

— QUARTERLY —

# AMBEDKAR VISION

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**A report on the  
human rights  
situation in India  
issued by the  
United Nations  
High Commissioner  
for Human Rights  
(UNHCR)**




*Ambedkar Society for South Asia*

# QUARTERLY AMBEDKAR VISION

**Editor:**  
Shaheen Hassan

**Assistant Editor:**  
Ashok Kumar



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.

## **Editorial Board:**



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## **Contact:**

Editor,  
Tel: +92 42 37115810

# Contents

Editorial	i	
Dalits and their dark fate of under-privileged professions in India	1	
A report on the human rights situation in India issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR)	4	
Around 60,000 Dalits held in bonded labour	6	
Are Dalits the Blacks of India, and Brahmins the Whites?	7	
Caste culture's rooted in amongst Bangladeshi Catholics too	8	
Two Professors Sue California State University Claiming its Policy on 'Caste' Targets Hindus	11	
Fighting a Pandemic of Misinformation	12	
Called untouchable in 2022': Why hundreds of Dalits in Karnataka embraced Buddhism	15	
Pakistan's Efforts for Protection of Minorities' Rights, Facts on Forced Conversions and Blasphemy Convictions	17	
India's first Dalit woman Ashwini KP becomes special envoy to UN	19	
India Enters 'Amrit Kaal' with Growing Atrocities Against Dalits	21	



*Ambedkar Society for South Asia*

2-Court Street, Lower Mall, Lahore. Tel: +92 42 37115810 Email: [assa.org@yahoo.com](mailto:assa.org@yahoo.com)



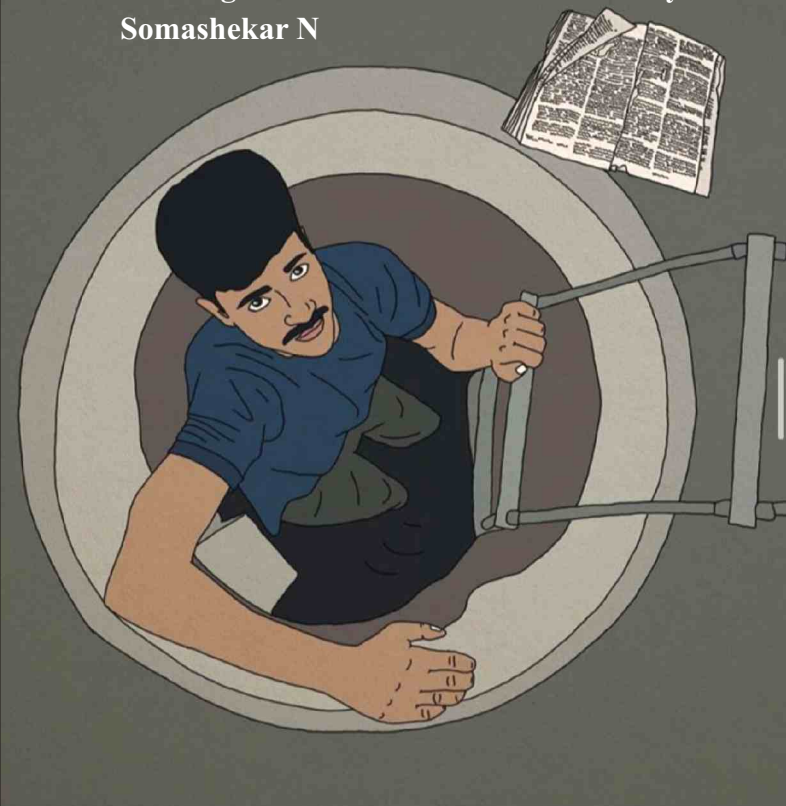
## from the Editor

Welcome to the new edition of Ambedkar Vision. Today in Indian states even after 75 years of Independence Dalit atrocities and their human rights violation yet to come to an end. Dalits are still facing different kind of discrimination in rural and urban areas. Caste based discrimination and violence goes against the basic principles of universal human dignity and equality as it differentiates between inferior and superior categories of individuals which is unacceptable. Lower castes are limited to certain occupations which are menial including manual scavenging sweeping and disposal of dead animals. The shadow of caste and its stigma follows an individual from birth till death affecting all aspects of life from education housing work access to justice and political participation International observer are raising concern about rapid rise in human rights violations. Human rights groups are questioning about deteriorating situation of fundamental right of individuals and minority groups in Indian polity. Government has displayed a poor record in protecting its citizens in recent years from persecution of religious minorities to the clampdown on independent media and to increasing political violence. Several rights groups have consistently highlighted the role of government in jeopardizing civil liberties and religious freedom. Those who spoke against abuses and accesses of institutions were also targeted According to Human Rights Watch report 2021 authorities have politically motivated cases against human rights defenders activists and opposition leaders who opposed governments narrative. The report also states that BJP led government has harassed arrested and prosecuted Rights defender activists Journalists Students academics and others who criticized government policies. By imposing sedition and terrorism laws the authorities have tried to deter critics. Even Human rights international organizations have been victims of BJP government over freedom to report. Hate speech laws were used to stop critical voices of journalists. Reporters without Borders an international organization described India dangerous country for journalists. Freedom House downgraded India's ranking from "free" to "partly free" Caste culture is rooted in South Asian countries. All which is required is to remove inequality from the society.



# Dalits and their dark fate of under-privileged professions in India

The origin of Dalits in the Indian caste system  
Somashekar N



The concept of categorizing humans based on their professions arose from the Early Vedic Period (1500 - 600 BC), where there were three major classifications:-

Teaching profession:- Brahmins.

Administration:- Kshatriyas.

Agriculture and Business:- Vaishyas.

But there was no categorization like upper caste and lower caste.

It is very essential to note that:-

There was no rigidity in the change of profession;

Inter-caste marriages or rather marriages between individuals of two different professions existed.

And social mingling was regardless of professional status.

But things changed from the Later Vedic Period (1000 -

600 BC). Due to improvements in the business sector, the Vaishyas moved towards trade and commerce.

To fill the gap in the Agriculture sector, a new category called Shudras emerged, this added the fourth category to the above list:-

Teaching profession:- Brahmins.

Administration:- Kshatriyas.

Business:- Vaishyas.

Agriculture:- Shudras.

And from here the aspects of profession, marriages and social interactions got rigid, there was no provision for modification, inter-relationship and common mingling. So this brought in hereditary nature in society.

Gradually, with the diversification of respective professions, the gap between the respective professions grew up giving rise to the Class system of society based on social status.

The Brahmins took up advisory roles, Kshatriyas took up security and leadership, Vaishyas entered different businesses and similarly, the Shudras also engaged in cattle rearing, laundry and other professions involving manual labor.

Being in the labor class, the Shudras were denied access to education, thereby, the social image of the Shudras depicted them as subservient to the other Classes, which brought in the concept of the Caste system.

In this Caste system, the role of respective castes in the society was presumed gradually reserving the Shudras to the Lower Caste.

Based on the place of residence, type of ritual practice and other social attributes, in modern society, they are categorized as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Being in the lowered section and widely diversified, they were collectively termed Dalits in modern etymology and due to denial of education; they are forced to be restricted for menial drudgery.

Thus, every Dalit is a forced manual scavenger, but not

every manual scavenger is a Dalit!

### Dalits tarnished in present society

The economic status of the lower caste has moderately improved due to specific constitutional provisions and social activities that promoted the Dalit parents to educate their children to bring them out of poverty.

Although they account for 25% of the Indian population (200 million in number) nearly 66% of them are Below Poverty line even today.

They are forced to take up professions like manual scavengers, rag pickers, slipper guards, drainage cleaners, safai karmacharies and other menial drudgery.

All these professions are informal and contracted by middlemen hence festering the exploitation further. The woes of the exploited Dalit victims in all this drudgery remain the same, they are not given proper remuneration and proper rigs & tools for these unhygienic works.

They can manage the brunt of this pain in every other drudgery, but the manual scavenging isn't very merciful to their lives.

### Manual scavenging: a dark curse on Dalits

Manual scavenging is a practice by which Dalits remove excreta from public and private dry pit latrines and carry them to dumping grounds and disposal sites. Though long outlawed, the practice of manual scavenging continues in most states and will continue as long as dry latrines are used.

Even at present 97% of Dalits are manual scavengers because the contractors prefer them!

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India.

A manual scavenger from Paliyad village, Ahmedabad district, Gujarat, expressed his cry in different seasons; In the rainy season, the water mixes with the feces that we carry in baskets on our heads, it drips onto our clothes and our face. When I return home, I find it difficult to eat food.... But in the summer there is often no water to wash your hands before eating. It is difficult to say which season is worse.

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

Manual scavengers are routinely exposed to both human and animal waste without the protection of masks, uniforms, gloves, shoes, appropriate buckets and mops. This has severe repercussions for their health;

**The majority of scavengers suffer from anemia,**



diarrhea, and vomiting, with 62% suffering respiratory diseases, 32% suffering skin diseases, 42% suffering jaundice and 23% suffering trachoma, leading to blindness. Many scavengers have also died of carbon monoxide poisoning while cleaning septic tanks and this number has increased in recent times.

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

**36% of them faced violence from their employers.**

**Over 50% of them face untouchability in their social circles.**

**A total of 996 Dalits laid down their lives due to manual scavenging since 1993 and 111 of them haven't received compensation yet!**

### Other Injustices towards Dalits in present society

**Bonded labor:-** There are a vast majority of bonded Dalit tribals who seek loans from employers or money lenders and get coxed by them at a high rate of interest.

**Child labor:-** Dalit children are vulnerable to exploitative labor mainly to support their families, especially the children of the migratory tribes, who are often expected to work alongside their parents in day-

labor jobs.

**Problems to access health care:-** Several manual scavengers facing suffocation are often poorly attended in government hospitals causing inhuman death. Apart from this, in Uttar Pradesh, anganwadis (community centers) are known to practice “untouchability” and as a result, pregnant women are forced to go without health care.

Doctors at the local hospital in PandalamThekkekara, Kerala, are seen to spend much more time treating upper-caste women than Dalit women.

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

**Crimes on Dalits:-** Media, NGO and government reports reveal that the police have systematically failed to protect Dalit homes and Dalit individuals from inhumane acts.

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

**Sexual abuse:-** Dalit women are also singled out for other indignities, like being paraded naked, even for petty disputes.

Human Rights Watch reported that on November 3, 2003, a Dalit woman in Kishanganj, Bihar was paraded half-naked by a group of people who wanted to teach a lesson to her family for not relinquishing their claim to a piece of land. Dalit women may be branded as witches and blamed for certain mishaps in the community. Dalit women are also punished for these mishaps, by having their teeth pulled out, by having chili pepper put in their eyes and by being beaten severely enough to result in death.

Further, they are severely exploited as Devadasis and under forced prostitution.

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

**Police atrocities:-** Dalits, including those arrested for minor offenses, are often held in custody for long periods, occasionally at distant and isolated locations to avoid publicity.

To cover up custodial deaths, police often claim that the person was killed trying to escape or that he or she died of natural causes. Dalit activists are often subjected to specious prosecutions, falsified charges and physical abuse and torture following arrest. Illegal police raids on Dalit villages under the pretext of looking for suspects in the aftermath of caste conflicts. Human Rights Watch has documented several such instances.

**Forced eviction:-** Encroachment of tribal dwelling areas has created turmoil for the Scheduled Tribes, this issue has been common in several infrastructure constructions including the Statue of Unity.

### **The hidden potential of Dalits**

Given the right opportunity and proper facilities, they can serve in several sectors to maintain the welfare of cities in a professional manner.

When the government is trying to bring every vocation under skill training even these jobs can be formalized as a certified profession. There are innovative technologies developed for cleaning septic tanks like:-

The Manhole cleaning robot of Kerala:-

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

HomoSEP robot, developed by IIT Madras:-

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

By providing advanced equipments the risk in the profession can be reduced, as seen in other countries.

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

### **The best example in Indian cities are:-**

**Bangalore:-** The garbage collection is well organized with waste segregation at the source and the collection is operated via garbage trucks. Even the collector has a proper uniform and hand gloves.

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

**Mumbai:-** The septic tank cleaning is done by a private company called “Blue star services” which again has adequate rigs for the employees.

Dalits and their dark professions in the 21st century India

The government of Punjab and Haryana can think about using them to clear stubbles in the farms once the harvesting is completed.

There are several instances of stubble burning despite of government incentivizing the stubble market, thus formal legislation can be made to empower the Dalits to harvest the stubbles for profit if the farmers fail to do. A caste-free society is achieved when everyone is treated impartially both from a social and political perspective. To achieve this, we need to stop linking social status and government privileges to different castes!

*Courtesy: Asiana Times*



# A report on the human rights situation in India issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR)



International observers are raising concerns about the rapid rise in human rights violations in India. In recent years, human rights groups have posed serious questions about the deteriorating situation of fundamental rights (of individuals and minority groups) in the Indian polity. From the persecution of religious minorities to the clampdown on independent media to increasing political violence, the government has displayed a poor record in protecting its citizens in recent years. In fact, several rights groups have consistently highlighted the role of government in jeopardizing civil liberties and religious freedoms.

A report on the human rights situation in India comprising of submissions by national human rights institutions has been issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR). As the report indicates, through arbitrary arrests and detentions, the government has curbed freedom of expression in an environment where state authorities have normalized excessive use of force. Moreover, the government has used repressive laws to attack religious minorities and silence critics - human rights defenders, activists, journalists, academics, students, lawyers and actors.

The latest ongoing Universal Periodical review under UN Human Rights Council has asked India to implement or revoke various discriminatory legislation specifically regarding minorities, women, children, lower classes of Indian society and internally displaced persons. In this regard Pakistan stressed on India on taking up recommendations of OHCHR reports on Kashmir to release Kashmiri political prisoners, human rights activists and journalists. Pakistan also recommended that India should respond to outstanding UN special rapporteurs visits and repeal national reconciliation commission and citizen amendment act and armed forces special powers act. Similarly countries like US, China, Russia, Turkey, UK and many others also highlighted flaws in Indian human rights record.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) government has targeted Muslim-majority regions in Jammu and Kashmir by abrogating the state's constitutional status in 2019. By revoking Article 370 of the Indian constitution, the government has stripped the state's autonomy over its constitution, thereby depriving the people of Jammu and Kashmir of formulating their own

laws. The Human Rights Watch, while mentioning such blatant violations of human rights in its 2021 Report, has described other draconian measures (like the Public Safety Act and Armed Forces Special Acts) that have facilitated human rights abuses in the region.

Such discriminatory legal practices are coupled with the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019: a track to provide citizenship to all persecuted religious minorities - except Muslims - who entered India before 2015. The UN Human Rights office has maintained that the move is “fundamentally discriminatory in nature”. In April 2021, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom's report requested that the US State Department name India as a “country of particular concern” because of “attacks” on religious minorities. The report argued that the Indian government had “promoted Hindu nationalist policies resulting in systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom”.

However, Muslims are not the only community subjected to severe human rights violations under the BJP rule. Incidents of caste-based discrimination against the Dalit and Adivasis have continued for years; women frequently face sexual abuse and incidents of violence against them in public places have surged. According to Amnesty International, 50,000 crimes against 'scheduled castes' were reported in 2020 alone. Dalits face systemic discrimination as being lower rung in Indian society, thanks to the system of social stratification - caste system - that divides Hindus into rigid hierarchies based on their work and religion.

The government has also targeted those who have spoken against these abuses and against the excesses of the state institutions. Authorities have, as Human Rights Watch's World Report 2021 illustrates, manufactured politically motivated cases against activists, human rights defenders, students and opposition leaders who have dissented against the government's narrative. The report states that the BJP-led government has “increasingly harassed, arrested and prosecuted rights defenders, activists, journalists, students, academics and others critical of the government or its policies”. The authorities have consistently tried to deter critics by imposing sedition and terrorism laws. Even international human rights organizations have been the victims of



the government's authoritarian endeavors against freedom to report: Amnesty International has been forced to suspend its operations in India after the authorities froze its accounts on the pretext of an alleged violation of foreign funding laws.

To curb critical voices in the national media, the state uses defamation, sedition and hate speech laws against journalists. Following the intense crackdown on the expressions of free speech and dissent, Freedom House downgraded India's ranking from “free” to “partly free”. Moreover, Reporters Without Borders, an international organization aimed at safeguarding the right to freedom of information, described India as a country that is very dangerous for journalists. The country was also downgraded on the organization's World Press Freedom Index (to rank the country according to its record on press freedom).

Incidents of human rights abuses and concerns regarding the violations of human rights in India challenge the government's claim of its serious commitment to human rights protection. The report of UNHCR on the human rights situation in India, comprising of submissions by national human rights institutions, has highlighted the gross violations of basic rights in India. National human rights institutions, international stakeholders and rights organizations have always highlighted how human rights violations have rapidly risen under the BJP-led government. The concerns should be emphasized more vociferously by civil society, rights institutions in India and the international community to protect the citizens of the second-most populous country in the world from rights abuses and violations of basic freedoms.



## Around 60,000 Dalits held in bonded labour

The organisation calling itself the 'Scheduled Caste Rights Commission of Sindh' has said that around 60,000 men, women and children belonging to this segment of society in Sindh are currently suffering forced labour by landowners.

Speaking at a gathering of scheduled caste communities in Bheel Colony here on Sunday, chairman of the organisation Advocate Kanji Rano Bheel said that most of Dalits forced into bonded labour hailed from Sanghar, Umerkot, Mirpurkhas, Badin, Thatta and Hyderabad districts.

He deplored that forced labour was in vogue brick kilns and agricultural lands across the province. The poor Dalit families found no other option opened to them when offered a peltre amount as loan to agree on year-long forced labour at farms and kilns, he observed.

He regretted that children of these families could not get education obviously due to abject poverty as they could not go for any other thing with the loan money for two square meals.

He said the government should enlist peasant

families in revenue deficit record to help out bonded labour. Kisan courts should be set up to check bonded labour and settle all disputes relating to the Tenancy Act.

He demanded the government to make arrangements on an emergency basis to ensure that Dalit families' children get education and jobs. He also called for funds to be allocated for the welfare of poor Dalit families and their jobless members.

Advocate Rano Bheel also regretted that not a single landowner/employee found keeping peasants in forced labour had ever been prosecuted and punished.

He said that a total of 1,837 farmers had been got freed by various courts in bonded labour cases.

Among them, 522 were children, 270 women and 1,045 adult men. He noted that 176 peasants released through courts belonged to the Kohli, Bheel and Oad communities and most of them hailed Sanghar district.

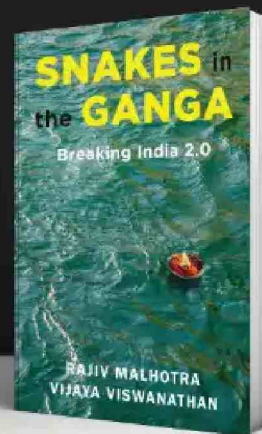
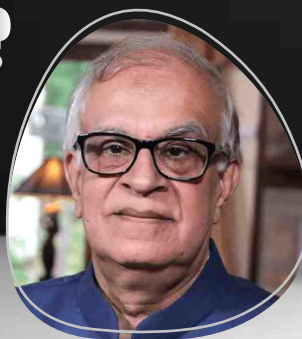
*Source: Dawn News*



# Are Dalits the Blacks of India, and Brahmins the Whites?

India, which has given birth to Hinduism and where most Hindus live, is increasingly being seen as the source of global oppression, especially in the West

**Rajiv Malhotra**



My earlier book called *Breaking India* was published a dozen years ago and exposed the Afro-Dalit theory when it was in its infancy. This theory claims that Dalits are the Blacks of India and non-Dalits are the Whites of India and that caste equals racism. I had explained the mechanisms of this US operated and financed project to exploit India's social fault lines by using the American race lenses. But nobody took it seriously when that book was published. An opportunity was lost to nip in the bud the global initiative to weaponise India's minorities.

Indians should have responded that the history of oppression points to a different conclusion: Just as Blacks were oppressed by Whites in America, in India the Hindus have been oppressed by a thousand years of colonisation, first by the Muslims and then by the Europeans. Therefore, Hindus should have taken the initiative to find common ground with Black Americans by explaining to them the tenets of Hindu culture and its history. But because Hindu leaders ignored my warnings, the erroneous ideas got a chance to take root and prosper. Recently, a prominent Black intellectual called Isabel Wilkerson has written a book asserting that the Afro-Dalit identity is the epicentre of global victimhood. Titled, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, it claims that caste is not simply one of the many forms of racism. According to her, caste is the backbone, the structure on which all racism stands. The British learned caste ideas from Vedic texts and took these structures to America to create the framework for racism against Blacks. From America, this approach to stratifying societies travelled further and spread to Europe where it led to the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews.

Wilkerson's outlandish claim is that caste is the root cause of all racism in the world. By isolating caste as the basic architecture on which all racism anywhere in the world is established, she laid the foundation for Marxism's latest attack on Hindu society. The argument being made is that since casteism is indelibly associated with Hinduism because of the karma theory, it can only be destroyed if Hinduism itself is dismantled. I am sympathetic to the Dalit cause in India and to the Black cause in the US. But the problem with Wilkerson's thesis is the American

history lens she applies blindly to Dalit issues. The history of Indian social systems is far more complex and cannot be resolved using her simplistic analysis.

Had this theory been limited to academics, it might not have been so dangerous. However, Wilkerson's theory has received a lot of publicity in American media. It is not a fringe idea in the US for she is a Pulitzer Prize winner and her book became Number 1 on the New York Times Bestseller List. It has been widely promoted by Oprah Winfrey through her book club. It is now a central part of the Black Lives Matter movement and the new Woke social justice ideology.

It would have been in the spirit of free thinking if the mapping of Blacks to Dalits and Whites to Brahmins was presented as a theoretical "claim" and hypothesis rather than as a fact. But this is not what we are seeing. There is no attempt by the proponents of this view to invite debate. You don't see any openness or humility among the believers of this dogma, or a desire to allow their claims to be challenged. They immediately cancel any voice offering an opposing view.

The result is that the social justice movement is turning Hinduphobic. India, that has given birth to Hinduism and where most Hindus live, is therefore, increasingly being seen as the source of global oppression. In our recent book, *Snakes in the Ganga*, Vijaya Viswanathan and I talk about Wilkerson's contribution to the far-Left discourse. We point out the many flaws in her logic as well as the factual mistakes she makes. We offer a rebuttal to the Afro-Dalit theory and also give a brief description of Indian social history. Visit: [www.SnakesintheGanga.com](http://www.SnakesintheGanga.com).

The author is a researcher, writer, speaker and public intellectual on current affairs as they relate to civilisations, cross-cultural encounters, religion and science. His latest book is 'Snakes in the Ganga'. Views expressed are personal.

*Courtesy: Firstpost*



# Caste culture's rooted in amongst Bangladeshi Catholics too

Two years ago, Kanika Das was in a relationship with a boy from a rich Catholic family and they planned to get married. However, their dreams were left in tatters when the boy's family opposed the plan saying Kanika belonged to a Dalit Catholic family.

“When they [the boy's family] found out my father is a cobbler and we belonged to the Dalit caste, they called off the marriage. That is not my fault, I think this is my misfortune,” Kanika, 19, told UCA News.

Dalits are considered socially lower and economically weak in the Hindu caste system on the Indian subcontinent, which continues to be practiced within Catholic Churches in the region, including Bangladesh.

The two families, both living in Khulna district in southern Bangladesh, did not know each other earlier. Kanika and her boy met through a mutual friend and they maintained a close relationship for nearly two years.

The boy was ready to accept her Dalit background but “problems started when his family became aware of it,” she said.

In the conservative village societies of Bangladesh, breaking off a publicly-known relationship is regarded as a disgrace for the girl. To ward off the shame, the family quickly arranged for her to marry a Hindu Dalit man, about a year ago. Kanika's experience is just one example of the social discrimination Dalit Catholics suffer within



Stephan Uttom Rozario

their own Catholic communities in various parts of Bangladesh.

## Discrimination turns full circle

For Kanika's father, 52-year-old Monohor Das, it was a sad turn of events for the family. He converted to Catholicism at the age of 27 with several other Hindu Dalits, primarily to escape social discrimination.

Dalits, who were once considered untouchable on the Indian subcontinent, continue to suffer restrictions in entering public places like restaurants and temples. Their children are also denied education in schools where upper-caste Hindu students study. “We thought once we became Christian we would be accepted like other Christians. But upper-caste Hindus, Christians and even Muslims feel uncomfortable with a Dalit presence due to long-running social stigmas,” he told UCA News.

After conversion, Monohor managed to send his three daughters to a Church-run school. Kanika completed 10th grade before marriage while her two sisters are in grades

10 and 8.

A change of faith helped Dalits like him to educate their children in Christian schools, but society and the Church continue to discriminate against them, he said. “Our children now get secondary level education. We are free to go to the market and barbershop. However, we are not equal to other Catholics. Even Church authorities do not consider us in decision-making bodies as they prefer only educated people,” he said.

Non-Dalit Catholics avoid the presence of Dalit Catholics. “So, we don't mix with them. Change is possible only if they come forward,” Manohor said.

Kanika says her father hoped social discrimination would end when becoming a Catholic. “But in reality, there is still discrimination in our life,” she said referring to her marriage. “It is true that I could complete secondary school only because my family was Christian. But if our Catholic community had taken better care of us, maybe I could get higher education and my life could be different,” she said.

Kanika now lives in a tin-roofed, bamboo-walled two-room house with her Hindu fisherman husband and father-in-law in the Dacop area of Khulna district. The house is built on government land close to the Pashur River where Kanika's husband fishes for a living.

### **No data on Dalit Catholics**

The Church in Bangladesh has no official data on Dalit Catholics.

Khulna diocesan officials estimate that Dalits form half of some 35,000 Catholics in its jurisdiction, where Jesuit missionaries established the first church in the 17th century. The diocese is considered a Dalit Catholic stronghold.

The Sanskrit word "Dalit" literally means “trampled upon” and denotes those outside the four-tier Hindu caste system. Those outside the caste are considered “outcastes” and “untouchables” by caste Hindus. India abolished untouchability in 1950, but discrimination continues in different forms in society.

Bangladeshi humanists introduced the term *rishi* (wise or sage) for Dalits, as an umbrella term for all outcastes to help avoid calling them derogatory names linked with their menial jobs. They are most identified by the menial work they are engaged in such as *methor* (cleaner), *dom* (gravedigger), *chamar* (animal hide collector) *muchi* (cobbler), *das* (servant) and *koiborto* (fisherman).

Researchers say some 2 percent of Bangladesh's 165 million people or 3.5 million belong to the Dalit

community. Dalit leaders estimate their people are about ten million. The number of Dalit Catholics, experts say, should be at least 10 percent of some 500,000 Catholics in the country.

### **Masking Dalit identity**

To mask their Dalit identity, some former Dalits, including Catholics, have changed their surnames and taken up better jobs.

Sudhir Sarkar, 45, was born as Sudhir Das. He changed his surname at the age of 16, before his secondary school examination. “It is because Das is a Dalit title and I know even if I do well in life, I might not be treated well in society,” Sarkar, a Catholic and assistant director of an NGO, told UCA News.

He said the discriminatory attitude of non-Dalit Catholics is “understandable but what is surprising is the attitude of Catholic priests, who come to the Dalit community. They developed a sense of arrogance,” he said.

“They don't want to talk now freely when they see us. They think they belong to something higher. They don't care about Dalits. But the reverse should have been the case. They should have shown more interest in the betterment of Dalit boys and girls,” Sarkar said.

Sarkar regretted that although the socio-economic condition of most Dalit Catholics is “miserable” the Church in Bangladesh has “no serious development plan” for those converted from Dalit groups. “Foreign missionaries brought us to the Church. Still today local Christians continue to call us Dalit Christians, which is insulting,” he said.

### **Open forms of discrimination**

“There are two kinds of Catholics in Bangladesh Dalits and non-Dalits. Without any difficulty, publicly they call us Dalit Catholics,” Sarkar said.

Sarkar pointed out that during parish programs, food is first served to higher caste Christians, the Dalit community will be served last.

“If someone from the Dalit community sits first, he will be pulled out and moved,” he said. The cases of the uneducated, shabbily dressed and those engaged in menial work are even more miserable.

“Most Catholics think they can't do anything worthwhile. So, they continue to lag behind.” Swapan Das, a 34-year Dalit Catholic and rickshaw puller in Khulna city, explained how Dalit Catholics are excluded during Church programs.



“Three years ago, my five-year-old son went to the church. I wanted him to sit with other boys, but one Sunday a 12-year-old forcibly pushed him away calling him a rickshaw puller's son. Now, my son sits with me when we go to church,” he said. Sarkar said education could make a difference because educated Dalit people seem to be getting some acceptance in the Catholic community.

### **Social change comes slower**

Italian Xaverian priest, Germano Antonio, who has worked among Dalits for over two decades noted that despite efforts, Dalits have made little progress in socio-economic development.

“Among the Dalits, the people of one or two villages have made some progress in terms of education and jobs but still lag in terms of social status. Sometimes they are discriminated against among us Christians,” Father Antonio, 83, told UCA News. Members of St. Francis Xavier for Foreign Missions, popularly known as Xaverian missionaries, have served in southern Bangladesh since 1895 and contributed to the development of Khulna diocese, working particularly with Dalits. Father Antonio said non-Dalit students are preferred over Dalit students in Catholic colleges in the city.

“It is often assumed that they have no money,” he said.

The priest noted any social change takes a long time, so a change of fortune for Dalits will take more time. “But the Church needs to make a long-term plan to educate Dalits. Only then it is possible to prevent discrimination against them,” he said.

Rickshaw puller Swapan says a Catholic priest rebuked him for continuing the education of his daughters when he asked for some monetary help for their schooling. “Instead of helping me, the priest asked me what's the use of educating girls. Give your daughters in marriage,” he recalled.

### **Education and wealth valued**

“If you want to have social respect you must have money and education. Even Church authorities prioritize those who are rich and educated and do not value those who are poor, especially Dalit people, Swapan told UCA News.

Catholic officials and leaders say the Church has been working for the development of the Dalit community for years. Catholic charity Caritas has a special project for the education and social development of Dalit people.

Caritas Khulna regional director Daud Jibon Das, who also hails from the Dalit community, said Dalit Catholics

in higher education is about 10 percent whereas it is about 70 percent among other Catholics. “The Church is working on it, but the Church has financial limitations, it cannot do many things even if it wants to,” Das told UCA News.

“If there is no support from the government, then these Dalit people will not be able to develop through their own efforts alone,” he added.

### **Progress is impossible without state help**

Father Jacob S. Biswas, Vicar-General of Khulna diocese, said that the Church has spent “a considerable amount of money” and energy over the years on the socio-economic development of Dalit people.

“But they could not develop compared to what has been spent. It is because of the lack of education. The Church is also working for their education,” Father Biswas said. The priest said the diocese has started a special fundraising program for poor, talented students which will be spent only on the education of backward communities like Dalit people. Parittran, a Khulna-based development organization working for the development of the Dalits community, is directed by Milan Das, a Dalit Hindu.

He says foreign missionaries played a vital role in awakening Dalit people to their rights. “Dalit people now speak against discrimination. But no matter how much we talk, discrimination cannot be removed from people's minds,” he told UCA News. Milan Das said the Church's work among Dalits should be strengthened, especially in the education sector. “More seminars or various educational training should be held together to close the gulf between Dalits and other Catholics,” he added.

A government official said the state has been taking all measures to assist and prioritize Dalit people in social security schemes.

“We are now moving towards development in a coordinated way with everyone. We are working to ensure that no one is left behind,” Ainul Haque, assistant director of the Social Services Department in Khulna told UCA News.

Kanika still laments her misfortunes because of her Dalit background.

“Being born in a Dalit family was a curse for me. I could have studied further and taken up a job with a good salary. All I want now is for inequality to be removed from our society,” she said.

*Source: UCA News*

# Two Professors Sue California State University Claiming its Policy on 'Caste' Targets Hindus

Shankhyaneel Sarkar



The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and Fox Rothschild filed a civil rights lawsuit against the chancellor and trustees of California State University in the California Central District Court.

The HAF alleged that the anti-discrimination policy of the campus targets members of Hindu community by including 'caste' as a protected category in its interim policy.

Hindu professors Sunil Kumar and Praveen Sinha from the California State University system claiming to represent members of the community have initiated the court action against Jolene Koester, who is the chancellor of California State University.

“CSU is constitutionally barred from dictating the beliefs of any religion. Yet in responding to and relying upon, among other things, resolutions passed by the California Faculty Association and Cal State Student Association, CSU takes the position that caste is integral to the Hindu religion. No religion other than Hinduism is treated in this manner by the CSU Interim Policy,” the Hindu American said in its statement on its website.

“Their characterization is incorrect that Hinduism mandates a racist and discriminatory 'caste system',” the HAF said in its lawsuit.

In 2022, the California State University system passed a resolution to add caste as a category of discrimination in order to ensure that students and faculty report anti-Dalit bias.

## ALLEGATIONS OF ANTI-DALIT BIAS IN US

The issue was first highlighted when an Indian-origin CISCO employee alleged that his Indian-origin superiors belonging from the dominant caste harassed him and

discriminated against him.

The state of California then filed a lawsuit against IT conglomerate Cisco and those two employees in 2020. Dalit rights organisation Equality Labs told US media outlets that Americans of Indian-origin who belong to the Dalit community in Google, Facebook, Apple and several other companies in Silicon Valley faced harassment and caste-based discrimination. More than 250 complainants came forward.

There has been myriad of experiences by Indian-origin workers belonging to the Dalit community. While some like Pranay Patil, a Dalit student at the Harvard Kennedy School, told the Harvard Crimson that he has not personally experienced caste hostility at Harvard but Kanishka Elupula, a Dalit Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology told the Harvard Crimson that there might not be specific instances but the debates on reservation sometimes displayed the attitudes other Indian-origin academics from dominant castes have towards people from the Dalit community.

The US has seen the rise of several Dalit civil rights groups in recent times like the Ambedkar International Center, Ambedkar Association of North America (AANA) and Equality Labs.

The move by the California State University system was also supported by the worker's unions who felt it was also a worker's rights issue.

The HAF, however, said the California State University system ran afoul of the Constitution of the United States by singling out 'certain faculty, staff and students on the basis of their religion and ethnicity'. It further added that it falsely casts caste as a Hindu tenet.

*Source: News 18*



## Fighting a Pandemic of Misinformation

Tika R Pradhan

Executive chairperson of the Samata Foundation, PradipPariyar, who advocates the rights of marginalised people in Nepal, currently leads the #DalitLivesMatter movement in the country. He was one of the young global leaders selected for the class of the World Economic Forum in 2020. Pariyar spoke to the Post's Tika R Pradhan on a host of issues including the representation of Dalits and marginalised communities, the role of youths in changing society and the report of the National Inclusion Commission suggesting an end to the reservation policy in Nepal. Excerpts:

### **How do you observe Dalit representation in Parliament and state agencies?**

Nepal's constitution stipulates that all state mechanisms will be inclusive-ensuring proportional representation of all groups, but the governments, past and present, have failed to draft the necessary laws to ensure such representation. One election law has ensured the representation of Dalit women in all wards of the local units and this is the only provision that political parties implement. The leaders in the state mechanism do not ensure the representation of the marginalised communities as per the spirit of the constitution. Firstly, they haven't drafted laws necessary to ensure proper representation and secondly, they don't implement the existing laws.

There is a history of political parties being dishonest when it comes to representation. From the decade-long Maoist insurgency to the 2006 people's movement to the Madhesh, Tharu and Dalit movements, it was the political parties that brought people to the streets with promises of representation in Parliament and state agencies. But after

the political changes brought about by these movements, the parties did not keep their word to the marginalised. We have spoken to almost all political leaders in the seven provinces and those in the Capital. Most of them said candidates from marginalised communities do not win the polls. I was surprised by this argument because there are thousands of candidates in the fray in each poll and it's not just candidates from marginalised communities who lose the polls.

It is widely believed in political circles that women, Dalits, Tharus or Janajatis and those from financially weak backgrounds cannot win the polls and this sentiment allows politicians to engage in fear mongering. They create an impression that elections are not for the common people. Rather than uplifting members of the marginalised communities to strengthen democracy, political parties send out messages that are discouraging for aspiring candidates. Only mandatory provisions written in the laws, including the 33 percent representation of women and a certain percent allocated for different groups in the proportional representation system, are followed by political parties. If there were no such provisions, political parties would not ensure any representation.

The election law has mandated the representation of Dalits but it has not mentioned that their representation should be equally distributed among men and women. Therefore, parties have been selecting women only to fulfil the women's quota depriving the representation of capable male members of those communities. Although the representation of Dalit women in itself is encouraging progress, the law is not clear on the representation of Dalit





men or Muslim men and other male members of the marginalised communities.

If this continues, people will understand that the proportional election system is only meant to ensure 33 percent representation of women. In my observation, political parties have no willpower to ensure proportional representation of the marginalised communities. It's disheartening to know that the Maoist party raised the issue of proportional representation but failed to put it into practice. These issues highlight the mindset of the political leaders in that they won't go for inclusiveness unless there are mandatory legal provisions in place.

**Although there is a mandatory provision for Dalit women as ward members, political parties failed to field Dalit women candidates in several places. Why?**

This goes on to show that the political parties haven't reached out to the entire Dalit population. Yes, there are some wards where there are no Dalit settlements and because of the mandatory provision, the seats allocated to them remained vacant for that term. But in places like Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, it was sheer negligence of the political parties. More than 150 positions of Dalit women ward members remain vacant across the country.

**Have the political movements and other social movements brought any positive changes in curbing social discrimination and increasing the representation of the marginalised?**

After democracy, Dalits are getting opportunities to speak, write and get an education and raise their voice. These are very important achievements.

During the constitution drafting process, the Dalit wings of all parties came together and discussed the common agenda to be guaranteed in the constitution. This gave birth to Articles 24 and 40 of the constitution which ensure education, health, social security and traditional occupations to the marginalised. These positive changes came about due to the Dalit movements and democratic movements. In 2011, the Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act was drafted. The Act was important because it criminalised caste-based discrimination. After the people's movement of 2006, we got the reservation policy due to which we have around two percent representation of Dalits in bureaucracy. Earlier the representation was negligible. However, there is still no representation of Dalits at the policy level. Also, reservation policy in the army and police has also brought positive changes. With this, there is a distant ray of hope among these communities that



they can be a part of various sectors of the state.

However, there are also challenges in eradicating caste-based discrimination as seen in the Rukum incident, AngiraPasi case and the recent case in Bajura where the ward chair beat up a Dalit man for entering a temple. If there were any positives in these incidents it is that Dalits have started to retaliate against such inhuman treatments meted out to them.

**You have said that the political parties are not honest. What could be the role of pressure groups to make them accountable or how can the parties be made accountable?**

To make political parties accountable and honest, their sister wings in the marginalised groups have a crucial role to play since they have spent all their lives and efforts in their respective parties. They have the right to question and challenge their leadership. If they cannot challenge their political leadership on caste-based atrocities then there is no point in being a member of that party. I also understand that it could be difficult for them to raise their voices while staying in the party because in the political scene only those who cater to the whims and fancies of the political leadership can climb the party ranks. This form of cronyism needs to be checked. This is where the role of organisations like ours (Samata Foundation) comes into play with us involving Dalit members of political parties in capacity building; giving them wider exposure and bringing them together and providing them with research findings.

In 2019, we brought Dalit members of political parties together and asked how they were working. Then there were no ministers from the Dalit community in the seven provincial governments. After our discussions, Province 1 got a Dalit state minister. The other provinces also followed suit except for the Madhesh Province.

But how can the Dalit leaders convince our top leaders who don't even listen to powerful leaders of their parties?

Dalits and marginalised groups are also vote banks for political parties. Dalits account for 13.8 percent of the total population and that kind of number can sway the polls. Dalit leaders must convince their leadership based on their voting strength. If Dalit issues are not properly addressed they must challenge the leadership.

**What about the overall representation in the state mechanism and Parliament?**

The issue of overall representation is not encouraging. If we look at bureaucracy, Dalit representation is only



around two percent out although Dalits comprise 13.8 percent of the national population. In the National Assembly, among the 59 members only seven are Dalits; only 19 members of the 275-strong House of Representatives were Dalits. If we talk about proportional representation, there must be 38 Dalit members in the lower house and at least eight in the upper house. In the seven provincial assemblies, there are only 33 Dalit members among the total 550 but there must be 76 members for proportional representation.

During the last polls for the House of Representatives, there were only three Dalit candidates contesting-UML leaders Chhabilal Bishwokarma from Rupandehi and Jagat Sunar from Kaski and Maoist Centre's Maheshwar Gahatraj. Interestingly they all won the polls. However, the prospects of Dalit candidates is not encouraging as political parties are not committed to increasing Dalit representations.

### **What is your observation of the recent report of the National Inclusion Commission that talks about ending the reservation policy?**

What I feel is that this country is mine but the state is not, because there is no diversity in the state. If you read the name plates inside Singha Durbar and the panellists and speakers gracing the podiums in Kathmandu, you won't feel this state is yours. One of the prime examples of how the organs of the state have not properly implemented Nepal's constitution is the recent report of the National Inclusion Commission. Prior to that-around one and a half years ago-the Public Service Commission announced vacancies for around 9,000 positions at the local level ignoring the reservation policy. If they had followed the reservation policy, at least 1,000 Dalits could have gotten jobs. That was when they started denying us the reservations quota. Following that the Supreme Court issued a verdict stating that only the "privileged" among the marginalised communities in Nepal have got opportunities thereby creating a creamy top layer.

Also, it is an irony that the commission itself is not inclusive. Maybe they are testing the waters to see if they can get away with it. They cannot come to any conclusion on reservations without reviewing the reservation arrangements. If they do, then the commission should say they only cater to the interests of Khas-Arya. Their recent report goes against the spirit of the constitution which talks about proportional representation and inclusiveness. There is a serious need to study the over-representation of Khas-Arya in Nepali society and why they are over-represented. Is that because they know the Nepali language and other communities are not given equal opportunities or the system is designed in such a way that only they can pass the opportunities on to others?

So before we get into the marginalized communities' representation, the overrepresentation of the Khas-Arya community must be studied.

### **In Nepal, Muslims, Dalits and Tharus are underrepresented, so how can they say this state is theirs?**

The most important issue is who is making the rules of the game. When people question whether the marginalised candidates are capable, they must realise that the candidates have fulfilled the basic rule of the game-the criteria to become political candidates.

### **Why do you think Dalit and Janajati movements are gradually becoming ineffective?**

Firstly, all the marginalised communities like Dalit, Janajati and women have contributed to all movements. Their roles are crucial in all the movements of Nepal whether that is the Maoist people's war, the Madhesh movement or the people's movements. All those who participated in these movements thought their demands of representation would be met but that did not happen. They didn't get fair representation in state mechanisms. The communities who were capable of sharing resources didn't want to share them with the marginalised communities once the movements were over.

Now with the new developments to curb their rights, the marginalised communities should have raised their voice against it but they have not been able to do so. The major reason is some of those leaders within the marginalised communities received the benefits and failed to speak for the communities.

### **Do you think a change in leadership could help improve representation of marginalised groups?**

In South Asian countries the definition of leadership is synonymous with someone who has a huge amount of money, can deploy more goons and those who have more people hovering around them. This must change. Only those who are honest, have integrity and will to serve the people should be in leadership positions. Also, the youth leaders have failed to challenge their top leaders since the former tend to wait for their turn and over time become complicit in corrupt leaders' shenanigans.

### **What should the young generation do to bring positive change to society?**

Dalit and non-Dalit youths must come out of their comfort zones. Problems cannot be solved by simply criticising the previous generations. We need to make some efforts by challenging our existing leadership and doing positive work to change our society.

*Source: Kathmandu Post*

# Called untouchable in 2022': Why hundreds of Dalits in Karnataka embraced Buddhism



**Rishika Sadam**

Over 450 Dalits renounced Hinduism Friday in the state's Shorapur city in a bid to get rid of 'untouchable' tag. Experts say just a sign of 'protest', lacks structural change.

Shorapur, Karnataka: For the large number of Dalits who gathered at Karnataka's Shorapur to adopt Buddhism Friday, the conversion is an attempt to shed the tag of 'untouchable' that they still carry, especially in rural parts of the state.

“By choosing Buddhism, we're not just rejecting Hinduism which promotes the caste system and inequality but we're also walking in the path of our guru Dr. B.R. Ambedkar,” said Dalit leader Devendra Hegde to The Print.

He said that “Baba Saheb” chose Buddhism not just to fight against casteism but also after understanding the principles of Buddhism and how it benefits the human race.

The event, organised by Golden Cave Buddha Vihar Trust, was held on the eve of 66th Dhammachakra Pravartan Din, when Ambedkar adopted Buddhism in 1956. Rahul Hullimani, secretary of the Trust said that 457 Dalits embraced Buddhism by taking the 22 vows as prescribed by Ambedkar.

Ambedkar's granddaughter Rama Teltumbde Ambedkar was the chief guest at the event. “It's 2022 and we are still being called untouchables. Why should we be in Hinduism anymore,” asked Venkatesh Hosmani, member of the trust, speaking to The Print.

Earlier last week, Venkatesh, along with a few others, threw photos of Hindu gods in a river, calling it “respectful visarjan”, before converting to Buddhism. The video of the same went viral on social media. Experts say that while being closely associated with Ambedkar's teachings, conversion to Buddhism

does not result in structural changes. Speaking to The Print, political activist and author, KanchaIlaiah Shepherd, said denouncing Hinduism does not change the perception of Dalits unless there is a cultural transformation.

“As of now, it is just a protest and challenge to Hindutva practices and deep-rooted untouchability practices,” he said.

## **Persisting casteist practices**

Shorapur Assembly Constituency is a Scheduled Tribe reserved constituency. According to the police, caste discrimination is a lot more prevalent in rural parts of the taluk.

Just a few months ago, a Dalit family was not allowed into a temple because of their caste until the police intervened. The incident took place in Amalihala village, 30 kilometres from the town area.

In another incident, a Dalit family was fined Rs 60,000, in the state's Kolar district, after their son touched a pole attached to an idol of a Hindu deity. These incidents have left a mark on the town which is in Karnataka's Yadgir district.

Describing an odd practice, Shorapur Police Inspector Sunil V.M told the The Print that many of the hotels, shops run by mostly upper caste individuals in the Taluk's Kirdhalli village are shut after a member of a Dalit family dies.

Several Dalit community members allege that it is because Dalits from other villages who visit the family might go to these establishments and the upper caste owners do not like it.

“The villagers say this a decades-old tradition but they don't know why exactly this is being done. It only happens when a Dalit person dies,” said Sunil.



“There are students in my class who do not sit next to me because I am a Dalit. They say stuff like move away from us, you belong to the lower caste. But, from now on I will identify myself as a Buddhist and I hope it will change their perspective,” Maya B., 14-year-old daughter of one of the organisers told The Print. She is a student at a local school.

“There are still villages in Raichur where drinking water for Dalits is from a different source, upper caste people drink from a different well. I was stopped from going to a temple a couple of years ago,” said Radha M, one of the 20 women from Raichur at the event, speaking to The Print. “If Hinduism does not give us equality, if that religion places us at the lowest level and does not want us, why should we obey it,” asked Amaralamma, another convert from Raichur speaking to The Print.

She said that they will go the “Baba Saheb way and live an equal life”, adding, “staying in Hinduism is an insult to our Baba Saheb.” Sunil added that Shorapur's literacy rate is hardly 50 per cent. That coupled with extreme backwardness and poverty is a reason for this discrimination, he claimed.

### **'Nothing changes'**

Renowned political activist, author, Kanchallaiah Shepherd pointed out how adopting Buddhism might be a sign of “protest” against Hinduism but does not add any cultural transformation to their social status. “Their occupation remains the same, their village remains the same, their names also remain the same. So, this does not really change the perception of others on them, until there is a cultural transformation,” he said.

He added that protest does not automatically create an equal space for them, perhaps not as much as other religion converts such as Islam or Christianity. “One reason why the RSS or the BJP have no issue with Dalits embracing Buddhism is that they see it as part of Hinduism. Had they been taking up other religion like Islam or Christianity, there would have been much noise about it,” he said.

“For instance, in Andhra Pradesh's Piduguralla area, a significant number of Yadav community members converted to Christianity and the other half did not. The converts saw cultural transformation - their women attended night schools, children went to Sunday schools and women dressed up for Sunday Church and that gave some sort of empowerment to the



community eventually, compared to those who did not. Buddhism is not doing anything similar here,” he explained.

### **Ambedkar's school of Buddhism**

Dalit community members have been converting to Buddhism ever since Ambedkar did. On October 14th 1956, along with over 3.5 lakh followers, he left Hinduism, as he considered it a threat to freedom because it propagated the caste system.

His re-interpretation, often referred to as the Dalit Buddhist movement, Navayana or Neo-Buddhism - rejected the “four noble truths” of traditional Buddhism and was instead remodeled with a focus on class struggle and social justice. But broadly, Ambedkar preferred Buddhism over other religions as he found the practice more suitable to liberate the marginalised sections of society. The conversion rate, especially among Dalits for whom conversion is a political tool and a protest against Hinduism, is declining, points out Shepherd.

“Ambedkar made some structural changes to Buddhism when he adopted it but there is not much clarity on how the religion would have been fully used for social justice. Had he lived longer after he embraced it, we could have seen it perhaps,” he said.

He explained that the initial idea was to combat the caste system in Hinduism. “How can one annihilate caste without making some structural changes,” he asked.

For the many Dalits converting to Buddhism, the idea is to walk on the path of Ambedkar. Shepherd points out that the younger converts could benefit from the move as their growth would be closely associated with Ambedkar's teachings.

*Courtesy: The Print*

# Pakistan's Efforts for Protection of Minorities' Rights, Facts on Forced Conversions and Blasphemy Convictions

Nisar Ahmed Khan

It can be argued that the binary construction, inherently divisive and discriminatory, of 'self' and 'other' is an outcome of the conditioned and egoic state of humanity. It reminds of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida who said that 'self' and 'other' are different, but mutually constitutes each other. Indeed, majority-minority group identities are constituted in a way where 'majority self', excludes 'minority other'.

Therefore, the protection of the national cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities is a prerequisite for the establishment of a just, democratic and harmonious state and society. This was recognized by the founding father of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah when he said "You are free! You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed-that has nothing to do with the business of the state,". This set the framework for future national outlook and legislation with respect to the rights of minorities in Pakistan. Indeed, the establishment of such a framework for minority rights was based on the recognition that minorities are in a vulnerable situation in comparison to majority groups in society and aims to protect members of a minority group from discrimination, assimilation, prosecution, hostility or violence, as a consequence of their status.

Notwithstanding its commitments to ensure minority rights in accordance with national and international laws and need for the preservation of the pluralistic social composition, Pakistan like any other country has faced challenges in the past. The deleterious effects of instrumentalizing religion and Islam during the Afghan Jihad against Soviet occupation in 1979 and later the US-led war against terrorism is well recognized and efforts are made to undone the damage. It is reassuring and commendable to see Pakistan achieving great strides in promoting and protecting minority rights. However, in this age of information warfare, Pakistan's laudable efforts have not been duly appreciated as Indian propaganda machinery is in full swing to discredit and malign Pakistan's global image. By presenting factually wrong statements and statics on the issue of minority rights in Pakistan, India has been trying hard, albeit unsuccessfully, to portray itself as the 'safe

heave' for minorities and deflect international attention from its own worst record of suppressing minorities.

So, let's consider if 'forced' conversions are indeed forced conversions or its more a hyperbole to malign Pakistan. The facts on the issue will help make an unbiased opinion. Consider this, since 2019 a total of 1169 cases of conversions occurred. The percentage of these conversions with respect to different groups are follows: Hindus (88%), Christians (9%), Sikh (less than 1%) and Qadianis (2%). Interestingly, of the 1169 conversions, individual conversions are only 17%, while 83% are family/ collective conversions. Less than only 1% are forced conversion cases in which girls are sent back to parent's custody. Pakistan has enacted the Hindu Marriage Act 2017 to address the issue which extends to the whole of Pakistan except Sindh as Sindh government has passed the Sindh Hindu marriage Act 2016 (amended in 2018), to facilitate the Hindu community to solemnize their marriages in accordance with the Sindh Hindu marriage Rules, 2019.

To dispel the negative projection of conversion issue, Pakistan Hindu Council and Ulema reached an agreement according to which any Hindu approaching Ulema for conversion will be reported to local Hindu Community leader and his/ her meeting with parents will be arranged (in absence of Ulema). When it comes to the protection of minority rights, the response of the state has been swift and uncompromising. For instance, 117 suspected including 7 main instigators who set ablaze the Hindu Temple were arrested within 2/3 days of event. 12 police officials were dismissed and 92 police officials suspended for negligence in duties to protect mob on Hindu temple in Teri. In such cases the government also releases funds for the reconstruction purposes. Another case at hand is the state's swift response for Protection of Minorities on Old Qilla Rawalpindi. On 27 Mar 2021, 15 religious motivated individuals attacked and tried to damage under renovated temple at PuranaQilla Rawalpindi. FIR was registered against individuals and they were arrested. Unsurprisingly, over 6000 Pakistani Hindus launched a protest campaign against India for its smear campaign against Pakistan on the issue of minorities and 133 Hindus returned in last one year from India amidst improving conditions for minorities.

The response on Blasphemy Laws/ Cases is indiscriminate and since 2005, 56 individuals were convicted on blasphemy offense. 45 Muslims, 7 Christians, 2 Hindus and 2 Qadianis (Muslims 80%, minorities 20%). Minorities convicted on blasphemy are given fair trial and rights of appeal in higher Judiciary. Acquittal of 5 Christians including Asia Bibi and Shagufta Kausar, Shafqat Emaneul etc by higher Judiciary are cases in point.

In fact, minorities in Pakistan are free to practice religion. There are 2652 Churches (1 church per 664 Christians), 732 Temples (1 Temple per 2734 Hindus) and 167 Gurdwaras (1 Gurdwara per 55 Sikhs) exist. If we draw a comparison in UK there is only one mosque for 2249 Muslims. Pakistan is committed to mainstream and empower the minorities. They are provided with equal rights to education, jobs and business opportunities (Reserve seats in Parliament, minorities on senior positions in bureaucracy, army etc). There are four reserved seats in the Senate and ten in National Assembly of Pakistan for minorities besides the proportional reserved seats in all Provincial Assemblies. The proportional reserved seats for minorities across the four provinces include Balochistan (3), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (3), Punjab (8) and Sind (9).

In pursuit of preserving the pluralistic composition and ensuring equal rights to minorities, Pakistan re-constituted The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and increased membership of minority communities, who are new in the majority. Moreover, Mr. Chela Ram Kewlani, a member of the minority community, has been appointed as Chairman of the Commission. In terms of quota for Minorities in Services, Pakistan has allocated 5% Job Quota for minorities in all Federal Govt Services, in addition to open merit. On the directions of National Commission for Minorities, implementation of the job quota is being strictly observed by Provincial Governments, Federal Ministries/ Divisions, FPSC, Islamabad, however, Pakistan needs to address any shortcomings in realizing this by addressing the lack of education and awareness.

The Single National Curriculum introduced in consultation with faith scholars at primary level in educational institutions of Pakistan for seven non-Muslim communities (Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Kalash, Bahai, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism) is praiseworthy. Besides that, different welfare measures are being taken, including the creation of Endowment Fund in line with the bill passed by KP on December 8, 2022, increase in scholarships for minority students with effect from March 2014 and provision of free vocational education for Hindus and Sikhs approved by Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) on 15 January 2021.

Apart from the Interfaith Harmony Policy at the Federal level, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has taken a number of initiatives to promote interfaith harmony. These include Declaration/ Celebration of Minorities Day, Public

holidays for minorities on their festivals of (Christmas and Easter for Christians, Holi and Diwali for Hindus, Biasakhi and Birthday of Guru Nanak for Sikhs, Nauroze of Zoroastrian, Eid-e-Ridvan for Bahai's, Festival of Lights for Buddhist community and ChelumJhust for Kalash people) at official level. The government has also established "District interfaith Harmony Committees" throughout the country and is holding "Interfaith Harmony Conferences" to promote interfaith culture, throughout the county. To mainstream Minorities, Minorities Welfare Fund was established, under which "Small Development Schemes" are carried out for the repair/ maintenance of the religious/ worship places of minorities. Also, Pakistan Sikh GurdwaraParbandhak Committee (PSGPC) established on 16.04.2019 facilitates the Sikh Yatrees from India and across the word on their religious festivals in Pakistan.

Also, the Ministry of Human Rights introduced Hindu Marriage Act, 2017 which extends all over Pakistan except Sindh. This Act is the personal law and contains various provisions specially to protect Hindu women against abused in marriages. Ministry of Human Rights in consultation with Christian Minorities has also prepared a Christian Marriage and Divorce Act. However, certain factions of Christian communities want further deliberation over this draft bill. Once the bill is finalized it will be introduced in Parliament without any delay.

Pakistan has also taken incredible steps to promote Religious Tourism by opening historical Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib Corridor and its operationalization for Sikh community, holding of 550th birthday celebration of Baba Guru Nanak, initiation of Baba Guru Nanak Scholarship for deserving talented student form Hindu & Sikh community, hosting of more than 60,000/- yatrees form across the word, opening of Shewala Teja Mandir and Gurdawara Choa Sahib, Jehlum, filling up of AmerKund (Holy Water) at Katas Raj, printing and distribution of Books and other promotional material on Sikh & Hindu Heritage. The security of minorities, especially during religious festivals is being strictly ensured. A grievance cell has been set up to resolve complaints of non-Muslims to ensure their democratic and fundamental right to practice their religion without any fear.

In the nutshell, if history is any guide, the protection of national minorities is essential to stability, democratic security and peace. Pluralist and genuinely democratic society should not only respect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of each person belonging to a national minority, but also create appropriate conditions enabling them to express, preserve and develop this identity. The various measures adopted by Pakistan reflect its unwavering resolve to realize the dream of its founding father and to preserve the pluralistic composition of society.

*Source: Modern Diplomacy*



# India's first Dalit woman Ashwini KP becomes special envoy to UN



**Report: Devendra Kumar**

**Ashwini KP, a resident of the small town of Chikkaballapur in Karnataka, has become a Special Envoy in the United Nations Human Rights Council. It is also a matter of pride that she is not only the first Indian to reach this position, but also the only woman in Asia.**

If there is courage, courage and the passion to do something, then the barriers of poverty and caste-religion are automatically broken. Born in a Dalit family, 36-year-old Ashwini KP has made this point worthwhile. Ashwini KP, who hails from the small town of Chikkaballapur in Karnataka, has become a Special Envoy in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). It is also a matter of pride that she is not only the first Indian to reach this position, but also the only woman in Asia.

## **Ashwini KP became the first Indian woman special envoy**

Recently, the United Nations Human Rights Council has appointed Ashwini KP as a special reporter to report on contemporary issues like racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance. She is the first Asian and the first Indian woman to reach this milestone. In fact, a few days ago, E Tendai Achium, a resident of Zambia, resigned before the completion of his three-year term. After this, a three-member advisory committee of UNHRC has appointed

Ashwini KP, a Dalit activist and political science professor from India, as a special reporter.

## **Journey from Small Town to Geneva**

Traveling from a small town to Geneva is not everyone's ability, but Ashwini has achieved this success due to her hard work, dedication and strong will. Apart from Ashwini KP in the special reporter race, Joshua Castellino of India origin and Unity Dow of Botswana were also involved. Ashwini is the 6th Special Reporter of UNHRC. His three-year term will start from November 1. Till now only people of African countries have been working in this post.

## **Ashwini's life journey has been very interesting**

Ashwini, who made her place in the UNHRC from a small town in Chikkaballapur in Karnataka, has had a very interesting and inspiring life journey. Ashwini was born in the year 1986 in a Dalit family. His father was an officer in the Karnataka Administrative Service. Therefore, his early schooling took place in Karnataka itself. Ashwini, of dark complexion and medium stature, had to face a lot of discrimination and humiliation in school and college due to being a Dalit. Even after this, he never paid attention to these things and continued his studies. Ashwini completed



her graduation from Mount Carmel College, Bangalore and post graduation in Political Science from St. Joseph's College.

### **Wanted to help poor people**

She used to be very upset to see the pitiable condition of the poor tribal and Dalit families living around the Kolar Gold Fields, adjacent to Chikkaballapur. She wanted to do something for those people and be their voice. Impressed by this, he decided to go to Delhi for further studies. When he decided to study outside Karnataka, his family members also supported him.

### **Power to raise voice of marginalized people from JNU**

Ashwini KP did her MPhil and PhD from South Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. During his PhD, he did a comparative study of India and Nepal in the context of Dalit human rights. He kept the theme of his thesis 'The International Dimension of Dalit Human Rights: A Case Study of India and Nepal'. In the process of his doctoral thesis, he had the opportunity to engage with many senior Dalit activists, academics, both in India and outside. He spoke to activists and academicians who were associated with various UN forums. His experience went a long way in building an understanding about the problems of caste and racism. While studying in JNU, Ashwini was also a



part of Samyukta Dalit Chhatra Manch. This platform exposed him to student activism and gave him the strength to be the voice of the marginalised. Even in college, she was oriented towards anti-caste and Ambedkarite movements.

Worked as Senior Campaigner at Amnesty International India

After doing her PhD from JNU, Ashwini worked for

some time as a guest faculty at Mount Carmel College in Bangalore, but she was very serious about social change. She wanted to do something in this field. So, in the year 2017, she started working as a Senior Campaigner in Amnesty International India. After joining Amnesty International, he worked extensively on issues related to rights and land rights of tribal communities in states like Chhattisgarh and Odisha. During this he saw how tribal and dalit community had to face discrimination based on race and occupation. He raised these problems at the international level for the first

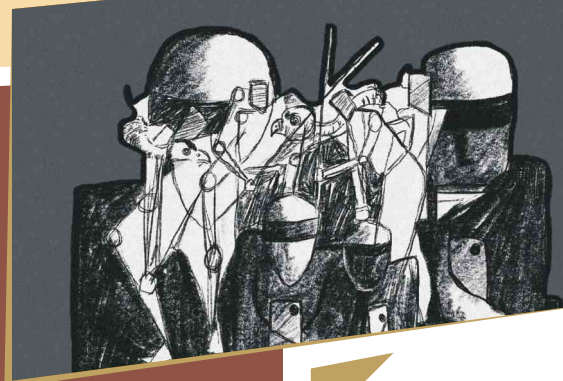
time. In the course of the work, the truth of the life of indigenous communities living in the most remote areas of these states came to be known. With this spirit, he worked for a long time in the social sector. As a result of this, today she has been able to establish her identity at the international level.

*Courtesy: PrabhatKhabar*



# India Enters 'Amrit Kaal' with Growing Atrocities Against Dalits

Subodh Varma



On the eve of the 75th Anniversary of Independence in August, a nine-year-old Dalit boy died from injuries suffered weeks earlier. The boy, a student of class 3 in Jalore district of Rajasthan, was severely beaten by his teacher for allegedly touching a water pot. In September, a 15-year-old boy in UP's Auriya district similarly died after his teacher beat him up for making a mistake in his test. A few days later, two Dalit sisters from a village in Lakhimpur Kheri of UP were raped and murdered, their bodies left hanging from a tree. This series of atrocities hit the media headlines, shocking the country and beyond. Culprits were arrested, compensation announced and outrage registered duly by one and all.

But such incidents are a fraction of the violence and oppression that Dalits continue to suffer in India, which is claimed to be entering the Amrit Kaal - starting from the 75th Anniversary of Independence and going up to the centenary in 2047. Since 1991, from when the data is available, over 7 lakh atrocities have been officially recorded by the police. That is about five every hour. And these are just the officially registered cases. A large number of cases routinely go unregistered because of the connections of higher caste culprits and survivors being in fear of the perpetrators.

## Some States Showing Increasing Violence

In the last three years, from 2019 to 2021, the country saw an 11% increase in atrocities against Dalits. Recorded cases rose from 45,961 in 2019 to 50,900 in 2021, according to the latest available data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

The increase is driven by enormous spikes in this violence (and their registration) in a clutch of states. The chart below shows the data for states with a higher percentage increase in anti-dalit atrocities than the national average. As can be seen, the entire northern Indian belt - barring Bihar - has shown a spike in atrocities that is higher than the national average. In Bihar (not shown in the chart) as also in neighbouring Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, the number of registered atrocities declined.

It is noticeable that almost all Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states are exhibiting a larger-than-average increase, the exception being Gujarat. Such states include Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. But several Opposition-governed states like Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Maharashtra (led by an Opposition alliance in the period covered) also figure in this list.

While the upper caste-oriented ideology of the Sangh Parivar, including the BJP, can be presumed to contribute to this worrisome situation, it needs to be stressed that caste oppression is systemic and weaved in the fabric of Indian society. It may get aggravated because of government negligence or even connivance, but the state machinery itself is significantly influenced by upper caste biases. On the other hand, Dalit communities are primarily poor, landless, labouring sections, which have been stigmatised and marginalised for centuries, without the wherewithal to resist oppression. Even political empowerment - like having elected representatives -





has not done much to restrain the stranglehold of caste oppression.

### Violence in Relation to Dalit Population

A different dimension of the issue is revealed if one looks at the crime rate, that is, the number of crimes per 1 lakh population of Scheduled Castes (Dalits) in a particular state. This measure is meaningful because the Dalit population varies widely across states; hence comparing the number of atrocities is often misleading. States with a higher Dalit population may have a higher number of cases, which makes its comparison with a state with a small Dalit population untenable. The chart below shows the crime rate for atrocities against Dalits in states with over 40 lakh Dalit population and higher than the country-wide average crime rate of about 25 cases of atrocities per lakh of Dalit population.

As can be seen, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are again the two states with the highest crime rates, almost two and a half times the national average. Other states in this list include Bihar, Telangana, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana (all above 30) and Gujarat (just below 30, at 29.5). Notable states with a relatively high Dalit population but not so high rates of crimes against Dalits include West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Strikingly, the northern belt of states is again featured in this - showing that they are the states with noticeably higher rates of crimes against Dalits.

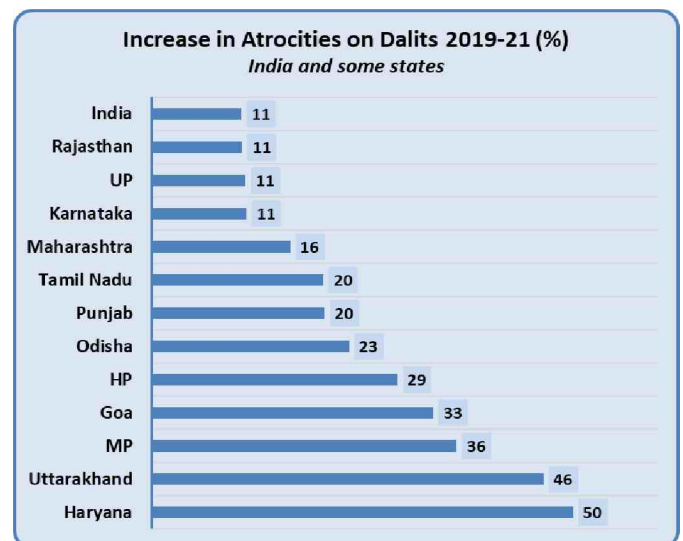
### What are Dominant Political Parties Doing?

It is strange that the oppression of Dalits continues unabated and across the board despite all the talk of Dalit empowerment by dominant parties like the BJP and Congress, as also state-level strong parties like



the Samajwadi Party or the Biju Janata Dal or even the Bahujan Samaj Party that claims to represent the interests of the Dalit population.

While strengthening laws and their diligent and unbiased implementation through the police and courts are necessary steps to be taken at the administrative levels, the situation calls for a much more extensive change in the social and economic realms. Only through such measures - like land to the Dalit landless, jobs, education, housing and medical care - can the material basis for their empowerment be laid. This, of course, needs to be accompanied by a sweeping social campaign to break the practice of discrimination and violence.



The dominant political parties and their multiple affiliates, especially the RSS-BJP cohort, need to be asked why they have not undertaken such a course until now, despite claiming to be electoral and socio-cultural leaders of a large population segment.

*Courtesy: Newsclick*



*Ambedkar Society for South Asia*

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