist and who for years researched and wrote about social reform, secularism and the ignominies of the caste system, shocked his many admirers and readers recently when he was appointed to the post of Consultant by the

Information and Broadcasting Ministry. He has now transformed himself into becoming a paid propagandist for the Hindutva forces. Not surprisingly, his comments and blogs on social media have become increasingly anti-Muslim. To retain his credibility, he has taken up cudgels against the entire Muslim community on the grounds that they it is intrinsically incapable of undertaking reforms and that it, therefore, acts as a roadblock for the Bahujan movement for social justice. He blames Mughal emperors for promoting upper caste Hindus and keeping the caste system intact when they had the power to destroy it.

The fact that he does not fault British rulers on the same grounds displays not only his intellectual dishonesty but also the fact that he has now dovetailed his own pronouncements with the agenda of the Hindutva forces who have also been supporters of British rule even during the struggle for Independence and have been supporters of Imperialism subsequently.

The venom that he has spouted against Muslims has increased with each blog and post and his commitment to create an unbridgeable chasm between Bahujans and Muslims and, in fact, to make Bahujans despise Muslims not only because of their lack of commitment to the cause of social justice but because they accept his argument that Muslims are responsible for the failures and weaknesses of their own struggles for social equality.

Most recently, in an astonishing display of obnoxious chicanery, Mandal has taken it upon himself to not only erase the memory of lesser known but very significant Muslim woman, Fatima Shaikh, committed to social equality and gender justice, but has gone on to actually deny her very existence.

He has advanced the preposterous claim that Fatima Shaikh is a figment of his own imagination, created to advance the importance of secularism in the days when he himself had been a committed secularist!

The strong sense of impunity that impels people like Mandal to advance claims of this nature is amazing! In recent years, Fatima Shaikh's name has become inextricably linked with that of Savitri Bai Phule who has assumed iconic proportions. Savitri Bai herself was not known very widely until a few decades ago when the women's movement of the 70's rediscovered her and scholars, many of them women, uncovered details of her extraordinary life and contributions.

Till then if at all she had been remembered it was as the wife of Jyotiba Phule, the indomitable fighter against Brahmanical beliefs and social constructs who dared to confront these in the heart of Pune which remained a bastion of Brahmanism for years after the defeat of the Peshwai in 1818, a Peshwai that prided itself in having implemented the most cruel aspects of the Manuvadi varnashram dharma or caste system.

Throughout our history, many women, most of whom have belonged to the oppressed castes, who dared to confront suffocating social norms and caste and gender oppression have been partially or completely obliterated from our memories.

Fragments of their poems and shreds of their histories are all that remain to speak to us of their courageous lives and histories. In recent years, painstaking research, again very often undertaken by women, is resurrecting them.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Fatima Shaikh, a woman belonging to the backward caste weaving community and a Muslim to boot too belonged to a backward community, the weaving community, has been unremembered for years. In fact, it is only the interest in Savitri bai's life that has made Fatima Shaikh come alive too!

As the wife of Jyotiba, Savitri Bai's name could not be erased and, with each passing year, her letters, her poems, her writings and her stories have been discovered and published and she has attained iconic status. Her birth anniversary on January 3rd is being observed by more and more organisations dedicated to social justice and equality including many women's organisations like AIDWA.

Her contribution to the access to literacy by women and that too by women belonging to the most exploited and shunned groups – widows, unmarried mothers, backward castes and dalits – is now known, studied and acknowledged.

Savitri bai was born on 3rd January, 1831 and was

married to Jyotiba at the age of 9. Even as a child she had watched her brothers learn to read and write and used to try and steal a look at their books. She was scolded for this and told that she would remain unmarried if she tried to get educated. Her love for books was so great, however, that she carried a book with her to her marital home!

Savitri, unlike so many child-brides, was fortunate. Jyotiba was not only kind and considerate, but he also taught her to read both Marathi and English. Jyotirao, himself, had studied only till class 7 when the Brahmins in his village made his father take him out of school. Fortunately, (Times of India, September 25, 2023), Ghaffar Munshi, a school inspector, convinced Jyotirao Phule to continue his education.

Jyotirao, realizing the emancipatory nature of education, went to great pains to teach Savitri and his cousin Sugana. After her rudimentary education was completed, the Phules visited a Christian missionary school for girls in Ahmednagar where the supervisor was Ms. Cynthia Farrar. Savitri enrolled here in the teacher's training course under Ms. Farrar. A young Muslim woman, Fatima Shaikh, was her fellow-student.

After Savitri finished her training, she and Jyotiba started the first school for girls from the backward and dalit communities along with young widows and unmarried mothers in 1848. This was an act of great courage and it immediately enraged the Pune Brahmin community that was unswerving in its commitment to uphold the principles of Manusmriti. The Brahmins forced Jyotiba's father to turn both of them out of the house.

Jyotiba's old friend, Ghaffar Munshi came to their rescue and told them to meet Usman Shaikh who turned out to be the brother of Savitri's batchmate, Fatima Shaikh. Just as Savitri had been fortunate in having a husband like Jyotiba, Fatima had been fortunate in having a brother like Usman, a most unusual man for the times, who did everything to ensure her education and training as a teacher.

When Jyotiba met Usman and told him about their plight, Usman immediately invited him and Savitri to stay in their home. After this, Fatima became part of Savitri's mission to educate women and girls considered immoral and outcast and she suffered the same attacks and insults that had become part of Savitri's everyday experience.

Within a few years, Savitri and Fatima had started 18 schools in Pune. While Savitri became involved in other activities of a social nature, the responsibility of running the schools was taken on increasingly by Fatima. Due to the prevalent custom of child marriages, many young girls became widows.

Their lives were a living death. Some of them became pregnant, often because they faced sexual assaults in their marital homes and sometimes because they entered into relationships.

As single mothers they were often forced to commit suicide. In 1853, Jyotiba and Savitri opened the doors of their ashram, the 'Bal Hatya Pratibandhak Griha' for such ostracized women.

Even today, this would be an extremely courageous step to take. In those days, in the heartland of Brahmanical Manuvaa and Savitri constantly did what was unthinkable for others!

The women inmates of the ashram were taught some skills which helped them to earn their livelihood and their children were admitted to the schools run by Savitri and Fatima. One of the pregnant women who was taken into the ashram was Kashibai. Her son, Yashwant, was adopted by Jyotiba and Savitri and was educated by them. He became a medical doctor.

Some years after Jyotiba's death, it was unthinkable. But Jyotiba's death, there was a plague epidemic in Bombay and Pune in 1896. Savitri immersed herself in helping people and contracted the disease herself. She passed away on 10th March 1897. Fatima Shaikh continued to run the schools that the two friends had started together but there is not much that is known about her life.

The date of her death has not yet been ascertained. About her birth, there are some who believe that she was born on February 9. Savitribai left behind many diaries and poems and her letters to Jyotiba are also well-preserved.

She wrote about Fatima "When I published Kavya Phule in 1854, I insisted that she (Fatima) publishes a book of her poems too. She has immense knowledge of Urdu and had composed many poems. Sadly, she never published...." From this we learn that Fatima too wrote poems but, sadly, they have not been brought to light.

Savitri Bai often said that her efforts to start a school for girls belonging to the dalit and backward communities would not have succeeded had it not been for someone named Fatima Shaikh about whom she said "Fatima was my closest friend, my most dependable ally in our success in the education of girls..."

The lives of Savitri bai and Fatima Shaikh have inspired millions of women in our country. Their strong bonds of friendship and exemplary courage have been a source of strength for many. The extraordinary relationship between a Hindu and a Muslim woman who even shared a home for some time, is a wonderful example of the unity that is so essential for the struggle for social justice to succeed.

This is precisely why Shri Mandal has had the temerity to state that Fatima Shaikh existed only as a figment of his own imagination. When this was challenged with facts and figures, he modified his claim and said that she may have existed but only as Savitri Bai's maid servant.

Accepting Fatima Shaikh as a Muslim woman social reformer whose own brother was committed to both reform and social justice would have removed the foundation of Mandal's thesis that Muslims as a community were not only incapable of social reform but actually placed impediments in the path to social justice for the Bahujans.

Fortunately, it is highly unlikely that Mandal's attempts are going to meet with any success.

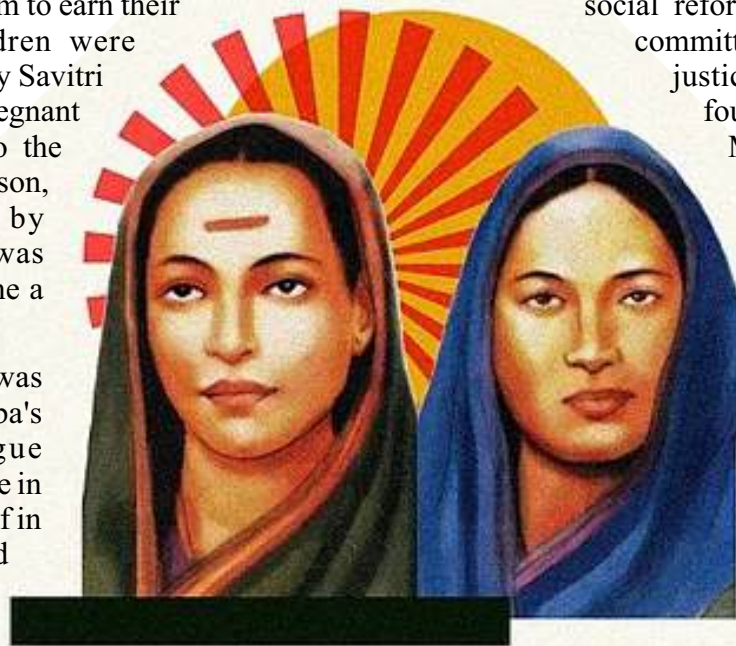
What is important, however, is to understand the lengths to which Hindutva supporters like him are willing to go to damage and divide the

struggle for social justice by negating not only the role but even the existence of Muslim reformers and thereby undermine and weaken the unity of the most oppressed and exploited that is essential for the success of the battle for social justice and equality.

It was their unbreakable unity that gave Savitri Bai and Fatima Shaikh the strength to confront the Manuvadi forces that insulted and humiliated at every step of their courageous journey.

The Hindutva forces that have gained much strength and success in recent years are, in many ways, the inheritors of Manuvadi beliefs and convictions. The same unity that gave strength to Savitri Bai and Fatima Shaikh is needed in even greater measure to carry forward their struggle today.

Subhashini Ali





'List RSS, Affiliates as Hate Groups': South Asian Communities in Canada Write To Trudeau



Members of 25 South Asian communities in Canada have written an open letter to the country's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, urging the government to list the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates in Canada as hate groups/far right extremist entities.

The development comes amid an unprecedented escalation of tensions between India and Canada over Ottawa's allegations that Indian government agents were involved in killing pro-Khalistan leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada in 2023.

"The recent RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) announcement has revealed the "involvement of agents of the Government of India in serious criminal activity in Canada" and that the RCMP and other law enforcement agencies in Canada have investigated and charged a "significant number of individuals for their direct involvement in homicides, extortions and other criminal acts of violence."

The assassination of a Canadian Sikh leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar last year and its alleged hand by India's Hindu nationalist government appears to be the tip of the iceberg," says the statement from the members of the South Asian communities.

"The Guardian reports that the "allegations of an India campaign of transnational violence and harassment have emerged not only in Canada but in the US, UK and Pakistan, where prominent Sikh activists say they have received threats to their lives," the statement adds.

The statement cited a 2023 report published by the National Council of Canadian Muslims that has linked anti-Sikh violence in Canada to the RSS and the Sangh Parivar. "The presence of Sangh Parivar and RSS-related groups sadly but predictably overlaps with various incidents of Hindu supremacist rhetoric and actions in Canada," states the 2023 report.

'Minority populations made second class citizens'

The statement adds that the BJP is the political arm of RSS – which is a paramilitary organisation which promotes "Hindutva" or Hindu nationalism, inspired by European Fascism.

"Founders of RSS explicitly espoused Fascist ideology In the ten years of BJP rule in India we have seen blatant examples of this, as the government takes India toward

The assassination of a Canadian Sikh leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar last year and its alleged hand by India's Hindu nationalist government appears to be the tip of the iceberg," says the statement from the members of the South Asian communities.

their goal of making the country a Hindu ethno-nationalist state in which the 200 million Muslim population and other minority populations such as Sikh, Dalit, Adivasi (indigenous peoples) and Christians are made second class citizens," adds the statement.

The signatories to the statement are – Academics for Palestine – Concordia, Association des Femmes Musulmanes de Québec, Canadian Council of Indian Muslims (CCIM) Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Montreal Canadian Forum for Human Rights and Democracy in India, Canadians Against Oppression and Persecution (CAOP), Canadians for Indian Democracy (CID), Canadians for Peace and Justice in Kashmir (CPJK), Centre sur l'Asie du sud (CERAS), Critical Diasporic South Asian Feminisms,

Under this Hindu nationalist government, atrocities against minorities in India have been carried out with impunity and often with complicity.

External Affairs – Students' Society of McGill University, Femmes de diverses origines/Women of Diverse Origins, Hindus for Human Rights, International Council of Indian Muslims (ICIM), Just Peace Advocates/Mouvement Pour Une Paix Juste, Justice For All Canada, Palestinian and Jewish Unity (PAJU), Quebec Public Interest Research Group – Concordia (QPIRG), Rang Collective: Arts for Solidarity, Solidarity Across Borders, South Asian Dalit Adivasi Network-Canada (SADAN), South Asian Diaspora Action Collective (SADAC), South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) Tadamon! and Teesri Duniya Theatre.

'Investigate influence of RSS and its affiliates'

“Under this Hindu nationalist government, atrocities against minorities in India have been carried out with impunity and often with complicity.

The evidence in recent reports confirm a network of these extremist groups are targeting Sikhs and other diasporic Indian minority communities and activists in Canada and the US.

The extensive network of Hindu nationalists and their affiliates in Canada and worldwide is well documented and now we know this network in Canada is involved in a disturbing pattern of coercion organized crime and deadly violence,” adds the statement.

The statement urges the Canadian government to extend protection to South Asians and other minority communities, investigate the human rights violations and influence of the RSS and its affiliates and list the RSS and its affiliates in Canada as hate groups/far right extremist groups.

“HSS-Canada, VHP-Canada, Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA) - Canada and Canadian Organization for Hindu Heritage Education (COHHE), SEWA International.

These groups often deflect criticism by invoking “hinduphobia”, which has been profusely debunked,” says the statement.

Source: The Wire

Geopolitical “Tug-of-War”

The Complex Realities of Protecting Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh

Tanim Jasim

A Legacy of Pluralism and Modern Challenges

Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has worked to enshrine the principles of secularism and equality in its constitution. Its founding ideals, forged through the Liberation War, emphasized the creation of a society where people of all religions, ethnicities and backgrounds would have the freedom to live and prosper. Today, this vision continues to define the nation and Bangladesh's Hindu population, around 8% of the population, remains a vibrant component of the country's cultural fabric.

Bangladesh has achieved a degree of communal harmony that distinguishes it from several neighboring states in South Asia. While no nation can claim a perfect record, Bangladesh's approach to pluralism has resulted in relatively fewer incidents of large-scale communal violence when compared to some regional counterparts. In contrast, India, with its rising Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has seen heightened communal tensions, especially targeting Muslims. Myanmar, another neighbor, saw a devastating campaign against the Muslim Rohingya, while Pakistan continues to grapple with religious extremism that has claimed thousands of lives.

Bangladesh's relative success in maintaining interfaith harmony should not be overlooked, nor should its challenges be inflated. While incidents of violence have occurred, they are often met with swift condemnation from all levels of society, including Islamic political leaders and civil society. This quick response showcases the broader social commitment to maintaining inter-communal peace, a commitment that is often missing from narratives presented by external parties.

India's Strategic Interests and the Politics of Humanitarianism

In recent years, Indian officials and media have amplified claims of rising violence against Hindus in Bangladesh, framing the nation as unsafe for its religious minorities. This portrayal came into sharp focus after Bangladesh's recent political upheaval in August, with Indian outlets promoting a narrative of rampant Hindu persecution. Yet, Bangladeshi Hindus themselves have called out these portrayals

as exaggerated, recognizing the harm these sensationalized narratives can bring to interfaith relations within Bangladesh.

The amplification of minority issues by Indian political leaders and media, however, raises pertinent questions about the motivations behind these assertions. India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 explicitly offers citizenship to persecuted minorities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. On the surface, this policy is presented as a humanitarian effort to protect vulnerable populations. However, it also reflects an official position that Hindus face systemic discrimination in Bangladesh—an assertion that Bangladeshi officials have criticized as an inaccurate generalization of complex communal dynamics.

By positioning itself as the global protector of Hindus, India not only seeks to influence internal perceptions within Bangladesh but also to assert a geopolitical influence. India's concern for Bangladeshi Hindus, framed in humanitarian terms, grants it a lever to shape Bangladesh's political landscape, particularly as political changes threaten to disrupt India's once-stable foothold in the region. For a sovereign nation like Bangladesh, this type of interference risks destabilizing intercommunal trust and complicates the country's efforts to foster an inclusive national identity.



Weaponizing Religious Identity: Risks for Bangladesh's Stability

The strategic framing of Bangladeshi Hindus as victims of religious persecution has real-world implications for Bangladesh's national cohesion. If left unchecked, this narrative risks alienating the Hindu minority from mainstream Bangladeshi society,

positioning them as “protected” by an external power rather than as equal citizens of Bangladesh. This division would fundamentally challenge Bangladesh's aspirations of religious pluralism and peaceful coexistence, goals that have long been embedded in its national ethos.

Moreover, the external pressure from India places additional strain on Bangladesh's internal political landscape. While both nations benefit from economic and security partnerships, these ties are increasingly overshadowed by India's heightened engagement on Bangladeshi domestic issues. This interference creates a complex environment where, even as Bangladesh's interim government seeks to reinforce protection for its Hindu citizens, it must also resist the perception that it is acting under foreign influence. The risk of alienating domestic constituencies grows, as does the perception of Hindus as a community separate from the national whole.

Fostering True Communal Harmony: Bangladesh's Path Forward

To reinforce its commitment to all citizens and resist external manipulation, Bangladesh must focus on strengthening its internal frameworks for minority protection and communal harmony. Initiatives to protect religious sites, prosecute perpetrators of communal violence and transparently address grievances are vital to maintaining intercommunal trust and stability. These measures are crucial not only to reassure minorities but also to bolster Bangladesh's image as a society capable of managing its affairs without undue interference.

Equally important is the role of civil society and media in Bangladesh in countering divisive narratives. Religious leaders, community organizers and activists have a unique role to play in cultivating an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, highlighting the

moments of solidarity that define Bangladesh's social fabric. By elevating examples of interfaith cooperation, such as Muslim citizens protecting Hindu temples or organizing joint celebrations, Bangladeshi media can showcase a narrative of unity that challenges foreign depictions of a divided society.

Bangladeshi Hindus, too, must recognize the broader forces at play. With a history that predates Bangladesh itself, the Hindu community is an essential part of the nation's identity. By resisting divisive influences and working alongside other Bangladeshi citizens, Hindus can reinforce their role as intrinsic members of society, challenging narratives that seek to portray them as separate or under siege.

Bangladesh's resilience as a democratic nation and its ability to manage religious diversity without external interference is key to its sovereignty. The weaponization of minority issues by powerful neighbors under the guise of humanitarianism complicates this pursuit, threatening to destabilize the country's internal harmony and diminish its agency. While calls for the protection of Hindu minorities resonate globally, it is Bangladesh's responsibility to address these concerns in a manner consistent with its own values and democratic principles.

Bangladesh's success in managing its diverse society should serve as an example in the region, where religious intolerance and division have too often led to conflict and suffering. By upholding the principles of secularism, justice and equality, Bangladesh can reinforce its standing as a tolerant, sovereign state. Embracing this mission will require vigilance against foreign narratives that undermine its unity, as well as a collective commitment among all Bangladeshi citizens to strengthen the country's pluralistic identity.

Source: Pressenza



77% of Manual Scavengers are Dalit, says report despite Union govt's denial

Even as the Union government claims that manual scavenging is not a caste-based occupation, it has been reported that close to 92% of the Sewer and Septic Tank Workers (SSWs) profiled by the Social Justice Ministry belong to the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) or Other Backward Class (OBC) communities. The Ministry has been profiling SSWs as part of its National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) programme, formulated “to stop SSW deaths and to promote mechanisation of cleaning operations with a vision to reduce hazardous cleaning and ensure the safety of sanitation workers.” An exclusive report published by The Hindu says that an analysis of this yet-to-be-published profiling data points towards a high consolidation of Dalit workers in the profession.

One of the components of NAMASTE is the profiling of sewer entry professionals/septic tank workers. In its report published on September 29, The Hindu stated that of the 38,000 workers profiled so far, 68.9% belong to the SC community, 14.7% to the OBC community, 8.3% to the ST community. 8% are from the general category. Put together, this indicates that 77.2% of the workers are from Dalit communities.

On this, highlighting that the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA)— a movement working towards the eradication of manual scavenging in the

country—recorded 339 deaths of manual scavengers in 2022-23.

Bezwada Wilson, the national convener of the SKA asks how the government can make such a claim. “Our groundwork clearly shows that the majority of manual scavenging workers are Dalits and it is a caste-based occupation. How can the government say it is not?” he told TNM.

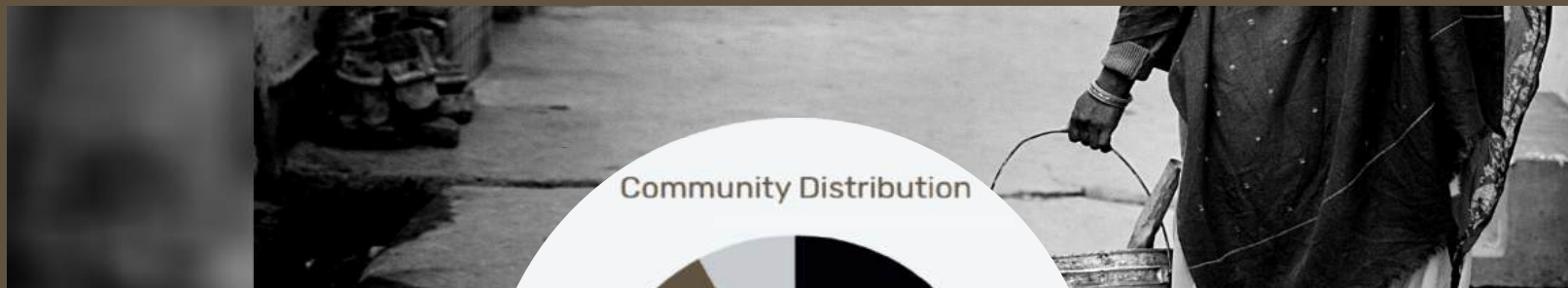
The government has not deviated from its stand this year as well. In his two responses about manual scavenging in the Parliament, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Ramdas Athawale said on July 24, 2024, that there was no report of the existence of manual scavenging in India.

However, there are discrepancies between the government's stands on the issue that were tabled in Parliament.

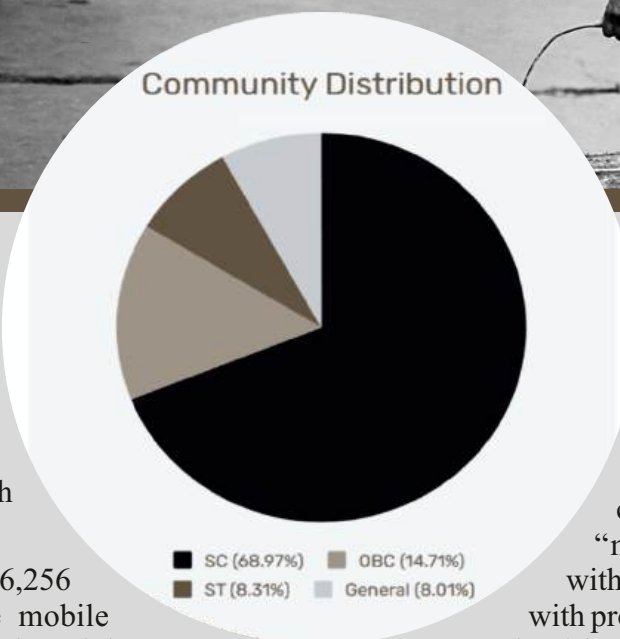
Inconsistent stands on the issue

In its first reply to Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale, the government said that there is “no report of the practice of manual scavenging in the country in the last five years.” In the second reply to Rajya Sabha MP Anil Kumar Yadav Mandadi, the ministry says there is “no report of the practice of manual scavenging in any districts.”





Community Distribution



He also added that the Social Justice Ministry had launched a mobile app called "Swachhata Abhiyaan" in December 2020 to capture existing data on insanitary latrines and manual scavengers associated with them.

While stating that a total of 6,256 cases were uploaded on the mobile application from 114 districts, the Ministry claimed that all of them were verified and none were "found to be credible."

However, a couple of weeks later, on August 6, 2024, in its reply to Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor, the Ministry stated that as of July 31, 2024, only 732 out of 766 districts in India have reported themselves as manual scavenging-free.

On the same day, in its reply to Lok Sabha MP Hibi Eden, the Ministry claimed that the reports sent by States/UTs do not mention the caste details of workers in the sanitation and cleaning sectors.

On August 7, in its reply to Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, the Ministry stated that manual scavengers are an occupation-based identification rather than a caste-based identification.

Manual scavenging vs hazardous cleaning

The Union government has maintained that 377 deaths have occurred in the last five years (2019-2023) due to hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.

It is to be noted that though cleaning sewers and septic tanks technically falls under the category of manual scavenging, the narrow definition of the practice in The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 prevents it from being

officially identified as such.

When MP Shashi Tharoor asked to differentiate between manual scavenging and hazardous cleaning, the Ministry pointed to its definition in the Act. Section 2(d) of the Act defines 'hazardous cleaning' of a sewer or septic tank as "manual cleaning" by a worker without the employer providing them with protective gear, other cleaning devices and without following safety precautions.

Section 2(g) of the Act defines "manual scavenger" as a person who manually cleans, carries, disposes of or handles human excreta in any manner in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or a pit into which the human excreta from the insanitary latrines is disposed of or on a railway track or other such spaces or premises. This does not include a sewer or a septic tank.

The Supreme Court, in a 2023 judgement, considered this point and said that hazardous cleaning is permitted if protective gear and cleaning devices are provided.

"Even though both a hazardous cleaner and a manual scavenger deal with human excreta, the statute only penalises hazardous cleaning and does not provide subsequent steps for rehabilitation of hazardous cleaners," the court observed. While

the Ministry for Social Justice claimed that there is no manual scavenging in India currently, two surveys conducted in 2013 and 2018 identified 58,098 'erstwhile manual scavengers'.

According to the data on the southern states, Karnataka had the highest number of erstwhile scavengers - 2,927; followed by Andhra Pradesh - 1,793; Kerala - 518 and Tamil Nadu - 398.



Source: News Minute



The Future Course of Dalit Movement

The organised Dalit movement in Nepal began in 2003 BS, marking the start of a long struggle for the rights and recognition of the Dalit community.

Despite this, the Dalit population had to wait nearly 70 years to have their basic rights constitutionally guaranteed.

Even now, nearly nine years after the promulgation of Nepal's current constitution, the promises made for Dalit rights remain largely unfulfilled. Articles 24, 40 and 42 of the Constitution of Nepal are specifically dedicated to the rights of Dalits.

The Constitution, beginning with its preamble, commits to ending discrimination based on class, caste, region, language, religion, gender and other social markers, including untouchability, while striving to build an egalitarian society grounded in proportional inclusion and social justice. However, the reality is far from this ideal.

The Dalit community still faces meagre representation in key areas of governance—such as the executive (government), judiciary (courts) and legislature (parliament). Currently, the government has no representation of Dalits and only 16 out of the 275 members of the House of Representatives belong to the Dalit community, despite Dalits making up around 14 per cent of Nepal's population. Furthermore, in the nine years since the constitution was adopted, no law has been passed to enforce Dalit-specific rights.

On January 31, 2022, the Supreme Court issued a

directive order to ensure the effective implementation of Articles 24 and 40, yet the constitutional provisions regarding Dalit rights remain largely unimplemented.

Proportional inclusion

Article 24, which guarantees the right against untouchability and discrimination, stipulates that no person shall be subjected to untouchability or discrimination in public or private spaces based on caste, ethnicity, profession or other factors.

Any act of untouchability is considered a severe social offense and is punishable by law, with victims entitled to compensation.

The Dalit community still faces meagre representation in key areas of governance—such as the executive (government), judiciary (courts) and legislature (parliament).

Article 40 ensures Dalits the right to participate in state affairs based on proportional inclusion. It mandates special provisions for their empowerment, representation and participation in public services, as well as in education, health and social security.

Article 42 further reinforces this by guaranteeing Dalits the right to participate in state bodies based on proportional inclusion.

However, despite these constitutional guarantees, their practical implementation is still pending.

The call for constitutional amendment is gaining momentum in the political sphere and there are concerns that such amendments might lead to the erosion of the rights granted to Dalits.

Many non-Dalit groups are reportedly unhappy with the constitutional provisions that ensure Dalits' rights. Against this backdrop, the Dalit movement must focus on both strengthening the rights enshrined in the Constitution and ensuring their effective implementation.

The role of Dalit leaders within political parties and the legislature will be crucial in this regard. One of the key shortcomings in Nepal's electoral system is the failure to guarantee the participation of marginalised castes, including Dalits, in direct elections. This has led to the dominance of particular castes or communities in the political process.

Thus, the Dalit movement must now focus on ensuring Dalit participation in direct elections, much like women's mandatory representation.

Dalits should demand mandatory representation in the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) elections, with political parties required to guarantee Dalit candidates proportionate to their population share. Moreover, special electoral constituencies should be created where only Dalit candidates can stand for election.

Additionally, the Dalit movement should push for the creation of a "Dalit Integrated Law" that consolidates the rights and legal provisions related to Dalits under Articles 24, 40 and other relevant sections of the Constitution.

At present, there is no dedicated ministry or structure to oversee the holistic development of the Dalit community. To address this gap, there

should be a law to establish a Dalit Development Council or Authority, tasked with promoting the community's development at all levels of government—federal, provincial and local—aligned with Nepal's federal structure.

Executive roles

Since untouchability and caste-based discrimination still persist in Nepali society, it is imperative for the state's executive bodies to take proactive measures to eradicate these practices.

A Caste Discrimination and Untouchability Elimination Committee should be formed at all three levels of government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and local government heads, with Dalit leadership incorporated into executive roles.

The Dalit community remains significantly behind in terms of human development indicators, facing systemic exclusion in education, healthcare, employment and social security. As such, there must be a policy provision to allocate a proportional budget based on the Dalit population at all levels of government.

Dalit leaders and activists must raise this demand vigorously in parliament, on the streets and within political parties. In line with constitutional mandates, the National Dalit Commission's branches should be established in all provinces without delay.

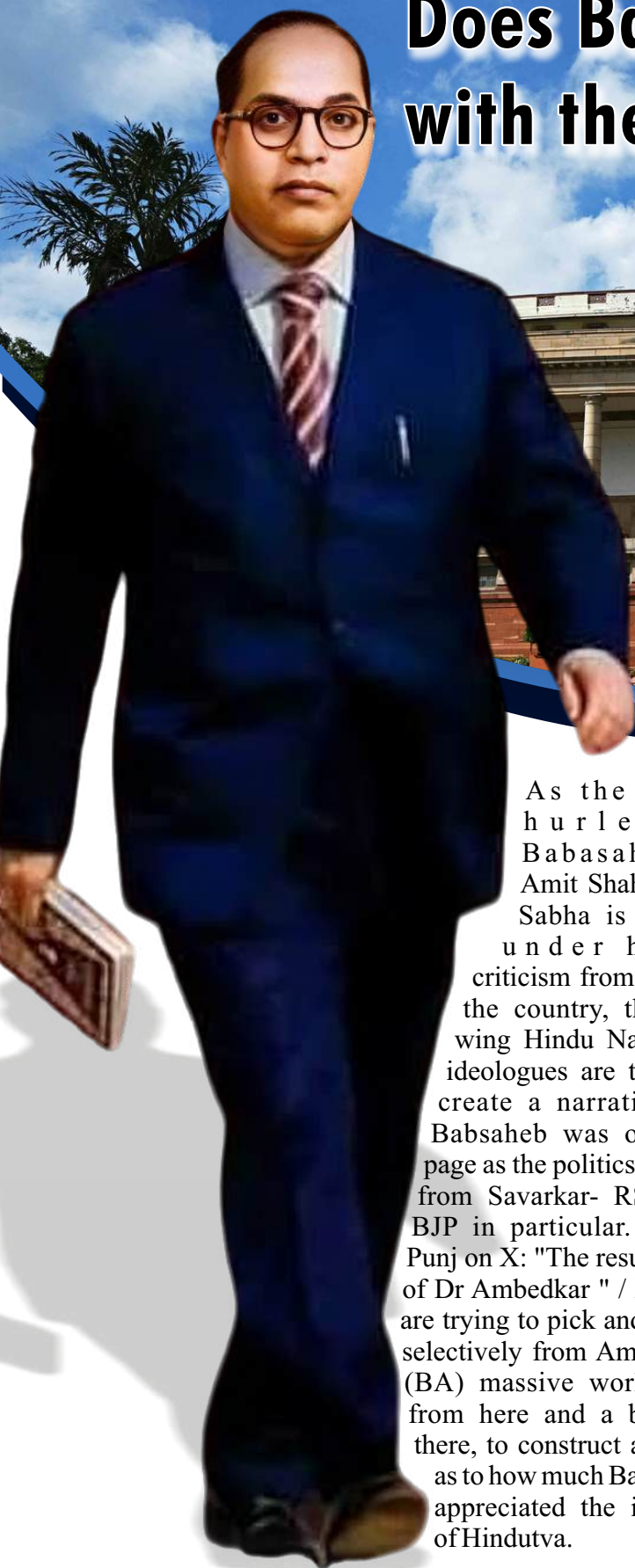
In conclusion, the Dalit movement should focus on two main fronts: ensuring the implementation of existing constitutional rights while simultaneously striving for further advancements in social, political and economic inclusion.

By building on the gains already made, the Dalit community can work towards greater equality and justice in the future.

Source: Rising Nepal Daily



Does Babasaheb's Ideology match with the Hindu Nationalist Politics?



As the insult hurled on Babasaheb by Amit Shah in Lok Sabha is coming under heavy criticism from all over the country, the right wing Hindu Nationalist ideologues are trying to create a narrative that Babasaheb was on same page as the politics of those from Savarkar- RSS- and BJP in particular. (Balbir Punj on X: "The resurrection of Dr Ambedkar " / X) They are trying to pick and choose selectively from Ambedkar's (BA) massive work, a bit from here and a bit from there, to construct a picture as to how much Babasaheb appreciated the ideology of Hindutva.

They go on to quote that Swami Shradhanand was the "the greatest and most sincere champion of the Untouchables" by BA.

They ignore the fact that that same Swami was involved in Shuddhi, 'Conversion of Muslims to Hinduism'. This is what annoyed the Muslim clerics. To this Shuddhi, Ambedkar responded, "If the Hindu society desires to survive, it must think not of adding to its numbers but increasing its solidarity and that means the abolition of caste. The abolition of castes is the real sangathan of the Hindus and when sangathan is achieved by abolishing castes, shuddhi will be unnecessary."

It was parallel and opposite to Tanzim by Tablighi Jamaat which was trying to convert Hindus into Islam. Though Shradhanand later became part of Indian National Congress, he was also part of Hindu Sangathan, a part of revitalized Hindu Mahasabha committed to Hindu Nation.

New constructs are being floated that Ambedkar and Savarkar are two sides of the same coin. True that Savarkar started the Patit Pawan temple which allows entry of dalits into temples.

As per Babasaheb this will create a separate temple where only dalits will visit. "An editorial in the April 12, 1929 issue of "Bahishkrit Bharat" states that Ambedkar had opposed the construction of the Patit Pawan temple from the very beginning. He believed that these temples would later be called temples for the untouchables." However Ambedkar did appreciate Savarkar's efforts. Though he felt they were irrelevant.

These are some points which are raised by Hindutva ideologues. They go hyper while describing Ambedkar's relation with Congress. Some of them argue that after the death of Gandhi and Patel, Nehru became authoritarian and ignored the opposition.

As Amit Shah said Ambedkar resigned from the Nehru Cabinet for his differences with Nehru on the issue of Article 370, Foreign policy and on the condition of SC/STs. The real crux is that the major point of Ambedkar resigning from Cabinet was his disappointment due to the shabby treatment given to Hindu Code Bill. A huge opposition and meetings were organized by RSS. Their volunteers were coming and demonstrating in front of Parliament. The peak of this was the massive protest in Ramlila Maidan on 11 December 1949, in which effigies of Ambedkar and Nehru were burnt.

Opposing the Hindu Code bill The Organiser, 7 December 1949, "We oppose the Hindu Code Bill. We oppose it because it is a derogatory measure based on alien and immoral

principles. It is not a Hindu Code Bill. It is anything but Hindu." The result of this aggressive campaign by RSS, on the Hindu code Bill was that it had to be delayed and diluted. This was the painful moments for Babasaheb, due to which he resigned,

The question of Manusmriti, Chaturvarnya, was the crucial part of differences between Ambedkar on one hand and Savarkar to BJP on the other. While in 1927, 25th December Babasaheb burnt the Manusmriti, the second Sarsanghchalak of RSS, M.S. Golwalkar went on to write eulogies for Manusmriti. Savarkar details his support to Chaturvarnya and praises Manusmriti "“Manusmriti is that scripture which is most worshipable after Vedas for our Hindu Nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice.

This book for centuries has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today the rules which are followed by crores of Hindus in their lives and practice are based on Manusmriti. Today Manusmriti is Hindu Law. That is fundamental." And "The worst [thing] about the new Constitution of Bharat is that there is nothing Bharatiya about it... [T]here is no trace of ancient Bharatiya constitutional laws, institutions, nomenclature and phraseology in it".

The central point of difference of Ambedkar from the Hindutva ideology is totally put under the carpet. In 1935 Ambedkar spoke in a meeting in Yeola near Nasik, On October 13, 1935, B.R. Ambedkar dropped a 'bombshell' when he said, "I will not die as a person who calls himself a Hindu! As per him this religion has no place for liberty, compassion and equality.

In the revised edition of his book 'Thoughts on Pakistan' he opposed the formation of Islamic Pakistan as that may pave the way for Hindu Raj or Rashtra and that will be a big calamity for its people.

As he declared this, there were many pressures on him to embrace Sikhism or Islam. Dr. Moonje from Hindu Mahasabha struck a pact with Ambedkar that if he avoids conversion to Islam, Hindu Mahasabha will not stand to oppose his move.

Babasaheb's own deeper studies led him to choose Buddhism.

Today BJP is trying to project that they have honored Babasaheb by erecting his

statues, raising the International Museum in his memory and other symbolic things. These are identity related issues while the crux of Babasaheb's values remains undermined. When the Mandal Commission was implemented BJP resorted to Kamandal politics. As Advani was arrested during his Rath Yatra (as a part of Kamandal politics), BJP which was part of the parties supporting V P Singh's Government withdrew its support and V.P. Singh's Government fell.

Congress along with Hindu Mahasabha opposed Ambedkar in Lok Sabha elections. Still it was Congress again which ensured that he was made a member of Rajya Sabha.

He was made a member of the Interim Government and also Chairman of the drafting committee of Indian Constitution. BJP's anxiety to prove that Ambedkar was part of Hindutva politics is a pure concoction to derive legitimacy from the memory of a person who totally stood against their very ideology of Hindu Nation.

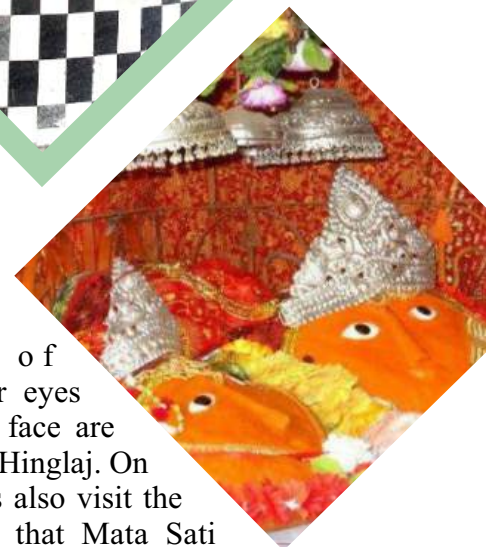
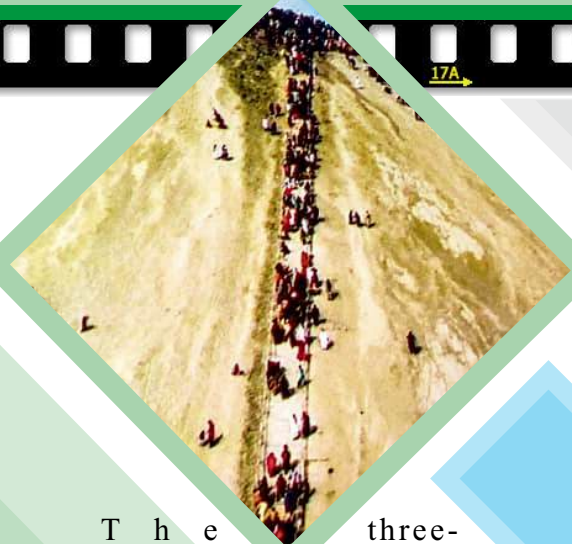
What an irony, those who stood/stand for Hindu nation are trying to project Ambedkar, who was opposed to Hindu Rashtra and wanted to have democratic, secular republic, as a part of their ideological parivar!

Ram Puniyani

The central point of difference of Ambedkar from the Hindutva ideology is totally put under the carpet.

Film highlights secure journey of Hindus to Balochistan temple

Shazia Hassan



The three-day festival at Hinglaj Mata in Balochistan, where Hindu devotees from not just Pakistan but all over the world visit to fulfil their religious obligations, is the subject of the well-researched 40-minute documentary Goddess of Hinglaj-51 Shakti Peeth, produced by Rava Documentary Films at Rava Studios and which was screened at the Arena Cinema.

The Hinglaj Sabeeta Temple in Pakistan is stated to be “3.2 million years old” and honours the Hindu Goddess Sati, who has a tragic story. In fact, it is said that this site of Hindu pilgrimage embodies interfaith harmony, as the place has been protected by the Baloch Muslim community for centuries.

Hindu devotees, including Hindu scholars, bhajan singers, politicians, etc, who have also visited here say that they are made to feel “1,000 per cent safe and secure” here by the Muslims who take care of maintaining the historic temple. They thanked the government with a heartfelt “Pakistan Zindabad!”

The film opens to scenes of devotees dancing before their gods and performing puja. You get to know some of the legends about the Hindu deities including the story of Sati who loved Shiva, her husband, who had fallen out of favour with her powerful father. He was insulted which Sati could not tolerate and jumped into raging flames. Her lifeless body was pulled out of the fire by her angry and grieving husband who carried her around everywhere. The universe was disturbed. The other gods could not allow it. They broke her remains into 51 pieces.

Where each piece, known to carry a particular power, fell

is a site of pilgrimage. Her eyes and upper part of face are said to have landed at Hinglaj. On way to Hinglaj, devotees also visit the mud volcano. It is said that Mata Sati stopped there before taking her life. About the Hinglaj Sabeeta Temple, Maharaj Gopal Das of the Hinglaj Temple points out in the film that for Hindus the pilgrimage is a sacred journey. It draws hundreds of thousands of devotees every year, who reach there by bus, car and even foot.

Maharaj Gopal Das says that Mata Sati carries great significance for married Hindu women. “Even the sindoor that a married Hindu woman decorates her hair parting with is attributed to Mata Sati.” He also said that Balochistan was once known as ‘Hingol Dosh’.

Rava Documentary Films' producer Tariq Rafique said that they ventured into documentaries to highlight issues that were not too well-known otherwise.

“The reason for coming up with this particular documentary on this subject was to tell the world how the Hindu community freely carry their religious obligations in Pakistan,” he said. He added that their other documentaries, include Dancing Girl about Mohenjo-Daro, Iqbal Masih about the young social activist who blew the whistle on bonded labour, etc. are all available on their YouTube channel.

Source: Dawn News



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