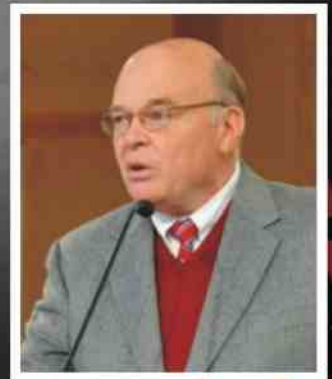


QUARTERLY

# AMBEDKAR VISION

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**Genocide May Happen in India,  
US Congress Told**




*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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## from the Editor

Welcome to the first quarterly magazine of Ambedkar Vision 2022. From the last century to the first two decade of 21st century world has gained significant achievement in the field of health due to the outcome of that life expectancy has increased substantially, especially in developed countries but good progress can also been seen in developing nation. But these humanity development benefits do not reach to all the sections of the society equally. Vulnerable groups like poor, minorities and marginalized people lives are still short. This edition highlights that life expectancies of Adivasis and Dalits in India are significantly lower than upper caste Hindus. New study finds that Adivasis lives four year, Dalit 3 years and Muslim one year less as against upper caste Hindus. A congressional briefing of civil society organizations in US held on 12th January 2022, briefs that people have to actually do something about threat of genocide in India and expressed grave concern about the escalating violence against Muslims, Christians, Dalits and Adivasis in India. Since January many activities concerning minorities, Dalit and other marginalized groups are in the spotlight in South Asia, nearly half of the marginalized in Bangladesh will remain in debt for 5 years for the money they borrowed amid income loss during Corona virus pandemic. The Sri Lankan government and security forces in 2021 suppressed, harassed, threatened human rights defenders, suppressed minority communities also suppressed peaceful protests and undermined democratic institutions. On the occasion of the world day of social justice an interview with right activist Ruth Manorama who dedicated her life for achieving equality and social justice for dalit and other marginalized women in India, both at the national and international level is also included in this edition. In the end thanks for the overwhelming response to Ambedkar Vision as always. We are sure that with this support and encouragement, this magazine will prove to be a vehicle for the delivery of timely and thoughtful information and opinion on the major issues facing us.



# Dalits have shorter lifespan, finds study



**Kalyan Ray**

The life expectancies of Adivasis and Dalits in India are significantly lower than upper-caste Hindus, a new study reported using decade-old government data on 20 million individuals from nine states. The life expectancy differences of more than four years in Adivasis, three years in Dalits and one year among Muslims as against upper-caste Hindus could not be explained on the basis of wealth or environmental exposures, the scientists said, suggesting that the difference may be rooted in discriminatory social practices. With economic status accounting for less than half of the life expectancy gaps, the results highlight the need to address social inequalities in India. The researchers used India's Annual Health Survey data from Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, representing 20 million individuals from 4 million households. They analysed the data using sophisticated statistical tools and compared with other data sets to derive the conclusions. "We observe lower life expectancies at birth among marginalised social groups. Adivasis have the lowest life expectancy among the four groups. Differentials between Adivasis and higher-caste Hindus are 3.7 years for women and almost five years for men," they reported in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA.

"The gap between Dalits and higher-caste Hindus is of similar magnitude - more than three years for both women and men. Muslim life expectancy is about one year less than that of higher-caste Hindu," the trio of Sangita Vyas at the University of Texas, Austin; Payal Hathi at the University of California, Berkeley and Aashish Gupta at the University of Pennsylvania reported. The life

expectancy for Dalits and Adivasis is similar to those of the poorest countries in the world. The overall gaps are similar to the contemporaneous Black-White gap in the USA and the Arab-Jewish gap in Israel. Given that marginalised social groups are also poorer, the question that arises is to what extent are social group differences in life expectancy driven by economic disadvantage.

## **Life expectancy gaps**

The study found that differences in rural residence, wealth and environmental exposures did not fully account for the life expectancy gaps between marginalised social groups and higher-caste Hindus. In the US, observable socio-economic status characteristics explain about three-quarters of the life expectancy gap between Black and White Americans. In India, they explain less than half. "We find that the unexplained gaps are about half a year for Muslim men, one year for Muslim women, more than two years for Adivasi women, Dalit women and Dalit men and more than three years for Adivasi men," they reported.

## **Social disparities**

To find out the reasons behind the unseen other half, the trio suggested digging deep into social disparities and exploitation as addressing the economic concerns alone won't be sufficient to bridge the gap. A 2020 study by scientists at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, also came up with similar findings. The IIPS team also found differences in life expectancy among various social and religious groups, but concluded that such gaps were not linked to socio-economic status.

*Source: Deccan Herald*



# Genocide May Happen in India, US Congress Told



A Congressional briefing was held on January 12 by civil society organisations in the United States 'to brief people who can actually do something about this threat of genocide in India.' The testimony of Supreme Court of India advocate Anas Tanwir is reported here and of entrepreneur and activist Amina Kausar here. Also testifying on video were Gregory Stanton, scholar and president of Genocide Watch, Govind Acharya of Amnesty International USA and Hindus for Human Rights executive director Sunita Viswanath. Viswanath expressed 'grave concern about the escalating violence against religious minorities in India under the rule of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist party the BJP.' She described a spreading net of persecution, where mob attacks and laws to criminalise interfaith relationships are accompanied by a citizenship law which 'discriminates against Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, Women, the LGBTQ community, migrant workers: and threatens to render stateless all of India's 200 million Muslim citizens.'

She spoke of the growing ranks of political prisoners 'whose only crime is that they have exercised their constitutional rights and expressed their dissent about the government and its policies.' Viswanath drew attention to the violence surrounding the dharmasansads in Haridwar

and other towns. 'There were anti-Christian hate incidents across India on Christmas Day. Hindutva mobs entered churches, threatened violence, chanted Jai Shri Ram and in some cases even broke a statue of Lord Jesus. And on New Year's Day over a hundred Muslim women (and we'll be hearing from one today) woke up to find that their photograph was part of a horrific online auction.' Coming to the 'open calls for genocide in Haridwar, one of the holiest cities in India for Hindus,' Viswanath described the US connections of Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati, who is for the moment in jail. She said Yati is a priest at the Dasna Devi temple in Ghaziabad 'who has on multiple occasions called for the extermination of Muslims and Islam. Last year this very priest assaulted a 14 year old Muslim boy for drinking water from a tap at the temple he runs and his only comment was that the beating he gave the young boy should not have been videotaped.' 'Unfortunately Yati also has American connections. Last year a 501(c) (3) nonprofit in the US, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, announced they would be holding a series of events with Yati as the main speaker. It was only after Hindus for Human Rights launched a public campaign calling attention to his Islamophobic statements that this Hindu group cancelled their events with him,' said Viswanath. She documented



some of the 'explicit calls for genocide against Muslims' at the parliament in Haridwar and the official BJP presence there. "Like in Myanmar, the police here, the politicians here, the army and every Hindu must pick up weapons and we will have to conduct this cleanliness drive (safaiabhiyan). There is no solution apart from this." - Swami Prabodhananda Giri, president of the Hindu Raksha Sena. "If the governments do not listen to our demand for a Hindu State, we will wage a war far scarier than the 1857 revolt." - Swami Anandswaroop Maharaj.

"Nothing is possible without weapons. If you want to eliminate their population then kill them. Be ready to kill them and be ready to go to jail. Even if a hundred of us are ready to kill two million of them, then we will be victorious and go to jail." - Pooja Shakun Pandey, general secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha.

Here Viswanathan added, 'This organisation is more than a 100 years old and its most infamous president Vinayak Savarkar was once accused of having masterminded Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. The Hindu Mahasabha regularly organises public memorials for Gandhi's assassin.' Asking what steps the Government of India has taken in response, Viswanath said, 'Many of the speakers have close ties with India's ruling party the BJP. The event was attended by BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay.. Last year Upadhyay was arrested by the Delhi Police for organising an anti-Muslim rally' in Delhi. 'The event was also attended by Udit Tyagi, leader from the BJPs Mahila Morcha or women's front.' 'Unsurprisingly, weeks have passed and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been silent. The Deputy Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Keshav Prasad Maurya.. said, "They have the right to say what they said in the dharamsansad. Nobody is saying anything wrong. They say what they think is right."

Viswanathan also recalled a video that did the rounds after the sansad. 'Some Muslim leaders registered a complaint against the genocidal statements made in the conference. In response, some of the speakers in the conference went to a police station to file a counter-complaint. In a video that has now gone viral, they are seen laughing alongside a police officer.' In the video, Pooja Shakun Pandey a.k.a. Sadhvi Annapoorna then told the police officer that he should send a message that he is not biased. She said, "You are a public officer and you should treat everybody equally. That is what we expect from you. May you always win." In response, Yati Narsinghan and Saraswati, who was the main organiser of the dharma sansad event in Haridwar responded, "Nishpakshkyun? Ladkahamari hi tarafhoga" - "Why unbiased? This guy will be on our side." And the room burst into laughter. Viswanath concluded by specifying



what Hindus for Human Rights want from the US government. 'The speeches made in Haridwar are an explicit call for genocide against Muslims by religious leaders who are close to the ruling party, the government. We call on the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to condemn the genocidal and anti-Muslim statements made in the presence of officials from India's ruling party and also to point out that these gatherings and statements violate the Genocide Convention and India's own Constitution.' 'We call on US senators to advance the Combating International Islamophobia Act, by establishing a special envoy office at the US State Department to monitor and combat international Islamophobia. This Act has already passed in the House and now we need it to pass in the State.' Viswanath cited a November early warning report by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum that uses risk-analysis methods to estimate that after Pakistan (15.2%) India has the highest likelihood (14.4%) of a genocide being perpetrated in the coming two years. Recalling the Clinton administration's inaction before the Rwanda genocide she said: 'We can't let the Biden administration repeat the mistakes of the past. Surveys show that the majority of Indian Americans believe that Hindu Nationalism poses a serious threat to India. The Hindutva extremists that gathered in Haridwar do not represent all Hindus or all Indians. We hope that all of you who are here representing US legislators will speak out loudly before it is too late.'

Govind Acharya, India specialist for Amnesty International, said the clutch of dharamsansads since December 'should not be seen in isolation. The Haridwarsansad 'was premised on Hindus facing a supposed existential threat from Muslims (who by the way make up about 14% of India's population) and the conference was filled with calls to carry out large-scale massacres of Muslims in order to institute Hindu supremacy over India.' He said these calls were accompanied by attacks on Christian Indians with the BJP involved. In Chhattisgarh in September, BJP workers conducted anti-Christian marches in which they belted out, "Converters! Let's beat them with shoes!" Later, that happened. In fact a member of the BJP youth



cell in Chhattisgarh, Rahul Rao, openly bragged of slapping a pastor "5 or 6 times," further saying that "it was immensely satisfying." He said that anti-conversion laws have been strengthened in India 'to criminalise the free expression of religious faith' and drew attention to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which guarantees everyone's right 'to have a religion, to have no religion, or most importantly in this context, to change our religion.' Acharya said the speakers at the sansad 'openly urged these Hindus to emulate.. Violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.. and then they boasted about this call to action in the days afterwards in the media.' Calling this 'illustrative of the atmosphere of bigotry that pervades these groups,' he said the B- Bai app that surfaced days later was only one among 'hundreds of examples of the casual dehumanising of Muslims and other minorities in India.' Acharya warned of the under-reaction from what he called 'the Indian mainstream' and 'Indian society'.

While 'some in the Indian mainstream are dismissing this sickening act as a prank,' said Acharya, 'to view it in isolation really allows Indian society, even more well-meaning parts of Indian society, to ignore the systematic nature of this hate and bigotry.' He reminded US legislators that 'We are just a few weeks before the 20th anniversary of the horrific violence in Gujarat'. Acharya cited The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in India by political scientist Paul Brass which argues the 2002 violence was 'a methodical anti-Muslim pogrom carried out with exceptionally brutal coordination.' He then drew attention to the targeted state violence in Delhi from December 2019 to March 2020 that accompanied the popular protests against the CAA. 'This really bigoted law specifically discriminates on the basis of religion by excluding Muslims seeking citizenship,' he explained. 'This CAA passage led to widespread but peaceful protests. However four days after passage the Delhi Police entered the Jamia Milia Islamia, a very well-known and prominent university in Delhi and brutally beat up and sexually harassed student protestors.'

'Then on January 5, 2020 a mass mob entered the Jawaharlal Nehru University, laying siege for more than two hours, yelling "Kill the anti-nationals!" and "The traitors must be shot dead!"' Then on January 27, in an election rally in Delhi in response to a protest site led by Muslim women in Shaheen Bagh.. the Union Home Minister said that the BJP can "keep the country safe and prevent incidents like Shaheen Bagh." And on that same day Union minister [of state] finance Anurag Thakur encouraged crowds to yell "Shoot the traitors to the nation!" The next day another BJP member of parliament Parvesh Verma said that protestors from Shaheen Bagh would enter homes and "rape your sisters and daughters and kill them," and further promised "not to leave even



one mosque standing after BJP's election in Delhi," Acharya recalled. He concluded with the NRC, drawing a parallel between Amit Shah and Rwanda. When the Supreme-Court monitored registry was completed in Assam, '1.9 million people in Assam were excluded. That means that they may end up without any citizenship despite decades of residence in India. And when you combine it with that bigoted CAA, the NRC is weaponised against Muslims in India.' There are camps in Assam that are now housing those who have lost their citizenship. Because of the bigotry of these laws, India stands to create the biggest statelessness crisis in the world, which will create unimaginable suffering - and of course the vast majority of those affected will be Muslims.'

Genocide Watch president Gregory Stanton thanked the organisers for the opportunity 'to brief people who can actually do something about this threat of genocide in India.' He said his organisation which has accurately predicted genocides for decades 'has been speaking out warning of genocide in India since 2002, when riots and massacres in Gujarat occurred that killed over 1,000 Muslims.' At that time the Chief Minister of Gujarat was Narendra Modi and he did nothing. In fact there's a lot of evidence that he actually encouraged those massacres. Now of course Narendra Modi has become Prime Minister of India, and under his BJP's policies he has used anti Muslim, Islamophobic rhetoric in fact to build his political base. And two of those specific ways has been the revocation of the autonomous status of Kashmir, which is the one state in India that is majority Muslim - and that revocation was largely aimed at restoring Hindu domination in Kashmir. The Hindu Pandits had left in 1990, as a result frankly of violence against them, but this revocation of autonomous status was specifically aimed at restoring Hinduism and Hindu domination in Kashmir.

'The second thing that the Modi government did was pass the Citizenship Amendment Act, which was aimed at especially Muslims. Because it gave specific favourable status to refugees who had come from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh who were of certain religious



groups - but the one group that was excluded was Muslims. 'This act was specifically aimed at the Muslims who had fled Bangladesh during the Bangladesh genocide and civil war in 1971 and had settled in Assam. And there were probably 3 million of those people and they had become regular citizens and so forth of India. 'Well, this Act required then a census overseen by the Supreme Court of India and the people who were brought in in the census had to prove that they were citizens of India before 1971 - through documentation. 'Now, a lot of people don't have that kind of documentation of course - I mean how many people have papers sitting around in their top drawers that can prove they were citizens before 1971? 'So the people who were targeted here were these people who had come from Bangladesh, mostly Muslims. And the idea is to declare them to be essentially foreigners and therefore to allow their deportation. 'Now we have seen deportations before very recently, haven't we? In 2017 that is exactly what the Myanmar government did to the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. They first of all declared them non-citizens, in the 1982 law that was passed in Myanmar that stripped the citizenship off the Rohingya.

'And then they expelled them, deported them, in effect, through violence and also through genocide - because it wasn't just forced displacement, which is a crime against humanity, it was also genocide, because they killed well over 10,000 Rohingya. 'And remember that the Genocide Convention doesn't just cover genocides in whole, it also covers genocides in part - "it is specifically aimed at the destruction in whole or in part of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." And that is exactly what the Myanmar government did in Myanmar against the Rohingya. 'Well, what we are now facing is a very similar kind of plot if you will - the aim here is essentially to extend this census and so forth all the way across India and the people who will be the victims of this are the 200 million Muslims who live in India.

'A lot of people forget that India has more Muslims than Pakistan and they have been part of Indian society for centuries, in fact millennia and so it's really not - the idea of India as a Hindu nation, which is the Hindutva movement, is contrary to the history of India and it is also contrary to the Indian Constitution. 'The Indian Constitution is specifically set up to make India a secular country, to allow for equality between all religions - it was not aimed at making a Hindu nation. And in fact during the first years of India's existence under the Congress party that secularity was defended. 'We should be aware that genocide is not an event. It is a process. It develops. That is what Genocide Watch is: what we try to do is to try and warn about genocide. We don't just declare this is a genocide: because I'd say right now it would be

very hard to say that there is a genocide in Kashmir or there is a genocide in Assam. 'What there are however, are the early signs and processes of genocide in both of those places and we believe that is what the Haridwar meeting was especially aimed at inciting. 'Incitement to genocide is a crime under the Genocide Convention and it is law in India that incitement to genocide is illegal. That law must be enforced. There are also other laws in India that could be enforced against the leaders of this. 'And yet Mr Modi has not spoken out against that violence and he has said "Oh it is not my responsibility, it's up to the state, up to the Uttarakhand state." The point however is that as the leader of India he has a moral obligation to denounce this kind of hatred, this kind of hate speech, that specifically calls for the killing of Muslims. 'The Genocide Watch model of genocide process, which is the ten stages of genocide (I should really have called it the ten processes of genocide) begins with classification. It begins with trying to exclude people from citizenship. 'It also includes dehumanisation: calling people terrorists or separatists or criminals, the kinds of language that was used in the meeting at Haridwar and has been used by the Indian Government also against Muslims. 'It is polarisation, which includes this anti-Muslim hatred and it is the kind of preparation that we are seeing right now where this dehumanisation is being preached. 'So we are warning that genocide could very well happen in India. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum is right about that. 'One of the first genocides that I predicted way back in 1989 was in Rwanda, when I lived there and I could see from the ID cards, where it identifies Tutsis and Hutu and Twa and so forth that these cards could be used for genocide. 'And when I asked the president of the Supreme Court, who was a Hutu himself, Couldn't you outlaw this? Making these ID cards not have these ethnic identifications on them? And he said No, we don't have judicial review here. So you're going to have to talk to the president. 'So I got an appointment to talk to President Habyarimana. I went in, we talked, I said you know, these ID cards could be used for genocide. At that point - and I said you have to get this off of the cards - a sort of mask went down over his face, because he didn't want to hear that. 'It turned out he was of course a leader of some of the genocidal massacres that had occurred earlier in that country. 'But as we left that meeting, I said Mr President, if you don't do something to prevent genocide in your country, there is going to be a genocide here in five years. 'That was in 1989. The genocide developed, the hate speech developed, all the early warning signs developed - and as we know, 800 thousand Tutsis and other Rwandans were murdered in 1994.

'We cannot let that happen in India.'

*Source: The Citizen*





# Could BAMCEF be the needed answer to RSS?

Suraj Yengde

People across the political spectrum and ideology have started to wonder about the future of post-Modi India. The inept rule of the current government has dismayed opponents and some supporters as well. Partymen as well as allies of the BJP have voiced their dramatically changed opinion on the shortcomings of the government. However, almost everyone has kept their criticism to only two people - Narendra Modi and Amit Shah - while largely accepting with frustration the RSS and its growing appeal.

**“There is no getting around the RSS,” is the common consensus.**

What is the RSS and how much influence does it hold? A personal secretary of a senior BJP minister who is a Dalit tells me the government is unable to bring desired changes in policies, with every part of its apparatus manned by an RSS handler. This was further proved by several encounters I had with the BJP government in Maharashtra. A senior strategist who had helped the BJP come to power and now finds it incompatible with his liberal Gandhian standards told me the RSS has long-term plans. So how does one take on an organisation that boosts the abusive traditional norms of Varnashrama Dharma? Is it possible to invent a new model that can challenge a behemoth like it? Or is the RSS dilutable, even open to reform?

Rights-based organisations and liberal Left viewpoints have just scratched the surface in taking on the RSS - a style that perfectly suits the Sangh. The usual clamour against the RSS is on its stand against Muslims and for a Hindu nation. This political minoritisation has granted fresh life to the values of the RSS. That is why, whenever anyone critiques it with elite textbook definitions, they add to the support base of the RSS. To counter the RSS, we need an organisation that is as sophisticated, much sharper in vision, astute in political manoeuvring and grassroots-based. It needs octopus-like organs that are extendable and malleable, with a firm head. The idea of Hindu, Hindustan and Vedic Brahmanism does not need to be defeated but simply reinterpreted. This work has been in progress since the times of Charvak, the Buddha, to the modern-era humanitarians such as Jyotiba Phule, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram.

The BAMCEF (Backward and Minority Community Employees' Federation) was formed in 1978 particularly for the purpose of ushering a democracy of the Bahujan - or the majority - rather than a theocracy of the minority of Brahmins and allied castes. But the appeasers of identity politics failed to understand the clear-eyed vision of the BAMCEF and reduced it to being just a Dalit body. Years of work by the admirers of Phule and Ambedkar had led to the body that is much like the Satyashodhak Samaj, Samata Sainik Dal, Independent Labour Party and Scheduled Caste Federation. Lessons from the past and consideration of the future went into forming a body comprising hardworking farmers, labourers, working-class Dalits, Adivasis, Shudras and other non-oppressive castes.

With 39 different offshoot organisations trying to dismantle the social structure through education and agitation, the BAMCEF has shown what it takes to humble the arrogance of casteist supremacists. Kanshi Ram was the most feared man in Indian politics and the BAMCEF was his surety, providing an arsenal of trained and devoted cadres, working to uproot Brahminism and Hindutva. The BAMCEF claims to have a presence in over 600 districts across India. Its organisational structure is tight-knit and difficult to penetrate, as they remain suspicious of the enemy trying to snoop or infiltrate. That is why very little is known about them or written about in the media. Yet, from organising protests to state- and national-level seminars, it remains a force.

It is important to note that the BSP's ascent and expansion are primarily due to the backbone provided by the BAMCEF. The mother of political organising that does not indulge in politicking, it rather offers intellectual support to the party. Will the liberal, progressive centrists, Leftists, unionists and LGBTIQ+ trust in a social organisation that can rival the RSS? Even in the times of the Buddha, caste ego could not be shattered completely; that is why the Sakya Republic was decimated. The world needs ideas of love and compassion. Politics needs action. People need to embrace the delicacy of both.

*Source: The Indian Express*





## Sri Lanka: Minorities, Activists Targeted



(New York) - The Sri Lankan government in 2021 suppressed minority communities, harassed activists and undermined democratic institutions, Human Rights Watch said today in its World Report 2022. The government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa failed to carry out legal reforms promised to its international partners and blocked accountability for grave violations, including past war crimes. "President Gotabaya Rajapaksa seems determined to reverse past rights improvements and protect those implicated in serious abuses," said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "While promising reforms and justice to deflate international criticism, his administration has stepped up suppression of minority communities." In the 752-page World Report 2022, its 32nd edition, Human Rights Watch reviews human rights practices in nearly 100 countries. Executive Director Kenneth Roth challenges the conventional wisdom that autocracy is ascendent. In country after country, large numbers of people have recently taken to the streets, even at the risk of being arrested or shot, showing that the appeal of democracy remains strong. Meanwhile, autocrats are finding it more difficult to manipulate elections in their favor. Still, he says, democratic leaders must do a better job of meeting national and global challenges and of making sure that democracy delivers on its promised dividends.

The Rajapaksa government has disregarded its own pledges of reform and continued to target minority Tamils and Muslims. The government uses the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the country's long-abused counterterrorism law and policies that threaten religious freedom and minority land rights. In March 2021 the United Nations Human Rights Council mandated the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect and prepare evidence of grave crimes

committed in Sri Lanka for use in future prosecutions. But a resolution before the Sri Lankan parliament would drop human rights investigations begun under the previous administration. Additionally, the Rajapaksa government's appointment of people with poor rights records to independent bodies, including the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and the Office of Missing Persons, have undermined their credibility and independence.

Throughout the year, Sri Lankan security forces harassed and threatened human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and the families of victims of past abuses and suppressed peaceful protests. Security agencies, including the police Terrorism Investigation Division, intrusively monitored and intimidated civil society groups and interfered in their funding sources on the pretext of combatting "terrorist financing." In June the European Parliament passed a resolution deploring the Sri Lankan government's intensifying repression. The European Commission engaged in human rights talks with the government in which it renewed pledges to reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act. An assessment of Sri Lanka's human rights record and its eligibility for continued trading privileges that are contingent upon respect for human rights, is expected from the commission in early 2022.

The government struggled to protect people from Covid-19 as cases surged several times throughout the year, which contributed to widespread economic distress, but a military-controlled response to the pandemic led to further serious rights violations. The police killed at least three people while purportedly enforcing Covid-19 lockdown regulations.

*Source: Human Right Watch*





*Ram Puniyani*

## Promoting Amity in the Times of Hate

Last month has seen a series of incidents which are very disturbing, to say the least. They have been promoting hatred, promoting misogyny, targeting Muslim women and abusing the 'Father of the nation'. Along with this we also came to know the immaculate investigation by The Wire, which tells us the frightening Tek Fog app capable of creating a storm of Hate against sections of society.

In the Dharm Sansad held at Haridwar (Uttarakhand), organized by Yati Narsinghanand among others, lot of saffron clad spewed venom against the minority community to the extent of giving the call for genocide. Yati now in judicial custody stated that "...if anyone takes on the responsibility to become the Prabhakaran of the Hindus, I will give Rs 1 crore and if he continues for one year, I will raise at least Rs 100 crore to give." Sadhvi Annapurna was no less on spreading hate. She called for murder of 20 lakh people (Muslims) and defended it by saying that it is for our religion while saying "yes, it's our duty". She ended by saying, "We will kill whoever is against our religion".

It is same Sadhvi who was earlier Poonam Shakun Pandey and had pumped three bullets into effigy of Gandhi a couple of years ago. In the same meeting Johny come lately, Jitendra Tyagi also indulged in hate against his earlier religion and he was the first one to be arrested. Along with this we have seen the Sudarshan channel's Suresh Chavhanke giving the oath to youth 'to kill and die' for our religion. In an event organized in Delhi by the Hindu Yuva Vahini he administered the oath to nearly 250 youth. "We all, take this oath, give our word, resolve that until our life's last breath, we, will remain prepared to fight, to die, if necessary, to kill for the sake of establishing a Hindu rashtra in this country and to make sure that it persists and that it

expands in the future."

Yet another frightening news was about Bulli Bai app. Few months ago Sulli Deals app was there. Now Bulli Bai app, humiliating the Muslim women who are raising the voice for rights, dignity and security of minorities were put on auction. That's not all The Wire, investigation, running over last few years revealed that BJP has one Tek Fog App, which can create propaganda at massive scale in short time. Operators have used the app to drive pro-BJP and Hindutva propaganda on Twitter, among other social media platforms.

The Hate speeches and these hateful activities have gone mostly unpunished. While Bulli Bai app makers have been arrested. The police did not take any proper action against the Hardwar Sansad. Only Jitendra Tyagi was arrested initially. With the intervention of Supreme Court, the police came into action to arrest Yati. Retired Naval Chiefs in their letter to the President have called for firm action against these Hate crimes. The alumnus and students/faculty of IIMs/IITs has drawn the attention of the government to the vicious atmosphere and the need to talk against this and to take suitable action.

The unrestrained statements and utterances of a scattered groups, which identify with Hindu communal nationalist ideology seems to have been unleashed as a plan to polarize the society. There is a global concern over what is happening in India. Amnesty International USA, Genocide Watch and 17 other human rights organizations in the USA expressed concern at the plight of Muslims in India during the Congressional Briefing. Experts spoke about the fear that country is likely to witness mass violence and massacres of Muslims if the situation worsens.

Ruling party's deafening silence is not surprising. We know that our Prime Minister very vocal most of the times seals his leaps when a Rohith Vemula is





subjected to institutional murder, or Mohammad Akhlaq is lynched for storing food, which is supposed to be beef. The deliberate silence and hesitant action is well designed to ensure the impact of the hate speech, dangerous speech and call for killings achieve a result by floating in the society for long time.

Dharm Sansad was a concept floated by RSS affiliate VHP; it was Dharm Sansad which had initially raised the issue of Ram Temple, which led to Babri demolition and intense violence followed that. The root of the 'Hate other' by now has travelled a long distance. Starting from the Shakha bauddhik where Muslim kings are demonized and values of Manusmriti are glorified, we have come a long way. Over last nine decades multiple organizations have been given birth to take forward this agenda.

With the coming of Social media and new techniques, the teenagers and young students have picked up the technology in the direction in which their minds have been tuned due to the barrage of propaganda. One recalls Shambhulal Regar, who was intensely involved in social media and went on to brutally kill Afrazul on the issue of love jihad. The four youth arrested for the Bulli Bai apps are a tip of the iceberg. The Tek Fog app is the new propaganda tool which can divide the society in irreparable way.

While the hesitant police is reluctant to touch the saffron clads and if forced to arrests them put some minor clauses leaving the escape route for them. Can PILs in Supreme Court save the country, riddled by such politics of hate duly promoted by the deliberate silence of ruling authorities?

While one can pin point the source of this Hate-call for Genocide, one also feels the pain that there has been no organization on the ground to promote the values of fraternity cultivated during freedom movement. There are no effective movements and initiatives which can carry the humanism of Bhakti-Sufi among the diverse Indian communities.

While one can hope that we may have a ruling party at the center which is sensitive to the give assurance of security to minorities, action against the likes of Yati or the youth making Bulli apps, or effective counter against the wretched use of Tek fog, we do need social movements to promote amity among diverse communities through cultural-educational mechanisms. Nothing short of a social movement to promote Fraternity-Amity can ensure the peace and harmony in the society. These are the essential prerequisites of social and political-economic development of the country.

*Source: Sabrang India*



# NCRC launches policy brief on forced conversions

Myra Imran

The National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC) on Monday launched its first seminal policy brief on forced conversions - signaling the Commission and the government's commitment to delivering child rights, including protection of minors from minority and marginalized groups. 'NCRC's Policy Brief on Forced Conversions with Recommendations After Analysis of the Arzoo Case' touches upon the gaps in existing laws. The brief also puts forward recommendations for specific interventions by various stakeholders to curb incidents of forced conversions in light of the rights of minors and religious minorities. The Commission recommended stronger policy frameworks and increased access to law and justice in accordance with international commitments and the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973. To achieve these, the NCRC asked the media personnel, Government and all the relevant stakeholders to recommit themselves to serve and deliver basic human dignity extending to all minorities and children in Pakistan.

Underscoring the importance of this research, the Chairperson NCRC, Afshan Tehseen Bajwa said, "The purpose of this policy brief on forced conversion is to not only bring attention to the scale of the issue but also highlight that the State, relevant authorities, federal and provincial governments have the responsibility to protect from organisations and persons trying to coerce/exploit vulnerable minors. In addition, the State also has the responsibility to provide unbiased and complete access to law and justice resources in cases of abduction and forced conversions." It is important to note that Pakistan has ratified the United Nations Child Rights Convention, of which Article 14(1) states that state parties need to respect the right of children to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Pakistan is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "the right to freedom of religion includes the right to change one's religion and that no one shall be subject to coercion to change their religion." Pakistan has also signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), of which Article 16 confirms the right of every woman to enter into marriage "only with their free and full consent."

Iqbal Detho, member Sindh NCRC, emphasised that the issue of forced conversions is faced by all religious minorities in Pakistan. He emphasized Pakistan's numerous positive obligations to ensure that Covenant rights are protected by the State. He outlined the issues related to lack of access to justice and presented the Commission's recommendations - including, the role of government and legislative bodies; engagement with law enforcement agencies and judicial bodies; mandates of national and

provincial human rights institutes; and, the partnership with civil society and media for awareness-raising. He said that minority inclusion also entails religious freedom so that marginalized groups are not pressured to give up their unique identities and beliefs. Delivering minority rights is directly related to child rights and child protection where minors of religious minorities are safe. Ensuring minority protection and preserving minority identity creates a tolerant social and judicial environment, governance and frameworks, leading to a just society where human rights, child rights and minority rights are protected.

Executive Director Parliamentarian's Commissions for Human Rights, Shafique Chaudhry; Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights, Lal Chand Malhi and National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) Member Minority, Manzoor Masih, reiterated the need for engaging policymakers and parliamentarians to build momentum on this issue. They were of the view that it is imperative to build a critical mass of parliamentarians engaged in Freedom of Religion and Belief issues, apprise them of ongoing policy research and build their capacity to ensure effective protection of minority and child rights by legislative and political influence. Executive Director Parliamentarian's Commissions for Human Rights, Shafique Chaudhry pointed out that majority of the forced conversion cases are of underage girls from religious minorities, which inextricably ties the issue with child rights and child protection. In addition, Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights, Lal Chand Malhi, highlighted the dearth of legislation regarding this matter and data collection on forced conversions.

Deputy Representative Unicef Pakistan, Dr Inoussa Kabore, acknowledged the importance of having a National Human Rights Institute such as the NCRC for safeguarding human rights. He said, "Unicef is working with the Government of Pakistan and the NCRC to implement child protection legislative frameworks in various provinces of Pakistan. This mechanism coordinates a government response to protect children from abuse - sexual, physical, emotional - and neglect and forced conversions. Unicef will continue to support the Government for implementation, service delivery and recommendations."

Echoing similar sentiments, Ahmed Quraishi, journalist and activist, said, "Forced conversions violate multiple Pakistani laws and international conventions, from rights of child to human rights, human dignity and freedom of belief." In order to enhance human rights, governments, judicial and law bodies and the civil society should foster synergies to ensure the freedom of religion or belief.

Source: The News





# India: Dangerous Backsliding on Rights



Indian authorities intensified their crackdown on activists, journalists and other critics of the government using politically motivated prosecutions in 2021, Human Rights Watch said today in its World Report 2022. Tens of thousands of people died during a surge in Covid-19 cases, with the government failing to provide adequate health care to those in need. The clampdown on dissent was facilitated by the draconian counterterrorism law, tax raids, foreign funding regulations and charges of financial irregularities. Attacks against religious minorities were carried out with impunity under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Hindu nationalist government. BJP supporters engaged in mob attacks or threatened violence, while several states adopted laws and policies to target minority communities, particularly Christians, Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis. “The Indian authorities have given up any appearance of tolerating dissent and are using the machinery of the state to silence critics,” said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “At the same time, the BJP government has created an atmosphere in which minorities feel unsafe, at risk of assault by ruling party supporters.”

In the 752-page World Report 2022, its 32nd edition, Human Rights Watch reviews human rights practices in nearly 100 countries. Executive Director Kenneth Roth challenges the conventional wisdom that autocracy is ascendant. In country after country, large numbers of people have recently taken to the streets, even at the risk of being arrested or shot, showing that the appeal of democracy remains strong. Meanwhile, autocrats are finding it more difficult to manipulate elections in their favor. Still, he says, democratic leaders must do a better job of meeting national and global challenges and of making sure that democracy delivers on its promised dividends.

The death of a jailed 84-year-old tribal rights activist, Stan Swamy, in July was emblematic of the ongoing persecution of rights activists. Swamy was among 16 prominent human rights defenders arrested on politically motivated terrorism charges related to an incident of caste violence in Maharashtra state in 2017. In November the police in Tripura state filed terrorism cases against four lawyers for conducting a fact-finding investigation into communal violence in October in which Hindu mobs attacked mosques and Muslim-

owned properties. The police also filed terrorism cases against 102 social media accounts and detained two journalists who reported on the violence, on charges of “spreading communal disharmony.”

The authorities continued to press charges against numerous students and activists, including under counterterrorism and sedition laws, for protesting citizenship law amendments that discriminate against Muslims. BJP leaders accused farmers, many of them from the minority Sikh community, of having a separatist agenda in protesting amendments to farm laws. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described people participating in various peaceful protests as “parasites,” while party supporters, including a government minister's son, allegedly attacked farmers in a hit-and-run incident involving an official convoy. The authorities also arrested a climate activist for allegedly editing a document providing information on the protests and issued warrants against two others. Several United Nations human rights experts raised concerns over government measures to restrict the protests. In November, following a year of protests, the BJP government finally decided to repeal the farm laws. The Indian news website The Wire, as part of the international collaborative Pegasus Project, reported that Pegasus spyware, developed and sold by Israeli company NSO Group was used to target Indian human rights defenders, journalists and opposition politicians. The company asserts that it sells the spyware “only to authorized governmental agencies.” The government also enacted new rules that allow for greater control over online content, threaten to weaken encryption and would seriously undermine rights to privacy and freedom of expression.

In February the government lifted an 18-month internet shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir imposed in August 2019 when it revoked the state's constitutional autonomy and split it into two federally governed territories. Journalists in Kashmir faced increased harassment and some were arrested on terrorism charges. UN experts raised concerns over abuses in Kashmir, including arbitrary detention of journalists, alleged custodial killings and a “broader pattern of systematic infringements of fundamental rights used against the local population.”

*Source: Human Rights Watch*



# Cal State Adds Caste to Anti Discrimination Policy: Dalit Group Happy; Several Faculty Say Unfair

Meanwhile, in the immediate aftermath of CSU announcing its intention as part of a collective bargaining agreement with CSU faculty, over 80 of those faculty members wrote a blistering letter to the CSU Board of Trustees opposing the move. The California State University is a public university system with 23 campuses and eight off-campus centers. CSU is the largest four-year public university system in the United States.

Equality Lab's executive director Thenmozhi Soundararajan, in a press release called CSU's decision a historic win, and credited "the tireless efforts of the student-led interfaith and inter-caste initiative." Noting that "the movement for caste equity in the United States is growing exponentially as caste-oppressed Americans and allies bravely organize for our rights," she added her organization looks forward "to working with CSU campuses to help implement this historic win." In the press release, Manmit Singh, a student at San Francisco State University said the victory "has shown the power of an interfaith, inter-caste and multiracial coalition." Meanwhile, Dr. Praveen Sinha, Professor of Accountancy at California State University, Long Beach noted, "The addition of caste is a misguided overreach given the existence of comprehensive policies which already protect against various forms of discrimination." He said, "We cannot but oppose the unique risk that CSU's move puts on us as they add a category that is only associated with people of Indian descent, such as myself and thousands of other faculty and students in the CSU system. It is going to create divisions where they simply do not exist."

"As a faculty member of Indian origin, I am well aware that



discrimination is a daily reality for many students of varied backgrounds and there is a robust mechanism of addressing all such complaints under existing laws and CSU policy," said Dr. Sunil Kumar, Professor of Engineering at San Diego State University. "But this policy change has been made in the absence of any scientifically reliable evidence or data. Rather than redressing discrimination, it will actually cause discrimination by unconstitutionally singling out and targeting Hindu faculty of Indian and South Asian descent as members of a suspect class because of deeply entrenched, false stereotypes about Indians, Hindus and caste. We are disappointed that the CSU faculty association championed this move without holding discussions with the concerned faculty even when three professors had alerted them way back in May 2021. In their meeting with these three professors on January 14 this year, some of the CFA leaders admitted that they did not understand the complexity of caste and that they dropped the ball." The faculty members expressed deep concern that, as written, the caste policy would specifically deny Hindu, Indian and South Asian faculty equal protection and due process. There are more than 600 Cal State faculty of Indian and South Asian origin who would be rendered vulnerable should the collective bargaining agreement be passed as currently written noted the Hindu American Foundation in a press release. Lawyers at HAF, also sent a letter to CSU Board of Trustees, the CSU Office of General Counsel, CSU Chancellor and president of the California Faculty Association, on behalf of CSU faculty. The faculty petition points to comprehensive survey by the Carnegie Endowment, "Social Realities of Indian Americans: Results From the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey," which found that while discrimination on the basis of color is common for Indian Americans, caste discrimination is exceedingly rare.

*Source: India West*





# Marginalised to be in debt for 5 years

Mustafizur Rahman

The coronavirus pandemic forced nearly half of the marginalised people in Bangladesh to borrow to just to get by amid income losses, according to a study of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs Bangladesh released yesterday. And they are likely to remain indebted for next four to five years as their incomes are yet to recover fully, it said. "We have found that four out of five households have experienced financial hardship due to the Covid-19 crisis. People living in the coastal belts, in slums, persons with disability and micro, small and medium enterprises suffered more than others," said Estiaque Bari, a senior lecturer of the economics department at East West University. He shared the findings of the study at the conference on "Bangladesh emerging from the pandemic: coping experience and policy choice", jointly organised by the Citizen's Platform for SDGs Bangladesh and the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) at the Brac Centre Inn. The survey, conducted among 1,600 marginalised households in February this year, found that seven out of 10 households suffered either job losses or temporary shutdown of business in the early phase of the pandemic. The rejoining rate was 97 per cent and they were mostly involved in low-paid informal sectors services, said Bari. Average withdrawal of savings per household was Tk 34,460 and people in the haor, coastal and slum areas and the dalits and the returnee migrant workers had to dip into their savings. And as the income has not risen enough, the incidence of overlapping membership at micro-finance institutions for loans and multiple borrowing are likely to increase, according to the study.

Bari said a dedicated relief programme should be taken for the marginalised communities throughout the pandemic period to safeguard their income loss. He recommended the government provide soft loans to these marginalised households through local government bodies to speed up their recovery. "The economy will need a recovery package 2.0 with distributive justice," said Towfiqul Islam Khan, senior research fellow at the CPD, referring to an advanced version of the stimulus package. The economist stressed the need for supporting the marginalised people at a time of rising prices of daily essentials and considering their struggle. He said most of the macroeconomic correlates are in the recovery trajectory but at a different pace.

"Macroeconomic stability is no longer in a comfortable state because of rising commodity prices fueled by both international prices and unfavourable government policy, significant negative overall balance of payments leading to reduced foreign exchange reserves and the volatile exchange rate." The government's fiscal space has squeezed, according to Khan. "The global environment is still uncertain and volatile - fragmented economic recovery and demand in the large economies, steep rise of commodity prices, the emergence of new (omicron) Covid-19 variant." At this stage, a targeted flow of fiscal resources to the more vulnerable households and relatively smaller and informal enterprises will have more aggregate domestic demand augmenting

effect and protect the marginalised groups, he said. Prof Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling, said social recovery was still slow. He said the stimulus package suffered from the problem of financing, management and monitoring. "We have not seen any monitoring yet." In the opening session, MA Mannan, planning minister, said amidst the pandemic, Bangladesh had done better than many other countries like India and China in terms of growth. "Exports have already rebounded. Besides, the agriculture sector has showed good performance."

Regarding the vulnerable health sector, he said the government was working to modernise and strengthen around 15,000 community clinics to provide improved health care services to the people. Now, at least 35 types of medicines are provided at free of cost to the patients from these clinics, he said, adding that training will be provided to build up the skills of health service providers. The poverty situation has improved a lot than earlier stages, said the minister. Sultana Kamal, a core group member of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, said there was data anarchy. "So, on what basis will the policy-makers take decision to overcome the situation?"

She, however, lauded the government as the pandemic issue was given attention in the 8th five-year plan. Sudipto Mukerjee, resident representative of the UNDP Bangladesh, appreciated the remedial measures of the government, which managed the Covid-19 fallouts. Even the economic resilience of Bangladesh has surprised many developed countries as the country achieved a good growth of GDP during the pandemic, he said, emphasising investment in the social development sector. Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the CPD, called for robust investment in the health sector to set up physical infrastructures and develop the skills of physicians and nurses.

She called for continuing the subsidised incentive for SMEs as most of the entrepreneurs have not received loans. She stressed the need for increasing the percentage of women in economic activities to 50 per cent from existing 36 per cent to accelerate the growth of GDP. While presenting a keynote, Debapriya Bhattacharya, convener of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, said the disadvantaged people were disproportionately affected due to the pandemic. In terms of income, savings and debt, the economic distress was more severe and prolonged compared to health and related fallouts. "Nutrition intake fell irrespective of employment status," he said. He listed four shortcomings of stimulus packages: insufficient in terms of GDP; they did not contain required cash transfer and food support measures; low coverage of eligible beneficiaries; and delivery deficit. Hossain Zillur Rahman, chairman of Brac, said a transparent vision of the government was needed to help the economy recover fast. Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the CPD, also spoke.

*Source: The Daily Star*



# Ruth Manorama: “Without equal treatment, it is impossible to reach social justice”

India has approximately 100 million Dalit women. Sixty million of them are employed in domestic labour. 2006 Right Livelihood Laureate Ruth Manorama has dedicated her life to achieving equality and social justice for them, both at the national and international level.

On the occasion of the World Day of Social Justice, we interviewed her on the situation of women in vulnerable situations in India and asked her which actions are needed in order to achieve justice.

**Ruth, what do you perceive to be the main challenge towards the achievement of social justice for Dalit women, domestic workers and women in vulnerable situations in general?**

Social justice and equality are fundamental aspects for Dalit women. These two concepts go together: without equal treatment, it is impossible to reach social justice. They are also very important components of the Indian constitution and are enshrined in its preamble.

Yet, the Indian government has been denying equal treatment to Dalit women for ages. We have been denied justice, we have been humiliated, treated violently and seen our rights violated. We never got freedom, even though it is essential.

The attitude of policymakers represents one of the main obstacles to reaching social justice. They argue that it is hard to check whether the rights of these women





are respected in the workplace, given that they usually work for private sectors. Policymakers don't see the point of even fixing a minimum wage because they think that it won't be possible to monitor the implementation of such measures anyway.

**And what role does intersectionality play when it comes to achieving social justice for these women?**

The majority of domestic workers come from the marginalised community in India. They are mostly Dalit women, women from other lower castes and Muslim women. They lack social security measures, such as fixed wages. Even cities such as Bangalore do not provide better working conditions. Dalit women are therefore poor and uneducated, but they are discriminated against primarily because they are women. This exposes them to sexual harassment and brutality in the workplace, as well as at home. At the same time, they feel the pressure of economically supporting their family and because of this, they accept all conditions, even the most unfair ones.

The poverty cycle plays a fundamental role in the life of Dalit women and domestic workers. They don't have access to education, hence they cannot obtain well-paid jobs. Even though education is free, they are unable to send their children to school due to the collateral expenses linked to it (materials, clothes etc.). Thus, their children remain uneducated, perpetuating the poverty cycle and the absence of opportunities which comes with it. When we look at the situation of Dalit women, we therefore have to consider different aspects: their wages, the working place, their lifestyle and so on. However, policymakers seem to ignore the importance of intersectionality.

**How did the Covid-19 pandemic worsen the situation?**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, domestic workers were often accused of carrying the disease hence prevented from working. The State did not enforce any compensation mechanism during the 2 years of the pandemic. Therefore, Dalit women, who already live below the poverty line, were further damaged by Covid and the absence of provisions. In addition, they did not receive

adequate information on Covid-19 nor benefit from protective measures. In this vein, I demanded the government to grant at least 10,000 rupees to them, which isn't much, but a symbolic move to show that there is a political will to help.

**Do you think access to the formal sector would better protect Dalit women, domestic workers and other women in vulnerable situations?**

Currently in India, the informal sector counts about 94 per cent of workers. Sure, certain types of formalisation are well needed. Legislation is a must. An enforcement mechanism is needed and implementation is crucial. There are currently a lot of measures planned by the government (e.g. free rice programs) but none of them provides an effective solution to poverty, caste discrimination or economic exploitation. This is the reason why I have formed the Karnataka Domestic Workers Union, a union of domestic workers. We've been fighting for so many years, just to obtain a minimum wage. When it comes to gender discrimination, harassment and violence, there is no difference between the formal and informal sectors. Both are equally affected.

**What reforms should States promote to ensure that domestic workers and the disadvantaged can be better protected?**

There are two important international conventions on the matter: ILO Convention NO.189, which regulates the treatment of female workers and Convention NO.190, adopted in 2019, which focuses on harassment in the workplace. Yet, the Indian Government did not sign any of them and therefore does not have a legal obligation towards them. I think it is fundamental to urge the authorities to sign these treaties and promote policies that finally advance the interest of Dalit women and domestic workers.

**Finally, how, in your opinion, do we achieve a more just, peaceful and equitable world?**

A lot can be done. First of all, legal standards must be implemented. Then, women should be able to file complaints and get redress for harm suffered.

It is also important to promote education programs that teach the importance of equal treatment of each member of society. People should learn that equality results from an obligation. Even our Constitution clearly states that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of class, caste, gender, or sex. I think that it must prevail in the minds of all people, in India and elsewhere, that these workers deserve justice.

*Source: Right Livelihood*