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Caste-Based Census Delay: A Denial of Social Justice

– Then, What Are We Waiting For?

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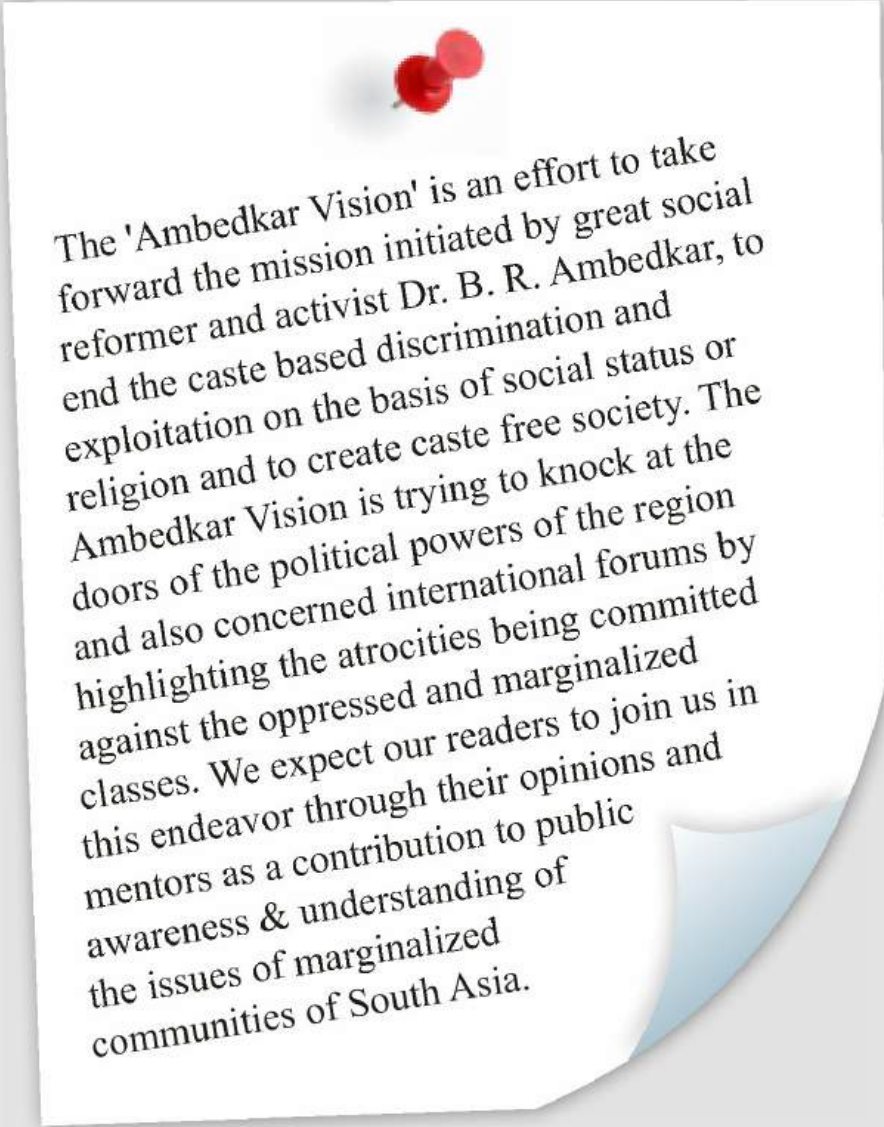
QUARTERLY AMBEDKAR VISION

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

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Ambedkar Society for South Asia

from the Editor

Welcome to the latest edition of Ambedkar Vision. Throughout South Asia, religious minorities are threatened with extinction—not by war or starvation, but by systematic discrimination, political manipulation and state-sponsored neglect. It is a crisis that cries out to be addressed, but that is often hidden behind geopolitical moves and domestic politics. Hindus, who make up about 8% of Bangladesh's population, still suffer from periodical attacks, described more as political penalties than religious persecution. Although the government maintains that most are against Awami League supporters, the difference provides little support for victims whose houses and temples get burned down merely for their identity. Impunity fuels a cycle that leaves minorities open to further exploitation. The fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in Bangladesh unleashed a wave of violence against Hindus, with over 1,700 attacks reported. India's media, particularly outlets aligned with Modi's BJP, framed this as a "genocide." Yet the same government accused of maline Muslims in India now demands protection for Hindus abroad. The recent incidents of violence since Sheikh Hasina's political crisis shows how rapidly religious identity becomes a substitute for political grievances within an atmosphere where minority safeguards remain only on paper. Pakistan offers yet another dire instance of demographic manipulation. The Hindu population of Sindh historically the cultural pillar of the province, now faces constant persecution by threats of forced conversion, land-grabbing, abduction of Hindu men and women and other considerations. In addition, economic problems are also inducing Hindu Pakistanis to emigrate. To many, India's Citizenship Amendment Act's pledge of speedy asylum to non-Muslims appears like a savior until, having reached it, they discover themselves stuck in giant, miserable camps, their documents stolen in an uninterested bureaucracy. India's Citizenship Amendment Act, though theoretically providing asylum, is in practice more political show than working solution, its administration corrupted by bureaucratic resistance and ideological inconsistency. Here in India, the persecution has another guise. The same political forces that make loud noises to defend Hindus overseas are eerily silent when Christians are attacked by mobs in Odisha or Dalit converts are discriminated against institutionally. Last year alone, attacks on Christians in India numbered 834, over two every day. The refusal to conduct a caste census—a move that would expose entrenched inequalities—speaks volumes about the priorities of a government more invested in maintaining social hierarchies than dismantling them. The last national caste census was done in 1931 and each attempt since then has been met with opposition. In Delhi, the Dalit Literature Festival provides a unique site of resistance where writers and poets steal back stories for years held hostage by upper castes. But mainstream publishing houses continue to prefer Brahmin voices. Even at the international level, such as in the U.S., the caste argument is politicized. Hindu academics are sued for discrimination on ambiguous caste policies and diaspora communities such as HinduPACT cry about "Hinduphobia." However, the same diaspora traditionally finances temples there, some constructed on land where mosques had previously been. Ultimately, behind each statistic, each headline, are human beings, broken, resilient, in fear. A Bangladeshi Hindu child asks her mother why they are hated. A Dalit Christian boy conceals his cross under his school uniform. A Sindhi Hindu girl rehearses a new name, praying it will protect her. Throughout South Asia, religious minorities are caught in a heartless paradox—labeled foreigners in their homelands, then exploited as political negotiables abroad. The world observes, at times in horror, more often in silence. The common thread in these crises is the refusal of governments to address minority persecution with honesty and urgency. If South Asia truly aspires to progress, it must confront this moral failure—not with empty promises, but with concrete action. The world is watching, but more importantly, the victims are waiting. Their time is running out.



Attacks on Christians in India in 2024, 100 More Than 2023: Rights Group



Civil society groups have once again raised the alarm about rising incidents of violence against Christians in India. New data released by the United Christian Forum (UCF) states that 2024 witnessed 834 such incidents, up 100 incidents from 734 in 2023. "The alarming frequency of attacks translates to more than two Christians being targeted every day in India simply for practising their faith," UCF said in a press statement on January 10.

These incidents take on a number of forms: attacks on churches or prayers meetings, harassment of those following their faith, ostracisation and limiting access to community resources and false allegations and criminal cases, particularly those pertaining to 'forced conversions'. The institution of controversial, stringent anti-conversion laws in several Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states has also served as a weapon in the hands of Hindutva activists and the state to act against minority groups. As The Wire has previously reported, there has been a sharp increase in the number of such incidents since 2014, when the BJP under Narendra Modi first formed the Union government. The highest number of incidents in 2024 were reported from Uttar Pradesh (209), followed by Chhattisgarh (165).

In many of these cases, rights activists have pointed out, no First Information Report is filed – sometimes despite there being a police complaint on the matter. In other situations, victims are afraid to approach the police because they believe that the police will try to turn the matter around and side with the perpetrators while filing false charges against the victims.

"Most of the time, FIRs are filed against the victims of violence, while the perpetrators are allowed to go scot-free," A.C. Michael, national convenor of the UCF, had told The Wire in 2023. "Otherwise the police usually tries to pacify the victims, saying if you file a case then they [the attackers] may become more aggressive and then your life will be more dangerous." Marginalised groups are more likely to be the target of these attacks, UCF has found. Of the 73 incidents the group recorded in December 2024, in 25 cases the victims were from Scheduled Tribes and in 14 they were Dalits. Women were victimised in nine of these incidents.

A recent series of reports by Omar Rashid for The Wire has highlighted how Hindutva activists have filed false conversion cases against people from marginalised

castes who choose to follow the Christian faith. The victims in these cases have often not formally converted their religion, yet they are accused of forcing or coercing others to convert from Hinduism to Christianity. While most cases filed under the new anti-conversion laws have not reached any sort of conclusion, in some situations the courts have thrown out the cases after finding the state prosecution's narrative to be unconvincing.

On December 31, 2024, a group of over 400 senior Christian leaders and 30 church groups had appealed to President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Modi to address the rising violence against the community. Their appeal came after a number of such instances were recorded around Christmas. This is not the first time such an appeal has been made and it remains to be seen whether the president and prime minister take note of the matter. While ignoring appeals of this kind, Modi has been attempting to reach out to sections of the Christian community over the last few years. On December 23, 2024, he attended Christmas celebrations hosted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. Speaking there, he referred to violence against Christians – but only in other parts of the world, like the Christmas market attack in Germany and the 2019 Easter bombings in Sri Lanka.

Journalist and rights activist John Dayal told Catholic News Agency that this speech had brought out Modi's "duplicity". "After expressing his 'pain' over incidents of violence, Modi did not mention a single incident from daily two cases of targeted hate violence in 2024 in the country. Instead, he cited the bloody Christmas market attack in Germany as an example. This is duplicity and this is what encourages the belligerent Hindu fundamentalists," he said. Leaders of the opposition too have questioned the prime minister's attitude towards the Christian community. Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien, for instance, said that Modi needs to be asked "tough questions" about issues faced by the community.

"I have no problem if you (bishops) want to have Christmas lunch with Modi, but, you have to also ask tough questions. The church has to ask difficult questions, like why you are trying to change Christmas into Good Governance Day. Why are they weaponising FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act)?" O'Brien said, addressing a gathering organised by Christian organisations in Ahmedabad on January 9.

Source: ANI News

Caste-Based Census Delay: A Denial of Social Justice

– Then, What Are We Waiting For?

Dr. Mali Devi



Today, as the global community continues to take action against caste bias, recognizing it as a matter of social and political rights, we see growing acknowledgment on international platforms. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy is celebrated on Social Justice and Equity Day, highlighting his contributions to the fight for equality. Yet, in India, we remain stagnant, in fact frozen after the first attempt of Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011.

To understand its adverse implications we need to revisit the observations by Dr. Ambedkar who clearly dissects harms associated with the ritual per se norm of conducting a one single census for all and moreover using it as a tool for policy making without having any engagement with its diverse and marginalised sections.

On October 26, 1947, Dr. Ambedkar expressed his dissent with the "General Census," criticizing its demographic data collection and political manipulation, which had adversely impacted marginalized communities, particularly those who have long suffered from the social disease of caste (Ambedkar, B. R. , 1947 in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and speeches, Vol. 17). The process of collecting data was often treated merely as a demographic exercise, without any meaningful engagement with these communities and their struggles. As a result, the General Census, lacking a vision for social equality, has primarily been a political tool for gaining power, rather than serving as an instrument for social justice.

This 'ritual' exercise has consistently lacked a framework to genuinely address the needs of deprived communities and promote social justice. The Scheduled Castes, despite their ongoing marginalization, have often been sidelined or misrepresented in this 'general' census. Dr. Ambedkar argued that these communities became victims of political manipulation, with their socio-economic realities obscured by the ambitions of other

groups seeking to consolidate power, thus denying their rights and dignity.

This critically grounded reflection serves as a call for a caste-based census in India today. Dr. Ambedkar's critique highlights the urgent, yet delayed, need for a transparent and transformative caste-based census—one that does not succumb to political manipulation. What is urgently needed is a caste-based census that provides detailed and accurate data on the socio-economic and political conditions of caste-affected communities.

This data can help address the historical and systemic marginalization of groups like the Scheduled Castes (SCs), who have been victimized not only by social hierarchies but also by political forces that manipulate their representation.

Therefore, a caste-based census must be a tool of empowerment and social justice, not exploitation. It must actively counteract the manipulation Dr. Ambedkar warned about, ensuring that no community, particularly the Scheduled Castes, is misrepresented or silenced in the political discourse.

This census should hold accountable those who seek to distort the realities of caste-based inequalities for political gain. For Dr. Ambedkar, true democracy and fraternity could only be realized when marginalized communities received fair representation—not only in politics but also in social, economic and political policies.

A caste-based census, conducted with integrity and transparency, would be one of the most effective ways to ensure that communities long excluded from the benefits of India's democracy are finally heard. Moreover, the caste census would address the very real concern Dr. Ambedkar raised about the misuse of the Census process to undermine the political rights of the oppressed.

His critique reminds us that a true democratic society is not one where rights are merely formally recognized, but one where the representation of all communities—particularly the marginalized—is genuinely and accurately reflected in policy decisions.

The caste-based census can bring us closer to that ideal, ensuring that the needs and rights of the Scheduled Castes and other disadvantaged groups are no longer overlooked or misrepresented.

But having strongly stood in defense of all the above, my question to my homeland is—What are we waiting for?

The Constitution of India has even given its people the power of Article 340, which authorizes the formation of a commission to examine the conditions of socially and economically backward classes and also suggests measures to address their social plight.

This provision highlights the importance of regularly updating the 'caste-based' data to ensure that the right of reservation reaches those who need it most and to continue improving their socio-economic conditions as per their population strength.

This delay has denied our people their representation and strength toward social justice and equality. Is it the fear that caste-based data might force the reality of annihilating caste divisions, with much defense? Or is it the reluctance to confront the uncomfortable reality that,

reservation policies in private-sector jobs as well.

Is it the fear that this caste-based census will be a national



and collective call to balance social justice with concerns about equity for all communities?

India cannot afford to remain frozen on this issue any longer. A caste-based census is not just a constitutional obligation but a national necessity to ensure social justice and inclusive development for its deprived communities.

A caste-based census is not just about the numbers of particular sections—it's about understanding the socio-economic disparities that continue to plague marginalized communities, particularly the Scheduled Castes.

By delaying this essential step, we continue to overlook the lived realities of millions who still face discrimination and inequality in their everyday lives.

If we are truly committed to creating a just and equitable society, it is time we stop avoiding the issue and take concrete steps toward addressing the realities of caste based oppression that still haunts our society.

Why, then, has India delayed doing this? Is it not time to ask ourselves: What are we waiting for? Because by freezing on this in the broadest reality, we are, in effect, endorsing social injustice, denial and impunity.

Hence, it is time to act and address what is right social justice per se, as, we all are aware that justice delayed is justice denied.



despite decades of so-called 'progress,' caste-based inequality continues to persist at the very heart of Indian society?

Perhaps it is the 'visionless' political sensitivity surrounding the issue—where any attempt to collect caste data is viewed through the lens of electoral gain, with parties fearing the data might upset their existing power dynamics or force them to revise and supplement

Addressing Caste Discrimination in India's Supply Chains: Insights from Ethical Trade Norway's Seminar



In January 2025, Ethical Trade Norway convened a seminar titled “Responsible Trade with India – What Must You Know?” to explore the complexities of engaging with India's vast and diverse market. The event underscored the critical importance of understanding caste-based discrimination, particularly against Dalits and Adivasis, within global supply chains. The Dalit Solidarity Network Norway also played an active role in the Seminar.

Despite constitutional prohibitions, caste-based discrimination remains deeply entrenched in India. Dalits and Adivasis often face systemic exclusion, relegating them to the most hazardous and low-paying jobs. This marginalisation not only perpetuates poverty but also makes these communities vulnerable to forced labour and human trafficking. The Ethical Trading Initiative's guidance highlights that caste discrimination fuels modern slavery and child labour in South Asia, affecting sectors such as textiles, leather, agriculture and construction.

In India, sub-minimum wages are also a widespread phenomenon when it comes to the lowest castes. Often, they are part of an invisible workforce whose wages are not recorded or who are working to pay off debts and interests controlled by their employers. An extensive study by the University of California on home-based garment workers in India found that 99% of workers, the majority of whom were either Dalits or Muslims, toiled in conditions of forced labour under Indian law. The study also found that most workers received between 50% and 90% less than the state-stipulated minimum wage. The prevalence of child labour was over 15% and many cases of bonded labour were also documented.

Even in urban settings and among skilled workers, urban Dalit women earn half the average daily wage earned by non-Dalit women and urban Dalit men earn 62% of the wage earned by non-Dalit men.

Working hours are not excessive

Due to their marginalised status in society – and dependence on accepting whatever form of work is available to them – the lowest castes, especially Dalits,

are often exploited in the workplace and forced to work excessive hours without being compensated accordingly. They may also face threats and physical or verbal abuse if they refuse to do the extra work. Their vulnerability to exploitation is reinforced by their lack of awareness of their rights and lack of access to redress for violations of these rights. Violations of working hours are found across all the sectors mentioned in this guidance and the lower the caste, the more difficult it is for workers to stand up to employers and refuse to work the hours demanded of them. With over 70 of Ethical Trade Norway's 215 members engaged in trade with India—a number poised to grow following the recent free trade agreement—Norwegian businesses must prioritise due diligence to mitigate human rights violations in their supply chains. Heidi Furustol, Executive Director of Ethical Trade Norway, emphasised the necessity for companies to conduct thorough risk assessments and implement measures to prevent and address human rights abuses, including caste-based discrimination.

Strategies for Responsible Engagement

To foster ethical trade practices, businesses are encouraged to:

- **Develop Explicit Policies:** Incorporate addressing caste discrimination directly within corporate policies and supplier agreements.
- **Collaborate with Local Entities:** Engage with local NGOs and trade unions to gain insights into caste dynamics and support affected workers.
- **Implement Training Programs:** Provide caste awareness and inclusion training for leaders, managers and supervisors to ensure equitable treatment across all levels.
- **Establish Grievance Mechanisms:** Create accessible and anonymous channels for workers to report discrimination without fear of retaliation.

By adopting these strategies, companies can contribute to the eradication of caste-based discrimination, ensuring that their operations promote human rights and social equity.

Source: ISDN

Nepal's 'abolished' Caste System is still going strong

Pierre Daum

There is one form of domination that Nepalis rarely discuss and the Maoists have completely ignored: the supremacy of the Bahuns (or Brahmins, the clerical caste) – and to a lesser extent, the Chhetris (or Kshatriyas, the warrior caste) – in all sectors of society.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal ('Prachanda'), former supreme commander of the Maoist forces, is a Bahun, as are Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, the irremovable leader of the UML and his counterpart in the NC. So too is Thabang district's chief of police.

Most hoteliers, traders, entrepreneurs, administrative directors, engineers and academics are likewise Bahuns. Chhetris are found particularly among the senior ranks of the military. In Kathmandu, Newar families also play a prominent role.

Bahuns, Chhetris, Newars, Dalits: Nepali society is a patchwork of castes and ethnic groups that is difficult for outsiders to decipher. It's the result of encounters between indigenous ethnic groups (Janajatis) and populations that arrived from India over the centuries.

The incomers imposed their language – Nepali, which is related to Hindi – as well as a rigid social hierarchy rooted in their religion, Hinduism. At the top are the Bahuns, Nepal's equivalent of Indian Brahmins, who today make up 11% of the population. Below them come the Chhetris (16%) and at the bottom, despised by all, the Dalits (14%) whom others consider so impure that they recoil at the idea of them sharing their table, touching their food, or worse, entering their kitchen.

Between the Chhetris and the Dalits are the Janajatis (Newars, Tharu, Magar, Tamang, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Gurkha), who make up 35% of the population and belong to over 100 different ethnic groups.

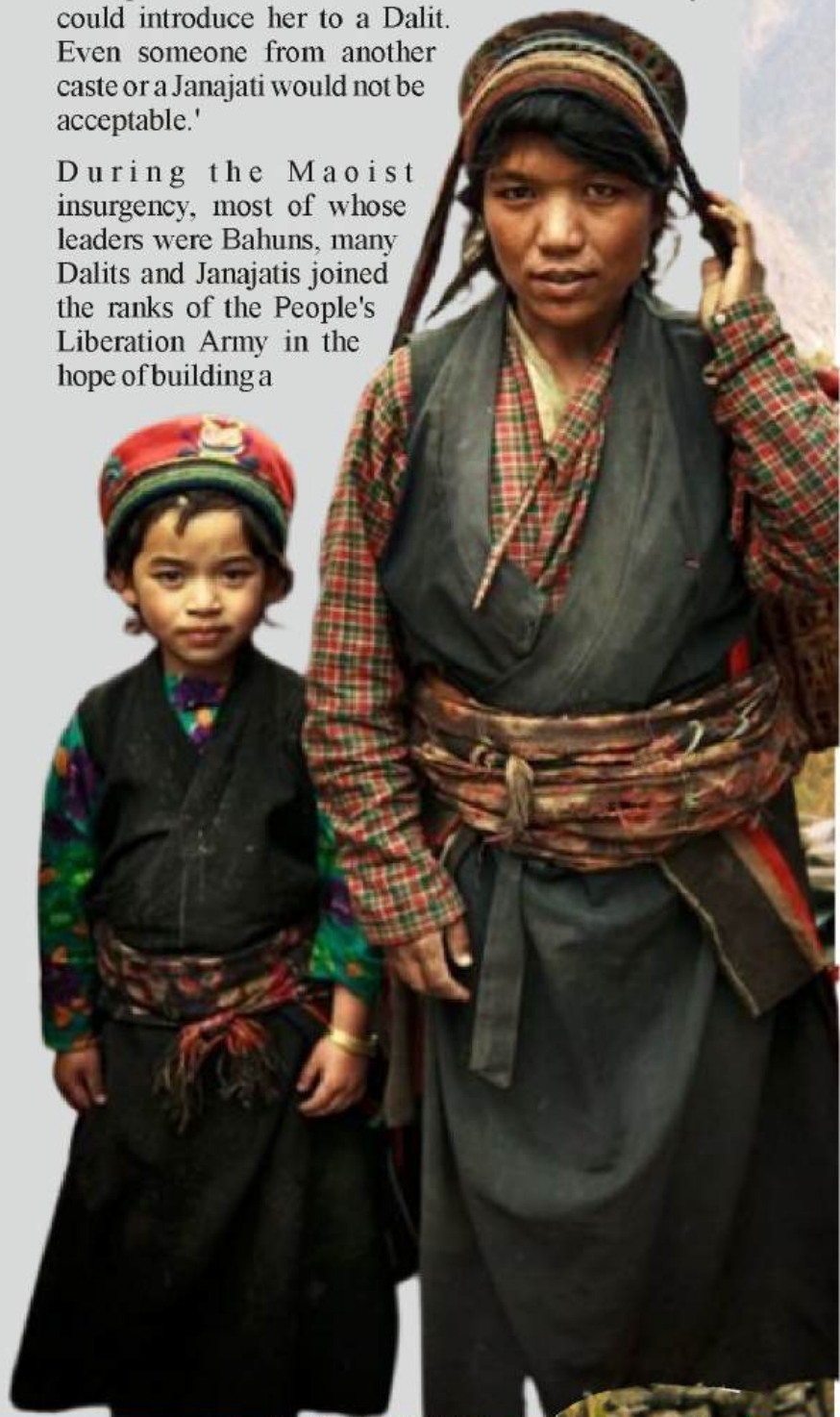
Many have internalised the Hindu aversion to the Dalits. To make things even more complex, there are also the Madheshis (20% of the population), a mixed group who live in the southern plains and a small Muslim minority (5%) scattered throughout the country.

Aditya Acharya, an assistant professor of forestry at Kathmandu University, comes from a peasant family in the village of Bohoretar, about 100km from the capital. His family are peasants, but also Bahuns – because belonging to the 'upper' castes does not necessarily equate with being wealthy.

'As a boy, I had Dalit friends at school, but I couldn't bring them home. Today, I do it secretly. If my parents found out, they'd be very angry, but no more than angry. My grandparents, however, would probably organise a purification ceremony for the house.'

At 30, Aditya is still unmarried. 'My mother's putting a lot of pressure on me. But there's no way I could introduce her to a Dalit. Even someone from another caste or a Janajati would not be acceptable.'

During the Maoist insurgency, most of whose leaders were Bahuns, many Dalits and Janajatis joined the ranks of the People's Liberation Army in the hope of building a



fairer society. In its ideology, the UCPN-M had given prominence to identity issues that went beyond simple class struggle.

During the ten-year war, fighters lived together, regardless of class and ethnicity, though their leaders remained Bahuns.

The 2015 constitution aimed to be more inclusive, stipulating that parliament should 'reflect the composition of society'.

'Unfortunately, we didn't impose [caste] quotas, as we did for women [33%],' says Baburam Bhattarai, former Maoist prime minister and a leading intellectual force in the movement.

As a result, Bahuns and Chhetris, who make up 27% of the population, hold half of all parliamentary seats, according to a survey by Mukta Singh Lama-Tamang, an anthropologist at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University. The Janajatis have 30%, the Madheshis 12% and the Dalits only 6%.

'In the civil service,' Bhattarai says, 'we introduced a rule reserving 45% of new positions for women, Dalits

Living in Pokhara, Nepal's second-largest city, in the foothills of the Annapurna range, he works for the Kadoorie Charitable Foundation, which is funded by a wealthy Hong Kong British family.

Gurung says he likes his work building suspension bridges and small hydroelectric plants for remote Nepali villages, 'but with my degrees and experience, I could have a much higher-ranking position in regional infrastructure.

I have no chance – because who controls the appointments? A Bahun. And those people only look out for each other. It's hopeless!'

It's the same story in politics. A few years ago, Sanjaya Chaudari tried to unite all the Janajatis in his region of Chitwan, south of Kathmandu. 'And that brought the Bahuns and Chhetris down on me.

Since they hold all the key positions, it was easy – suddenly, I couldn't get a bank loan, because all the bank managers are Bahuns.' He later joined the NC, hoping to stand in local elections. 'On paper, candidate selection is very democratic.

At the top are the Bahuns, Nepal's equivalent of Indian Brahmins, who today make up 11% of the population. Below them come the Chhetris (16%) and at the bottom, despised by all, the Dalits (14%) whom others consider so impure that they recoil at the idea of them sharing their table, touching their food, or worse, entering their kitchen.



and Janajatis.

But that mostly applies to lower-level posts.' Bhattarai, himself a Bahun, admits that Nepali society is still Bahun-dominated, 'but our struggle was to overthrow the monarchy, not to fight the Bahuns and Chhetris.'

Narayan Gurung is a civil engineer who specialises in Himalayan environmental dynamics and geological risk. Like most Nepalis, his surname immediately reveals his caste and ethnic group. He is a Janajati of Gurung ethnicity.

But in the end, it's always a Bahun or a Chhetri who wins.' Did he try to form an alliance with his region's Dalits? 'No, that's impossible. First, because many Janajatis wouldn't accept a Dalit entering their home for a meeting. And then, you can't trust the Dalits. They're too under the influence of the Bahuns and might betray us.'

Source: Mondediplo



Politician who fought casteism in US, denied Indian visa to meet ailing mother

Bharathy Singaravel

Kshama Sawant, a former Seattle city council member and Indian-American, has been denied visas twice by Indian authorities, preventing her from visiting

her elderly mother who requires

urgent medical attention. The denials came despite Sawant's appeals highlighting her mother's critical health situation and her need to be present for care. An emergency visa application submitted recently has also not been approved so far.

The denial of her visa is retaliation for her stance on caste, her Left-leaning politics and her past critique of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union government, Kshama has alleged.

In a letter to Minister for External Affairs (MEA) S Jaishankar last year, she had also attached a letter from her mother's doctor, but received no response. The Ministry did not respond to TNM's queries either.

Speaking to TNM, she said her visa applications were rejected twice since May 2024—without explanation. Indian authorities have remained unresponsive so far regarding her recent emergency visa application as well, Kshama said.

According to the doctor's letter, Kshama's mother, Vasundhara Ramanujam (82), has been under treatment for two years for atrial fibrillation, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), chronic kidney disease, diabetes mellitus, hypertension and ischemic heart disease.

The letter stated that Vasundhara's health is rapidly

deteriorating and that she requires Kshama's immediate care.

In 2023, Kshama was part of the efforts to ensure Seattle became the first city in the US to make caste a protected category—a move that would protect lowered-caste persons from discrimination.

Kshama's 10-year term in office ended in 2023. "For 10 years, I was an elected official in the United States," she said, adding, "My suspicion is that the Indian authorities believed that if they retaliated against me while I was in office, that would create more of a backlash for them. So I am not surprised that the first time they've retaliated has been the first time I applied for a visa after I left office."

She adds that she and her husband, Calvin Priest, have been able to visit India without such problems so far including in June 2022. Calvin, who is supposed to travel to India now with Kshama, has been granted a visa.

Kshama had first planned to visit India in 2024, from June 26 to July 15. Accordingly, she had applied for an e-visa in May of that year. E-visas are granted to foreigners for recreation, sight seeing, to meet friends or relatives, for medical treatment, attending short-term yoga programmes or business purposes.

The first rejection came on May 26. The notification simply said that the visa has been rejected. No reason was provided. Kshama applied again, but received the second rejection on June 27, but Calvin had been granted a visa. This time too no explanation was given for the rejection.

At a loss what to do, Kshama says she applied three weeks ago for an emergency visa at the Consulate General of India in Seattle. Emergency visas are provided to US passport holders of Indian origin in extreme circumstances such as the critical illness or death of a family member.

Typically, emergency visas are granted within two or three days, Kshama said. But she's facing an inordinate delay.

At the Consulate, an employee named Suresh Sharma had assured her that he would at least look into the matter. However, he has now allegedly stopped answering calls. "I am left with no other conclusion than this political retaliation. If it's not, there is a very easy and straightforward way to prove me wrong. They just have to grant me the visa," Kshama tells TNM.

Past political work

Kshama points out that her Socialist and Marxist beliefs, her efforts to help successfully push the minimum wage in Seattle from USD 7.25 per hour to its present USD 20.76 per hour or the JumpStart Seattle tax levied on billion-dollar corporations like Amazon to fund COVID-19 relief efforts and affordable housing have all made her unpopular with both Democrats and Republicans alike in the US.

In 2020, Kshama introduced a resolution in the Seattle city council against India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register for Citizens (NRC). The resolution was passed in February of that year, which Kshama says was the first such move in the US.

She also says that it had the support of hundreds of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and various American labour unions.

At the time Kshama had said, "The fight against the right-wing and bigoted agenda of the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] and of Modi is not separate from, but in fact inextricably linked with, the struggle of American progressives against the bigoted agenda of [Donald] Trump and the right-wing Republicans."

Also at the time, the Indian Consulate General had urged the Seattle city council to vote against the resolution, alleged Kshama.

The same year, Kshama worked with anti-caste organisations to add caste to the Seattle city council's list of protected categories. The city council had based its decision on a 2018 survey conducted by US-based South Asian Dalit Civil Rights organisation Equality Labs.

The survey showed that of the 1,500 respondents, 52% of Dalits and 25% of shudras were worried about their caste identity being "outed". "It was a historic win, so it's no surprise that the Modi regime is trying to seek retaliation.

BJP and Rashtriya Swamysevak Sangh (RSS)

supporters showed up in opposition to the Bill, but they lost," Kshama said. A similar move that would have made California the first US state to ban caste discrimination was overturned.

Also in 2020, The Seattle city council passed a resolution against the unpopular farmers' laws in India which had seen sustained and large-scale opposition from farmers. In 2021, the Union government—in a rare act—was forced to repeal the contentious laws while global support for the protests was growing.

"When you're a Marxist, a socialist and someone fighting for working class people, every wing of the political establishment, internationally, becomes an enemy, whether it's in the US or in India, whether it is Democrats and Democrats or Republicans. I have proven that it is possible to win by organising people rather than putting your faith in the political establishment, that that makes me a real threat," Kshama



The denial of her visa is retaliation for her stance on caste, her Left-leaning politics and her past critique of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union government, Kshama Sawant

said.

Kshama said other Indian-origin critics of the Union government have also been punished for their stance. Sweden-based professor Ashok Swain is still fighting the cancellation of his Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card, which effectively bans him from re-entering the country.

Ashok, who like Kshama, has an elderly mother requiring medical attention, was reportedly accused by the Union government of "illegal activities inimical" that threaten India's sovereignty and security.

Source: The News Minute



India warns of religious persecution in Bangladesh – but many Hindus there see things very differently

Ulrich von Schwerin

The attackers came at night, broke open the roof at the back of the temple and threw an incendiary device inside.

A statue of Krishna was completely destroyed in the fire and two images of Lakshmi and Narayan were badly damaged. Six weeks later, the traces of the fire are still clearly visible in the Hindu temple in the north of Bangladesh's capital Dhaka.

The once lovingly decorated statues are bare, their bodies covered in soot, their feet singed by the flames.

After the attack on the night of Dec. 6, the police came and secured the evidence, but they have not caught the perpetrators, says Rathan Kumar Ghosh, who now looks after the temple his grandfather built in 1961.

The 55-year-old suspects that the attackers knew the location well. The temple is located a little off a dusty road and is mainly used by Ghosh's family and some Hindus from the neighborhood.

Apparently, the attackers also knew about the surveillance camera outside the entrance. Ghosh had installed the camera after the fall of autocrat Sheikh Hasina on Aug. 5 because he feared an increase in tensions between Hindus and Muslims.

The vast majority of Hindus in Bangladesh supported Hasina's Awami League until its fall, as they believed the party would guarantee secularism and protect religious minorities.

Most attacks occurred on the day of Hasina's fall

Hindus are the largest religious minority in Bangladesh, accounting for around 8% of the 170 million inhabitants. In the chaotic days following the fall of Sheikh Hasina, there was a wave of violence against Hindus. According to the government, 1,769 attacks were reported on houses, stores and temples belonging to Hindus after the overthrow – 1,452 of them on the day of Hasina's fall alone.

However, it is disputed how many of the attacks were religiously motivated and how many Hindus were attacked because they were close to Hasina's Awami League.

The interim government of Muhammad Yunus, which took power after the fall of Hasina, emphasizes that it has a zero-tolerance policy toward religious violence. In a statement issued at the beginning of January, the government maintained that all attacks would be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice.

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According to the government, however, police investigations have revealed that the vast majority of attacks on minorities were politically motivated.

Only 20 of the 1,769 incidents were of a genuinely religious nature, the government stated.

Most Hindus were not attacked due to their religion, but because they were known to be Awami League supporters, the statement continued. According to the government, the violence also affected Muslim representatives of Hasina's reviled party.

Some of the attacks which took place during the

guarantee the lives and property of Hindus.

The issue is straining relations between the neighboring countries. The situation is tense anyway, as India acted as Hasina's closest ally until her fall. It continued to support her party even after Hasina's government had been exposed as authoritarian and corrupt.

When the autocrat was eventually swept out of office by a popular uprising in August, Hasina fled to India. To this day, Delhi refuses to extradite her to Bangladesh, where she would be put on trial.



turbulent transition period are also thought to have been about personal disagreements and property disputes.

Indian media warn of genocide against Hindus

The Indian media, on the other hand, portray the situation quite differently.

After Hasina's fall, media outlets associated with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in particular spoke of a genocide taking place in the predominantly Muslim neighboring country.

Modi's government has long been criticized for inciting hatred against India's own Muslim minority, but this has not stopped it from urging Bangladesh to

Tensions have been mounting at the border for months. India is complaining about an increase in illegal migration from Bangladesh and is trying to secure the border with barbed wire fences.

Since August, India has also stopped issuing visas for Bangladeshis, which has caused displeasure among business people.

The dispute puts Bangladesh's Hindus, who are already suspected of being Delhi's fifth column by Bangladeshi nationalists, in a delicate position.

Source: NZZ

Dalit Literature Festival: A celebration of inclusivity

Vitasta Kaul, Vedaant Lakhera



The fourth Dalit Literature Festival (DLF) began under an overcast sky, with rain-soaked streets and the revolutionary rhythms of Bheem geet filling the air. As the sun emerged, so did a crowd of writers, activists, students and curious onlookers, all drawn by the promise of an equal space where marginalised voices could speak on their own terms. Organised between February 28 and March 1 at Aryabhata College, Delhi University, by the Ambedkarvadi Lekhak Sangh and the Dalit Adivasi Shakti Adhikar Manch, the DLF was more than just a literary gathering. It was a necessary intervention—one that broke into the mainstream, challenged dominant narratives and amplified sidelined voices.

Dalit literature has long existed on the fringes of Indian publishing. While it might have gained some recognition in recent years, mainstream literary spaces still remain remarkably exclusionary, relegating Dalit voices to footnotes or token representation. Even when they are included, Dalit narratives are frequently framed by a privileged caste gaze, reinforcing stereotypes rather than dismantling them.

The publishing industry mirrors this exclusion. While major publishing houses like Penguin or HarperCollins occasionally publish works on B.R. Ambedkar or on Dalit rights, independent publishers struggle to find distribution channels. Festival and book fair organisers often charge exorbitant amounts—up to Rs.70,000 for a nine-day space at the World Book Fair in Delhi—making it nearly impossible for smaller publishers to participate.

A self-funded lit fest

The DLF is significant in this context. Unlike elite literary festivals backed by corporate and state sponsorship, the DLF is entirely self-funded. Writers, activists and academicians pool together their resources to ensure that the fest remains accessible to all—publishers, artists, performers and readers alike. Sanjeev Danda, co-founder of the DLF, told Frontline that the decision not to go for state or corporate funding lies at the core of the festival. “We have deliberately distanced ourselves from corporate sponsorships because accepting them would mean adhering to their conditions. This festival is sustained through personal contributions—our own money, pooled resources,” he said. “Contrast this with the Jaipur Literature Festival, which openly states that it is state-sponsored. If the state funds it, it inevitably reflects the state's bureaucratic and political agenda. There is no such influence on the DLF—no politics, no external control—only the unfiltered voices of the people.”

Professor Ashok Kumar, who teaches Hindi at Motilal Nehru College, Delhi University and is a member of the Ambedkarvadi Lekhak Sangh, echoed Danda. “If you involve corporates, you're killing the soul of the festival. We refuse to align with corporate interests. This isn't a lavish event—we barely manage, but we make it work. The students of Delhi School of Fine Arts handled the décor without asking for payment. It's contributions like these, acts of solidarity, that keep the festival alive.”

For independent sellers like Blue Lotus Books, the festival was not just a place to sell books, it was about sustaining a movement. “As students from Tata Institute of Social Sciences [TISS], we started gathering books from various sources and self-published writers because many are not represented in the mainstream,” said Prakash, co-founder of the Mumbai-based organisation. “We are not here for profit but to amplify the knowledge of the Ambedkarite movement.”

Literature for peace

The festival featured several bookstalls from smaller publishers, specialising in literature by Dalit, Adivasi and other marginalised authors, including women and LGBTQIA+ voices. This year's theme, “World peace is possible through Dalit literature”, underscored the global relevance of Dalit struggles. The idea that true peace cannot exist without justice was a recurring motif of discussions, poetry readings and performances.

Prof. Kumar said, “Dalit is not confined to a single identity; it encompasses all those who have been historically oppressed.” Dalit literature, too, resists rigid classifications.

It is a literature of resistance, amplifying voices that mainstream narratives ignore. It does not just tell stories—it asserts existence, reclaims space and challenges systems of exclusion.

Prof. Kumar emphasised the importance of Dalit literature in present times. “For over a decade, India has witnessed deepening divisions, with people increasingly separated along lines of religion, caste and other identities. These fractures are further destroying the harmony of communities and peace, be it political or personal, remains out of reach. This is where Dalit literature plays a crucial role—it amplifies voices that have long been silenced, bringing the realities of their lives to the forefront.”

The first edition of the DLF was held in 2019 at Kirori Mal College, Delhi University, followed by the second in 2020. After a two-year hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the third edition took place in 2023. Reflecting on the journey, Danda said: “We began shaping the idea in 2017-18. Our first festival in 2019 was meant to be small, with only 50 attendees. We arranged food for about 100 people, but nearly a thousand showed up. It was chaotic—our planning went out of gear—but we were overwhelmed with joy. Last year, more than 4,000 people attended the two-day festival.”

This year's edition had panel discussions on key socio-cultural issues, including Dalit women's empowerment, Ambedkar and the Constitution, the challenges faced by minority populations and the struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community. The panels featured authors,



poets, professors, activists and scholars of Dalit literature. The DLF also had cultural performances, including theatre, music and a kavi sammelan (poetry reading).

Moon, a third-year sociology student from the Miranda House college, shared the thrill of getting to display her paintings for the first time. “This is my first exhibition. My artwork is a reflection of my academic background: I incorporate my sociological understanding into my art. I don't consider myself an artist; I simply draw in my free time.” She added, “Opportunities to showcase critical art, especially in the context of the Dalit movement, are rare.”

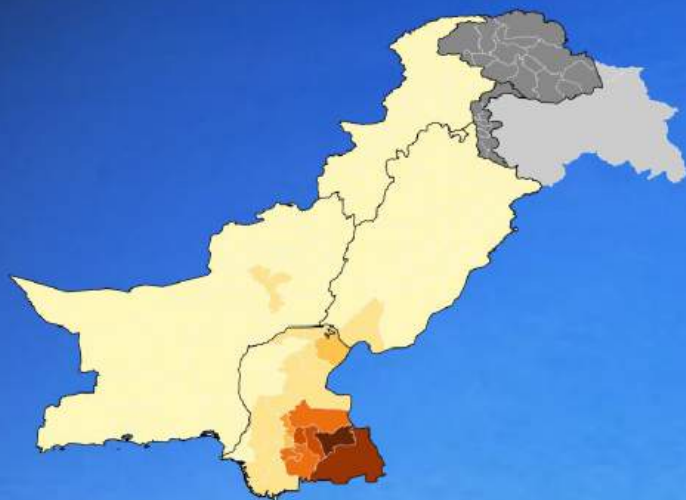
The few spaces that display such art are elite enclaves. As a woman from Tripura, from a marginalised background, I find it tough to navigate them.”

A defining feature of the 2025 edition was a panel dedicated to sewerage workers, who are arguably the most marginalised group among Dalit communities.

The discussion on the issue sought to bridge the gap between the people who write and the people who are written about. A panellist said, “Literature is born from a collective. For literature to thrive, even the person cleaning the roads must contribute.”

The convenor of the festival, Prof. Balraj Simhar from the Hindi Department at Aryabhata College, emphasised that Dalit literature is fundamentally about humanity—justice, equality and dignity for all. “It is said, Sahitya samaj ka darpan hota hai (Literature is the mirror of society). But do women truly appear in that reflection? Do Dalits? Do people from the LGBTQI+ community? If large sections of society remain invisible, can we call it a true reflection?”

Source: Frontline



Hindu Exodus



The vision of this country's founding father was that of a Muslim-majority state where members of all religious communities could live in security and with dignity.

Sadly, we have come quite far from that noble vision, as the plight of Sindh's Hindus illustrates."

According to a recent study by the HRCP, a number of factors are fuelling the Hindu exodus from Sindh towards India.

It should be noted that Sindh is host to the largest number of Hindus in Pakistan.

The HRCP says that the key reasons forcing Sindhi Hindus to migrate from their ancestral land are forced conversion and marriage of girls and young women, kidnapping of Hindu individuals, as well as the generally poor law and order situation in the province.

Moreover, economic issues are also causing Hindu Pakistanis to leave the country.

As HRCP head Asad Iqbal Butt observed, there were reports that around 300 people left Kashmir alone for India last year, but the actual number may be higher.

It was also mentioned at the study's launch that while

wealthier Hindus led relatively comfortable lives across the border, poorer members of the community were living in refugee camps.

It is also true that India is encouraging this trend; in 2024 the Citizenship Amendment Act took effect in that country, which allows non-Muslims from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh facing 'persecution' in their home countries to seek Indian citizenship. Muslims from these states are pointedly excluded.

Hindus are an essential part of Sindh's culture and Pakistan's religious tapestry.

The fact is that there is no state-sponsored anti-Hindu campaign in the country. Rather, extremist elements and criminals are targeting the community.

But the state cannot absolve itself of the responsibility to protect Hindu citizens and assure them of safety.

The key factors behind the exodus need to be addressed, while those Pakistani Hindus that have left for India should be given an amnesty and allowed to return home.

"The fact is that there is no state-sponsored anti-Hindu campaign in the country. Rather, extremist elements and criminals are targeting the community."

Source: Dawn

US court turns down petition by Hindu professors, grants legitimacy to university policy meant to weaponise 'Caste' against Hindu Americans

Dibakar Dutta

On March 15th, the Hindu Policy Research Advocacy Collective (popularly known as HinduPACT), took to X (formerly Twitter) to highlight the far-reaching consequences of a recent US court verdict on Hindu Americans. "We strongly disagree with the judgement of the 9th Circuit Court against the Hindu faculty of CSU," it said in a tweet.

HinduPACT pointed out, "The Hinduphobic caste narrative in the US based on fictitious surveys and allegations is a weapon to destroy the professional success of American Hindus."

HinduPACT was referring to the verdict [pdf] of the United States Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, which was delivered on 12th March. The case pertains to a legal challenge by two Hindu Professors, Sunil Kumar and Praveen Sinha, against a dubious 'anti-discrimination and harassment policy' of the California State University (CSU) that came into force in January 2023.

In an unprecedented move, CSU had included the word 'caste' in the protected class of 'Race or Ethnicity.' Needless to say, the varsity did not define 'caste' in its policy, leaving ample scope for its misuse.

CSU had even defended its position saying "the same analysis campus investigators use to determine other forms of discrimination will be applied to allegations of caste discrimination." This was despite having no working definition of caste and the broad possibilities of falsely labelling everything as 'caste discrimination', a concept alien to American society and politics.

The arguments made by the Hindu Professors

Professors Sunil Kumar and Praveen Sinha pointed out that the addition of 'caste' as a protected class in the 'anti-discrimination and harassment policy' of the California State University (CSU) falsely attributed the caste

system to Hinduism. They argued that the policy not only stigmatises Hinduism but also forces them to self-censor religious practices like celebrating holidays and discussing religious texts.

The Hindu Professors further pointed out that the 'anti-discrimination and harassment policy' was unconstitutionally vague and that even non-discriminatory religious practices could be misconstrued as discriminatory under the CSU policy.

Professors Sunil Kumar and Praveen Sinha also highlighted that the 2023 policy resulted in a spiritual injury, i.e. stigma from belonging to a religion (Hinduism) that has been disparaged. They argued that Hinduism was being singled out in the policy after the addition of caste as a 'protected class', which was not the case with other provisions laid down by the California State University.


US Court turns down appeal

The United States Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit rejected the appeal of the two Hindu Professors.

It claimed that 'caste' is not exclusively a religious concept and has previously been used to refer to 'social class without reference to any particular religion' by the country's Supreme Court. The court further stated that the 'anti-discrimination and harassment policy' of the California State University (CSU) and a Question & Answer document released by it did not make explicit reference to Hinduism.

"There are also documented incidents of caste discrimination in the United States and recent lawsuits in California, New Jersey and New York have alleged caste discrimination," Judge Richard C. Tallman claimed despite charges remaining unproven in all the mentioned cases. He also claimed that Professors Sunil Kumar and Praveen Sinha failed to demonstrate 'sufficient injury for a pre-enforcement challenge.'





that constituted harassment and voluntarily dropped the case. We also saw notorious lawsuits against the

Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan (BAPS) temple in New Jersey alleging forced 'Dalit labour' for the construction of the temple as well as human trafficking. It later turned out that artisans were threatened to be part of the deep-rooted conspiracy to stall the construction of the grand Hindu Temple. Some were tempted with promises of American citizenship and huge amounts of money.

The United States Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit also said that the CSU policy did not stigmatise Hinduism and thus did not amount to 'spiritual injury.' It claimed that the two Hindu Professors had 'no standing' in the case. The court further down the appeal by stating that Professors Sunil Kumar and Praveen Sinha failed to show how their non-discriminatory religious practice could be misconstrued as discriminatory. It must be mentioned that the petition of the CSU Professors was earlier turned down in part by the United States district Court for the Central District of California.

The larger context behind the case and its implications

'Caste' is an alien concept to the Hindu American way of life. There is no concrete proof of any instance of caste discrimination in the United States. There also has not been a single conviction in any case where 'caste discrimination' was alleged. In recent years, several bogus cases of alleged 'caste discrimination' were propped up to target Hindu Americans in positions of power. We saw it in action in the infamous CISCO case where two Indian-origin engineers (Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella) were accused of discriminating against a 'self-identifying Dalit.' This was despite the fact that the alleged victim was recruited by Iyer at a generous package with millions in stock grants. The Indian-origin engineer had also hired at least one more 'self-identifying Dalit' who held a leadership position at Cisco Systems Inc. It also came to light that the 'self-identifying Dalit' was working in the American company for 8 long years at the time of filing the complaint. The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) ignored the fact that Sundar Iyer publicly identified as 'agnostic' for over 20 years. CRD went on to falsely identify him as a 'Hindu' and relied upon malicious 'reports' published by The n m o z i Soundarajan-run-Equallity Labs.

CRD
a n y
against
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could not find
evidence
the two Cisco
engineers

The anti-Hindu lobby in the US, which experienced initial success by weaponising 'caste' against Hindu Americans, is willing to go to any length to tarnish the reputation of one of the most successful communities in the US. The ecosystem has been coercing educational institutions, corporate houses and tech giants to include 'caste' in protected classes, despite it being a non-issue in the North American country. The California State University (CSU) policy of 2023 is a step in that direction. The recent ruling by the United States Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit is thus a setback for the Hindu community in the US.

OpIndia speaks to HinduPACT

OpIndia spoke to Dr Ajay Shah, the convenor of HinduPACT, about the matter. The Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective aims to bring Hindu ethos and dharmic values of unity in diversity, plurality, compassion and, mutual respect amongst religions to policy and advocacy for human rights, environmental protection, gender equality, education and interfaith dialog. Dr Ajay Shah told us, "We are against all forms of discrimination. However, it needs to be pointed out that caste discrimination is nonexistent here in the States. No one knows or cares for so-called "caste" of another person. So, no question arises about discriminating against community members based on that attribute."

"At the same time, they have not defined what constitutes a caste in the CSU policy. It is a sure-shot way to target Hindus simply because anyone can make any claim without limitations. Practitioners of other Faiths can get away by claiming caste is not part of their religion and then conflate jaati and varna into caste, assign it exclusively to Hindus and leave Hindu Americans exclusively vulnerable to false accusations of perpetuating discrimination," Dr Shah emphasised.

He informed that the anti-Hindu lobby has been trying to bring 'caste' to the American mainstream since 2008 and has quadrupled its efforts in recent years. "HinduPACT will continue to fight for the interests of the Hindu community," Dr Shah concluded.

Source: OpIndia

Caste Census: Who Benefits From Ignorance?



Kavitha Kalvakuntla

India, a nation of staggering diversity, continues to march towards progress. Yet, a pressing question remains: how do we ensure this progress is inclusive? The answer lies in understanding the true social and economic realities of our people through a caste census.

The caste system, a deep-rooted reality in Indian society, has shaped access to resources, opportunities and rights.

Despite decades of affirmative action, the lack of up-to-date data on caste demographics undermines effective policy formulation.

India stands on the cusp of monumental transformation, yet its foundations remain deeply rooted in a caste-based hierarchy that shapes lives, opportunities and governance.

For decades, caste has been the silent architect of inequality—visible in the cracks of our social structure but invisible in official data. It is time to confront this reality with courage and clarity. A nationwide caste census is not just a demand; it is a democratic necessity.

Why Fear Data?

For far too long, governments have tiptoed around the question of caste enumeration. The last caste census was conducted in 1931 under British rule. Since then, India's policymakers have operated in the dark.

How can we address inequality without knowing its magnitude? How can we uplift marginalised communities without understanding their true population, status and needs?

The absence of granular caste-based statistics hinders our ability to plan welfare programmes effectively. It perpetuates the dominance of a privileged few while pushing marginalised voices further into obscurity.

Congress in Karnataka is yet to publish the Caste Census report.

Telangana under the leadership of K Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) had witnessed firsthand the transformative power of targeted policies, whether through BC welfare programmes, the post-matric scholarship schemes for BC students and BC Residential schools.

For other community initiatives, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government in Telangana introduced life insurance for the weaver community, government support for inter-caste weddings, free electricity for saloons to support the Nai Brahmin community, life Insurance for weavers and various other schemes for the dhobi community to name a few.

The Politics of Silence

Opposition to the caste census exposes the insecurities of vested interests. The question we must ask is: who benefits from ignorance? Fear of data reveals a fear of accountability.

It challenges the status quo of power and privilege that certain groups have enjoyed for decades. Those who resist a caste census are not protecting India's unity, they are protecting their monopoly over resources and representation.

In Telangana, under the K Chandrasekhar Rao-led BRS government, we have seen the potential of progressive governance to challenge inequality. Yet, the demand for precise numbers grows stronger.

The 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census failed to publish caste-specific data, leaving millions of backward classes, Dalits and tribal communities out of meaningful discourse. This systematic invisibilisation cannot continue.

A Tool for Empowerment

Caste census is not divisive; it is empowering. It offers an opportunity to quantify deprivation and calibrate justice. Consider this: OBCs constitute nearly 52% of India's population, yet they hold only 27% of reservations in jobs and education. Similarly, SCs and STs face chronic underrepresentation despite constitutional safeguards.

The reality could be far more skewed, but without data, their struggles remain anecdotal, not statistical.

Nations cannot grow by ignoring inequality; they grow by confronting it.

The BRS-governed Telangana has shown how welfare-driven governance can improve lives when policies are rooted in inclusion.

Imagine what India could achieve if its policies were based on accurate, contemporary caste data.

Beyond Tokenism

The caste census is not about mere numbers; it is about narratives.

It is about rewriting the story of India's progress with fairness and dignity.

It is about dismantling centuries of privilege and making way for equitable opportunities. It is about measuring the distance we still need to travel toward social justice.

In the words of Babasaheb Ambedkar, "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy."

A caste census is a step towards ensuring that India's social democracy is not a hollow promise.

The Road Ahead

A caste census is not just a matter of numbers; it is a matter of justice. To those who fear division, we say: unity does not come from erasing identities but from respecting them.

The time for hesitation is over. India must count its people, because what cannot be counted cannot be corrected.

Let this be

the beginning of a new era—one where data empowers democracy and equality is more than a slogan.

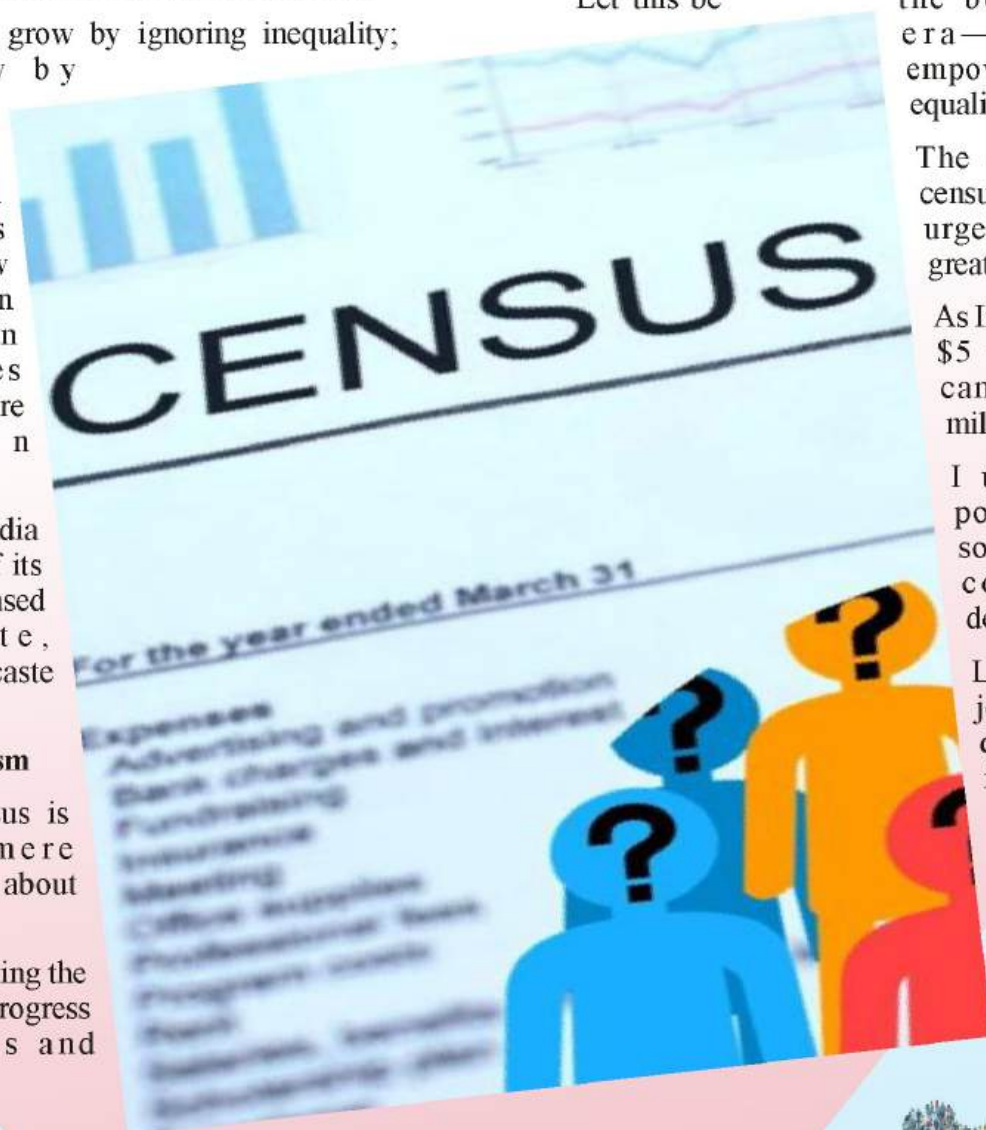
The demand for a caste census is not new, but the urgency has never been greater.

As India strives to become a \$5 trillion economy, it cannot afford to leave millions behind.

I urge policymakers, political parties, civil society and citizens to come together and demand a caste census.

Let data guide our journey toward equality, dignity and prosperity for all.

Source: NDTV





PAKISTAN:

Senate panel takes up National Commission for Minorities Bill

With strong backing from government officials and lawmakers, the bill aimed to establish a national body dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of minority communities in Pakistan.

During the meeting, the chairman of the committee, Senator Syed Ali Zafar, stressed the importance of ensuring the bill reflected the diverse needs of minorities while maintaining transparency and fairness.

“A law passed today will shape the future for years to come, so careful deliberation is essential,” he stated.

A statement issued here said that in response to a proposal by Farhatullah Babar, Syed Ali Zafar endorsed a rotational system for the chairperson, ensuring representation from all provinces. “This will prevent any region from being overlooked in the leadership selection process,” he noted.

Minister of State for Religious Affairs Khealdas Kohistani, strongly advocated for the bill, calling for its expedited passage. “This legislation is critical for strengthening the protection of minority rights in Pakistan,” he said, underscoring the government's commitment to equal rights for all citizens.

Senator Poonjo Bheel proposed that the chairperson should have extensive legal expertise, preferably with experience in high court practice. “A highly qualified chairman with a fixed tenure will bring stability and credibility to the commission,” he emphasised.

Meanwhile, Senator Danesh Kumar suggested setting clear eligibility criteria for commission members, including a minimum age of 30 years and a rotation system for balanced provincial representation.

His proposal was supported by Senator Gurdeep Singh, who called for the inclusion of all religious minorities, particularly Sikhs, to reflect their historical contributions.

MNA Asfanyar M Bhandara recommended reopening two temples currently under the Capital Development Authority's (CDA) control as a symbolic gesture of

religious freedom.

“This will send a strong message of inclusivity and commitment to minority rights,” he asserted.

Farhatullah Babar voiced concerns about the selection process for the commission's leadership, arguing that appointments should be made through a consultative process rather than a single authority.

“The commission should function like the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), where appointments are made by parliament, ensuring independence and accountability,” he stated.

Additionally, Farhatfullah Babar warned against administrative delays that could render the commission inactive due to unfilled vacancies.

He proposed implementing a structured procedure for timely appointments and renewals, along with mandatory biannual reporting to ensure transparency and oversight.

The committee will continue its discussions in the coming weeks to refine the bill before its presentation to parliament.

“The suggestions made today are crucial to ensuring the commission effectively fulfils its mandate,” Syed Ali Zafar concluded.

Members observed that with strong support from lawmakers and officials, the National Commission for Minorities Bill 2025 was poised to become a landmark piece of legislation, reinforcing the government's commitment to justice, equality and human rights for all citizens.

Source: Dawn





Ambedkar Society for South Asia
