

QUARTERLY

# AMBEDKAR VISION

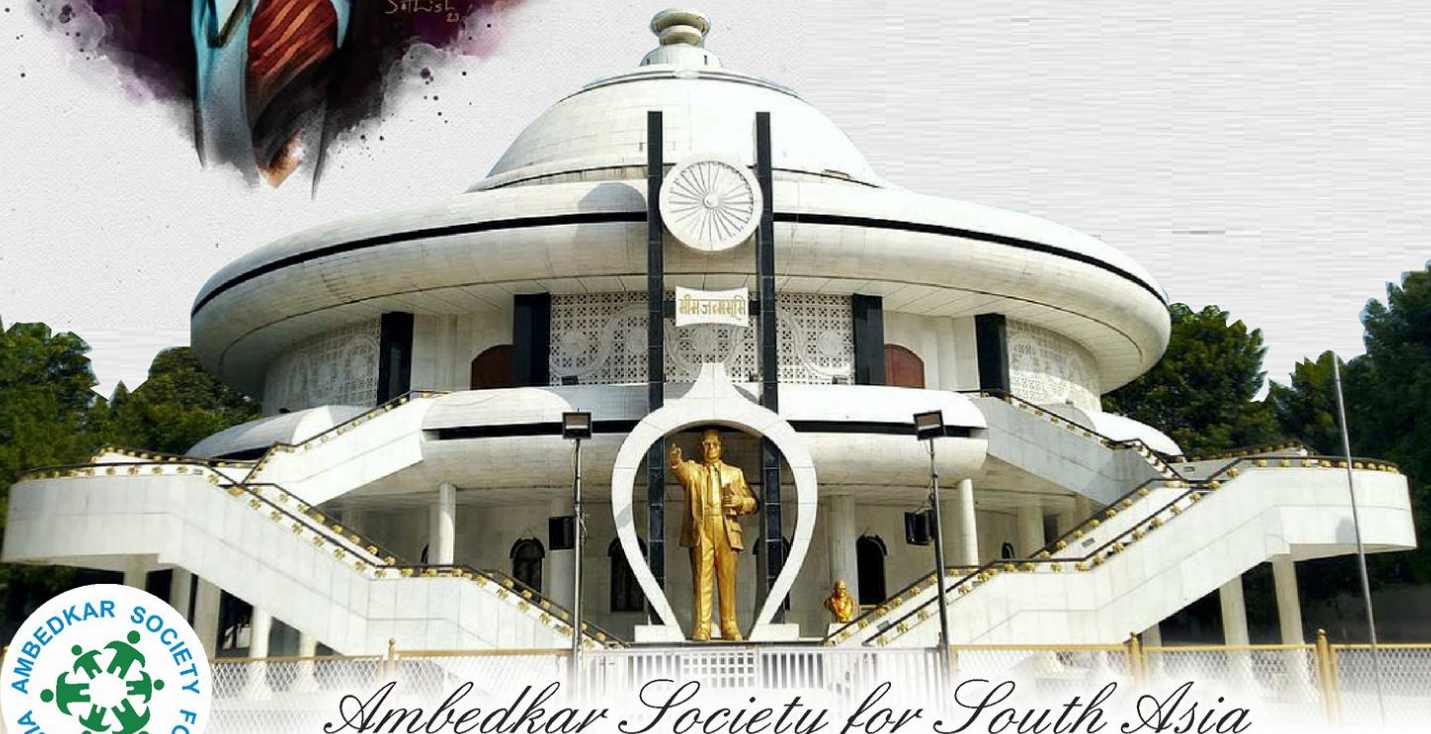
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**Dr. Ambedkar's Birthplace  
A Confluence of Struggle,  
Inspiration and Devotees**

[pg.3]



*Ambedkar Society for South Asia*



# QUARTERLY AMBEDKAR VISION

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

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*Ambedkar Society for South Asia*



## from the Editor

Welcome to the latest edition of Ambedkar Vision. The recent celebrations of Dalit History Month in Burlington, Canada, mark an important step toward the recognition of centuries long efforts, struggles and strength of the Dalit community. But this recognition is totally opposite to the widespread and brutal realities of caste-based discrimination that persist not only in South Asia but across the world. The shadow of caste continues to haunt millions of people, affecting their rights, dignity, opportunity and justice. Such disturbing narratives reveal a disturbing pattern of systemic discrimination, violence and institutional indifference which needs urgent global attention. Vijay Puli of the South Asian Dalit Adivasi Network (SADAN) pointed out a bitter truth that caste distinctions have migrated with the diaspora. Dalits in Canada face biasness on workplace, housing discrimination and social exclusion, proving that the caste system is not limited to geography. In UK, Dalit students are forming Ambedkarite Societies to counter casteist behaviors on campus, highlighting how caste hierarchies persist even in educational institutes. The formation of such societies such as SOAS, Lancaster and Oxford reflects a quiet determined resistance to an oppressive caste system that follows Dalits across borders. Meanwhile, in India, the origin of the caste system, oppression is even greater and worst. Manual scavenging, despite being illegal, claims hundreds of Dalit lives annually. These are not just accidents but caste-based murders, a brutal reminder that caste is deeply prevailing in the society. The recent cases of bone mining in West Bengal and Odisha where Dalits are forced to collect human bones for very low wages expose the depths of economic and social exploitation. The state's failure to end these practices despite progressive laws indicates cold-bloodedness. Shivam Sonkar, a Dalit scholar, denied admission to Banaras Hindu University despite his qualifications, further illustrates how caste protects opportunities, even in spaces open to intellectual development. Nepal's Dalits, who make up 13% of the population, face a similar and parallel exclusion. Poverty, illiteracy and child marriage affect them disproportionately, with the Dalits of the Terai suffering the most. The data provided by government reveal a wide wealth gap: only 6.2% of Dalits belong to the highest economic class, compared to 22% of non-Dalits. The literacy rate among Terai Dalit women is a shocking 51.9%, highlighting the cycle of backwardness. These figures are not just numbers but evidence of a society that continues to marginalize Dalits despite constitutional guarantees of equality. The Hindu minority, especially Dalits living in Pakistan, also face discriminations and as seen in the case of businessman Setal Das, who was kidnapped in Balochistan. The protests by locals and the demand for his recovery highlight the uncertain existence of religious and caste minorities in the country. The reality of systemic neglect persists, although the government promises protection and ensures basic human rights for all minorities. The irony is hard to ignore even after positive steps like Balochistan's recent move to promote the Hinglaj Mata Temple as a global tourist site. The state claim and mention religious diversity of the country, but its Dalit citizens remain vulnerable to violence and exploitation. The thread connecting these events is the complex grip of caste, a system which dehumanizes and divides. Resistance to this oppression is equally global. In Canada, activists are pushing for the recognition of caste under human rights law. In the UK, students are challenging educational erasure by centering on Ambedkar's ideas. In India, Dalit scholars and filmmakers fight for representation, while in Nepal, advocates demand policy reforms. Yet, these efforts often face backlash whether through institutional indifference, as seen in BHU's rejection of Shivam Sonkar, or through violent mob attacks, as happened to Christians in Odisha, where Dalits are often doubly disadvantaged as religious and caste minorities. Solution cannot only be found just in legal frameworks but in a radical reimagining of societal values. In this reference, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideology of annihilation of caste is still relevant today as it was relevant century ago. Economic empowerment and political representation is essential, but education is critical, for dismantling of casteist mindsets that is prevailing in every layer of society. The global diaspora must confront its own complicity, whether in Canada's rental discrimination or the UK's academic exclusion. Governments must move beyond symbolic gestures like Dalit History Month or temple promotions and enforce laws with rigor. The international community must recognize caste discrimination as a global human rights issue like racism. The stories from Burlington to Odisha and Dera Murad Jamali to Terai are not isolated; they are chapters in a long history of oppression and resistance. They remind us that caste is not a relic of the past but a living, evolving system of violence. Ignoring it means accepting it. The time for passive acknowledgment is over. The world must act with urgency and solidarity resolve to dismantle this centuries-old scourge once and for all.





## 30 Christians injured in attack by Hindu nationalists in Odisha



More than 30 Christians who had gathered for a prayer meeting were injured in an attack by a large mob in eastern India's Odisha state on the morning of June 21, CSI has learned. At least 20 of them sustained serious injuries and were admitted to hospital. As of June 27, no one has been arrested in connection with the incident.

A group of around 400 people from surrounding villages entered Kotamateru, a remote village governed by the Matapaka local council in Odisha's Malkangiri district and launched a coordinated assault. The region has limited connectivity and poor access to emergency services.

The mob used weapons including axes, according to local media report.

One resident managed to inform a pastor outside the village, who then contacted the Malkangiri Police Station. Officers arrived soon after and helped evacuate the wounded, who were taken to the Malkangiri District Hospital for treatment.

Fearing more violence and rising tensions, the remaining Christians took shelter in a nearby church, which is now serving as a temporary relief center.

The peaceful gathering had been a prayer event to bless seeds before the planting season.

Police officials have alleged a different version of events. Inspector Rigan Kinda of the Malkangiri Police Station told the Indian newspaper The Telegraph that the violence stemmed from a family dispute between two brothers, one a Christian and the other a Hindu. He claimed that on the day of the incident, the Christian group was surrounded and questioned about their religious beliefs, leading to a confrontation and injuries.

Local Christian leaders have alleged that a Hindu nationalist group, the Bajrang Dal, was behind the attack. Bajrang Dal district leader Sibapada Mirdha denied any

involvement but said that Hindus were increasingly vocal about what they viewed as "forced" conversions by Christians. He told The Telegraph that "sometimes there is a spontaneous reaction to this."

Hindu nationalist groups have been known to spread misinformation that fuels religious divisions, incite local residents and later portray attacks as spontaneous reactions to alleged Christian conversions. According to the government's 2011 census, Christians make up only 2.3 percent of India's population.

### Police inaction after attack

The Malkangiri Pastors Fellowship submitted a memorandum to the Superintendent of Police on June 23, demanding legal action and accountability for the failure to prevent the attack.



A police complaint was registered under legal provisions related to causing hurt and unlawful confinement. But as of this writing, no arrests have been made. A local source said the complaint failed to include more serious charges under the country's penal code, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Charges for attempted murder (Section 109) could have been included given the severity of the injuries sustained by over 20 people, along with charges for deliberate acts intended to outrage religious feelings and disturb a religious gathering (Sections 299 and 300).

Local Christian leaders have called for a permanent police outpost in Kotamateru and nearby villages, saying it is necessary to prevent further violence. Security in the area has still not been increased, even on a temporary basis, after the incident.

Bishop Pallab Kumar Lima, a senior leader in the Anglican Church of North India, described the situation as “a grave humanitarian crisis,” according to Catholic Connect. As president of the Odisha Chapter of the Rashtriya Christian Morcha (or National Christian Board, a recently established Christian advocacy group), Bishop Lima called on the state government to deliver immediate relief, ensure justice and protect the rights of religious minorities. A local Christian leader said the government must urgently provide compensation, relief and rehabilitation to the victims under the Odisha Victim Compensation Scheme and other applicable state relief mechanisms.

### Increasing persecution in Odisha

Odisha has seen a rise in anti-Christian incidents in recent years, with local communities reporting repeated threats and a few confrontations. Recent independent fact-finding teams visiting Odisha between March and April 2025 documented a sharp rise in incidents targeting Christians in Nabarangpur, Gajapati and Balasore

districts. The teams recorded repeated cases where Christian families were denied burial rights, forced to convert in order to bury their dead and experienced both police violence and institutional neglect.

For example, in Nabarangpur alone, at least eight incidents since 2022 involved mobs exhuming bodies, desecrating graves or forcibly converting remains to

Hinduism before allowing burial. In one case, the body of Saravan Gond, a young Christian man, was stolen and the deceased's mother and sister were allegedly assaulted while police stood by.

A more severe and widely documented outbreak of violence occurred in Odisha's Kandhamal district over 2007–08. In December 2007, mobs burned more

than 100 churches and over 700 homes at Christmas time.

Violence escalated again in August 2008 following the killing of Hindu leader Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati. The murder was falsely blamed on Christians and it further resulted in the deaths of dozens of Christians, displacement of thousands, destruction of over 395 churches and reports of gang rape and forced conversions. In a recent interview with CSI, a local pastor said threats had increased since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took over the state government in Odisha in June 2024.

Hindu nationalist groups have become significantly more active since the BJP came to power, the pastor said. He described living in fear, unable to leave his home for work due to threats of violence. He also referred to a video circulating on social media in which a Hindu nationalist leader warned Christians, “If you're going to convert people, you will see what will happen.”

Local Christians have appealed to the Christian community in India and abroad to pray for their safety and for justice to be served.

*Source: csi-int.*





Dalit History Month:

## Dr. Ambedkar's Birthplace

Ankit Pachauri

# A Confluence of Struggle, Inspiration and Devotees

Mahu in Madhya Pradesh, the birthplace of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar—the architect of India's Constitution—becomes a significant hub every year during Dalit History Month. This place is not only a witness to Dr. Ambedkar's birth but also a source of inspiration for the Dalit movement.

Throughout April, followers of Babasaheb and believers in his ideology from across the country and abroad visit Mahu. Bhimrao Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, in Mahu, Madhya Pradesh (now Dr. Ambedkar Nagar). He was the 14th child of Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai. His father, a Subedar in the British Indian Army, highly valued education.

Born into the Mahar caste—then considered "untouchable"—Dr. Ambedkar faced discrimination from an early age. In school, he was not allowed to sit with other children or even touch water due to social prejudice. These early hardships became the foundation of his lifelong struggle for social justice and equality.

### Significance of Mahu During Dalit History Month

- April is celebrated as Dalit History Month and Mahu holds special importance during this time. Ambedkarites, social activists, students and members of the Scheduled Caste community gather here from across the nation. April 14 Celebrations: On Ambedkar Jayanti, thousands pay homage at his statue in Mahu. Government and social organizations host various events. Seminars and Discussions: Seminars and debates on Dalit

rights, social justice and the Constitution are held, featuring scholars and activists from across India.

- Awareness on Constitution and Social Justice: Workshops and cultural programs are organized to educate the youth about constitutional values.

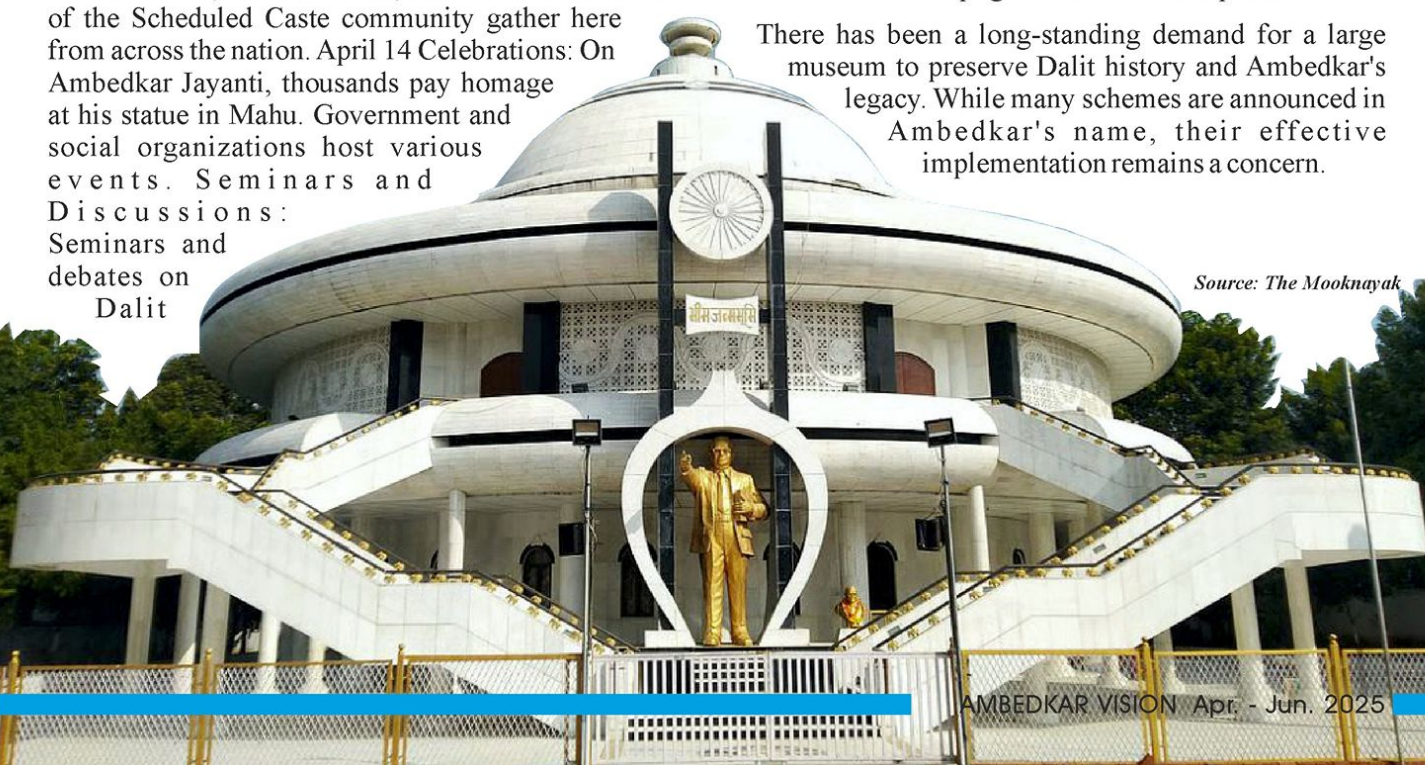
Raju Kumar Ambode, media in-charge and managing member of the Dr. Babasaheb Janmsthal Memorial in Mahu, Indore, told The Mooknayak that millions of devotees visit Babasaheb's birthplace every April. This year too, from April 12 to 14, proper arrangements for lodging and food will be made to ensure devotees can pay their respects without hassle. Ambode added that on April 14, individuals who have made notable contributions to society will be honored. The event aims to propagate Babasaheb's ideals and encourage those driving positive social change.

### Social and Political Dimensions of Mahu

Mahu is not just Ambedkar's birthplace but also a symbol of Dalit politics. Every year, various Dalit organizations and political parties present their ideologies here and discuss policies for social justice. However, despite its significance, Mahu faces infrastructural challenges. Basic amenities for pilgrims remain inadequate.

There has been a long-standing demand for a large museum to preserve Dalit history and Ambedkar's legacy. While many schemes are announced in Ambedkar's name, their effective implementation remains a concern.

Source: The Mooknayak





# An Anti-Caste Counterculture Is Gradually Taking Root in UK Universities

In a darkened lecture theatre in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, about 50 people gathered for a special screening of *Court* by Chaitanya Tamhane, a movie that critiques casteism in the Indian legal system.

Meanwhile, 400 kms away in northwest England, a book stand in the library of Lancaster University showcased a special collection on caste and Ambedkar. And in another part of the UK, at the University of Leeds, students gathered to commemorate Ambedkar's birth anniversary and discuss plans for the newly formed Dr Ambedkar Society.

These scenes from Dalit History Month celebrations in April this year in different parts of the UK represent a quiet but growing assertion taking root in many English university campuses. With more Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi students going to the UK for higher education in recent years, they are creating a counterculture on campus, challenging how 'India' and 'South Asia' are understood among British and international students and faculty.

Through organising lectures, workshops and film screenings and by forming anti-caste and Ambedkarite student societies on campus, marginalised students in the UK are amplifying voices from within their communities on an international platform and contributing to the global understanding of caste and resistance to it.

Some are taking the effort further by trying to push for their universities to recognise caste in their policies, to help address the familiar patterns of discrimination and structural inequality marginalised students experience in the UK.

## Creating a new cultural presence on campus

With tens of thousands of Indian students enrolling in UK universities every year, it is commonplace to find 'India Societies' and 'Hindu Societies' among the many student-run clubs on campuses across the country.



In fact, societies that promote Hindu religion and culture on campus have been around in the UK since at least 1991. Through these groups, students organise a variety of events including Bollywood nights, aartis, Diwali and Garba celebrations and discussions on Indian politics and society.

Dalit students who came to the UK to study did not feel represented by any of these existing societies, said Abhishek Bhosale, PhD scholar and current President of the SOAS Ambedkar Society.

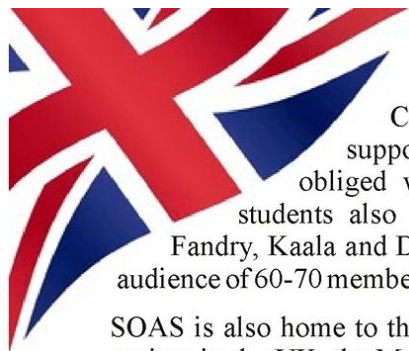
When the society was formed in 2018, the idea was to create a safe space where Dalit students could get together, as well as to democratise and diversify the campus by putting forward their stories and perspectives, he said.

In the past year, during Abhishek's tenure as president, the society has organised several public events including a discussion with *The Wire's* Sukanya Shantha and her lawyer Disha Wadekar on their petition in the Supreme Court about caste-based discrimination in Indian prisons. The society also organised discussions on Shahu Patole's book *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* and Anand Teltumbde's book *Iconoclast*.

What impact do students hope to have through these events? Abhishek explained that by telling the story of caste in a university like SOAS with an international, politically engaged student body, sensitisation about caste inequalities can reach the wider world through these students when they return to their home countries.

"We want to internationalise the authentic stories of people from Dalit backgrounds. For example, if not for the SOAS Ambedkar Society, there wouldn't be a discussion in London on Patole's book about Dalit food," Abhishek said. They also try to bring the academic discussions to life through cultural events such as the Anti-Caste Film Festival they organised in April this year, where the





Court was screened. With support from the filmmakers who obliged without a screening fee, the students also showed Jai Bhim Comrade, Fandry, Kaala and Dr B R Ambedkar to a diverse audience of 60-70 members in London.

SOAS is also home to the first known Adivasi student society in the UK, the Maki Munda Indigenous Studies Society. In the 2023-24 academic year, a few students from Jharkhand who were at SOAS on various government scholarships created this society to engage with Adivasi issues on an international platform. In their public events, they make it a point to invite Adivasi scholars and grassroots activists as panelists, often joining virtually from India, to share their indigenous knowledge and first-hand experiences. During a student fair in January 2024, the society also organised an Adivasi dance from the Chotanagpur region. "People write about the poverty among Adivasis, their trauma and rights abuse but rarely do they embrace Adivasi culture. As Adivasis, we constantly battle damnation and shame in being who we are. Through the dance, we wanted to showcase our rich heritage and give it due regard in an international space," said Madhuri Xalxo, a PhD scholar and founding member of the society.

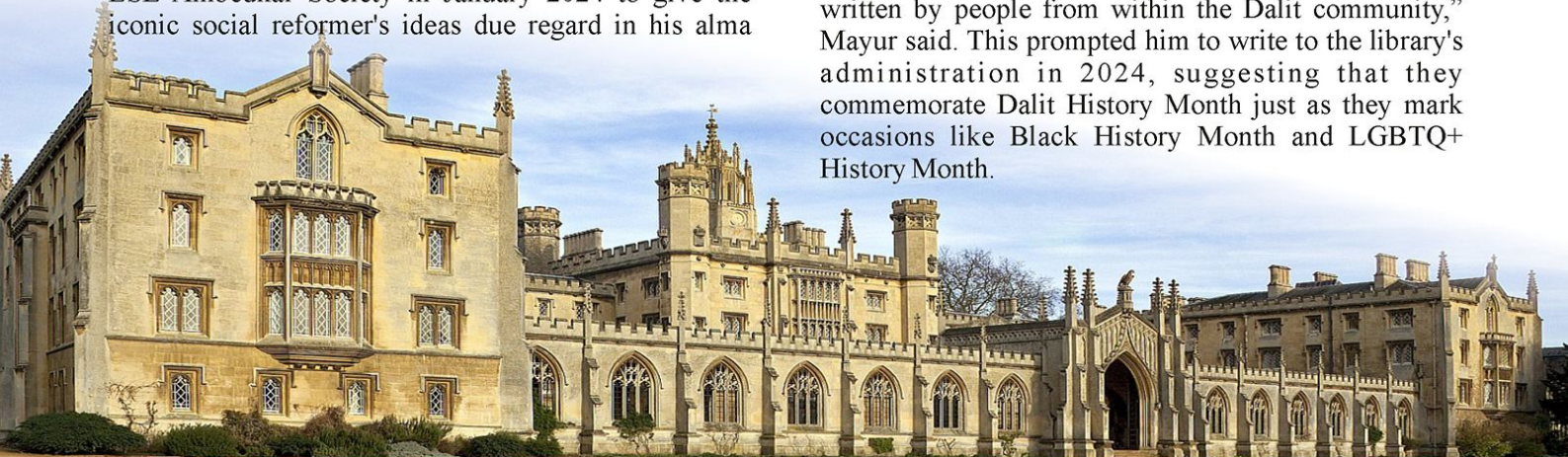
A handful of universities in the UK now have Ambedkarite or anti-caste societies formed by students. The Ambedkarite Society of Edinburgh at the University of Edinburgh was formed in January 2024 as a response to various incidents of casteism that marginalised students experienced from fellow Indian students of privileged caste backgrounds. "I was very taken aback by the lack of sensitivity among many Indians. So we formed the society to promote an anti-caste consciousness among students from India, among diaspora and among international students," said Aniruddha Mahajan, PhD scholar and founding president of the society.

At the prestigious London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), a few Dalit students started an LSE Ambedkar Society in January 2024 to give the iconic social reformer's ideas due regard in his alma

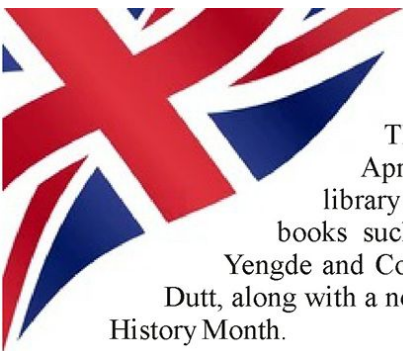
mater. Ambedkar enrolled as a student in LSE in 1916 and completed a master's degree and a PhD from the university. Ritu Kochar, PhD student and founding president of the society, said, "I was very proud to join the same university where Babasaheb once studied. But when I came here, I realised that even though Ambedkar is featured prominently as a notable alumni of LSE, there is hardly any engagement with his ideas on economics, caste or religion." Through its activities, the society aims to change this and bring focus to his scholarship. At the University of Oxford, the Oxford South Asian Ambedkar Forum (OxSAAF) was formed in 2021 with the intention to create an alternative to the existing Indian cultural presence on campus, mostly associated with Diwali and Bollywood. "One thing we wanted to do from the beginning was to create a desi counterculture of food, clothing, films and so on, in Oxford," said Shireen Azam, DPhil scholar and founding member of OxSAAF.

For instance, in 2022, OxSAAF organised a screening of the film Kaala by anti-caste filmmaker Pa Ranjith. "After the screening, we gave out food coupons which said 'India is not a vegetarian country'. We served both veg and non-veg food but we wanted to push against the widespread association of India with vegetarianism," Shireen said. Most societies have about 6-10 core members from different caste backgrounds and nationalities, with many more students and members of the public participating in their events. Despite their resolve to assert their presence, keeping the societies active year after year is a challenge since master's students leave when their one-year courses conclude and PhD students are often kept busy by research and academic commitments.

Outside of societies, some individual students like Mayur Helia, PhD scholar Lancaster University, are also doing their bit to bring insider perspectives to conversations on caste within academia. When he first enrolled here, he noticed that the university's library did not have many books on caste or Ambedkar. "The library had whole sections of books on Gandhi and on Nehru but there was hardly anything on caste, especially those written by people from within the Dalit community," Mayur said. This prompted him to write to the library's administration in 2024, suggesting that they commemorate Dalit History Month just as they mark occasions like Black History Month and LGBTQ+ History Month.







The library staff obliged and in April 2024, for the first time, the library had a bookshelf showcasing books such as *Caste Matters* by Suraj Yengde and *Coming out as Dalit* by Yashica Dutt, along with a note on the significance of Dalit History Month.

This year, too, the library celebrated the occasion with a dedicated bookshelf. Perhaps the biggest shift is the presence of so many researchers from marginalised caste backgrounds in the UK, engaged in academic knowledge production on caste, its history and its contemporary life. Students see this as an opportunity to correct the 'Savarna gaze' in research on the subject and to tell overlooked stories of resistance and dignity. "There are enough privileged caste researchers doing research on us. I want Dalits to come here to the UK and talk about the community. Now it is time for insiders to get their voice and for the mic to be passed," said Mayur, whose own PhD research is on caste, resistance and surveillance among sanitation workers in South Asia.

### **A growing push for recognition of caste in policies within UK universities**

Ambedkar famously said that caste would migrate with Hindus wherever they went, a prediction that has been visibly borne out in recent years across the globe. In the UK, too, students from marginalised castes experience subtle and unsubtle forms of discrimination from South Asian faculty and fellow students and even outside the campus. For instance, as a master's student at the University of Edinburgh, Vaishnavi (who goes by first name only) felt alienated by fellow Indian students when she told them she was on the Maharashtra government's overseas scholarship for OBC students. "After I told them, those students didn't want to go out with me, they didn't want to be friends. It disturbed me," she said. It reminded her of similar experiences of discrimination she had endured during her undergraduate studies in India. "You come from India and you are trying to run a way from that but even here, you are getting the same experience," Vaishnavi said.

Many students are first-generation learners who don't have the support networks or resources to tide over these challenges of moving to a new country with an unfamiliar academic system. Even the scholarships, particularly the National Overseas Scholarship, has its issues with students complaining that the stipend amount is insufficient to cover the high cost of living in the UK, forcing them to

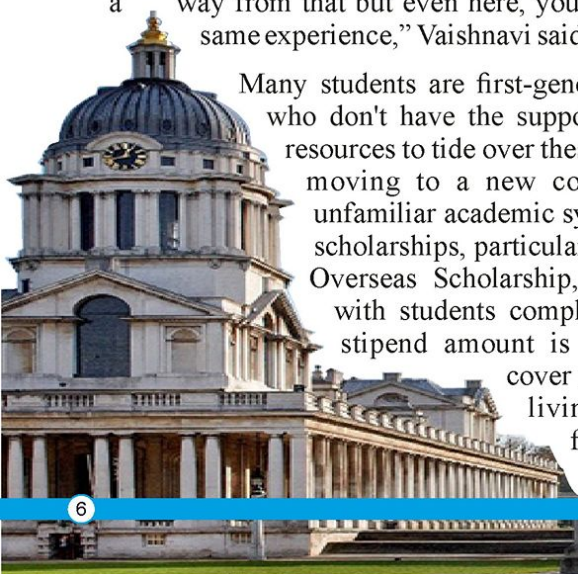
work part-time jobs. Although university administrations in the UK are generally sensitive to the diverse needs of students, a lack of understanding of caste and its impact on the student experience means that universities are ill-equipped to address the specific issues of marginalised caste students.

As president of the Ambedkarite Society of Edinburgh, Aniruddha tried to help a few students seek redressal after being subjected to caste-based discrimination from fellow Indian students. But the institutional mechanisms of the Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) in place to deal with such grievances fell short. "It was difficult to make them understand the seriousness of the complaint and the overt and covert ways in which caste discrimination takes place. Most importantly, they didn't understand the impact it has on the victims and the trauma they experience," Aniruddha said. When contacted, the EUSA said they were not in a position to comment since they are in the process of changing their representatives for the new academic year.

To tackle this lack of understanding, students are now also trying to bring an acknowledgement of caste in policies within their universities. In 2023, students at SOAS, led by Sushant Singh who was then the union's co-president for Welfare and Campaigns, made a proposal to the Students' Union to add 'caste' to their Equality and Diversity policy.

Now, as per the amended policy, the union is committed to creating equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination on the basis of caste, along with other characteristics such as age, race and gender identity. The policy, however, applies only to the students' union and not to the university since the two are separate legal entities.

Some students, like Yashashwani Srinivas, a PhD candidate at the University of Leeds, are trying to bring change by taking up positions with some influence. Yashashwani is a recipient of the White Rose doctoral studentship funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK. She applied to be on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee for the studentship and once on it, she advocated for caste to be included in the diversity monitoring. She was successful and, since October 2023, the studentship guidance states that while students will not be discriminated against on the basis of caste, age, race, gender and so on, this information will be collected anonymously to monitor the diversity of the cohort. It's a small change but in the process of doing it, Yashashwani hoped to begin important conversations around caste, conversations which she and fellow students now plan to keep going through the newly formed Dr Ambedkar Society at Leeds.





Students are not alone in this fight – they are supported, with evidence and advice, by existing networks of anti-caste advocacy groups in the UK. Santosh Dass MBE, chair of the Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA) in the UK, argued that these small wins, like Yashashwani's and the one at SOAS, are “vital” even if they don't have an immediate impact. “Maybe having the word 'caste' in the diversity policies will make them think about how people in positions of power may be treating Dalit students differently,” she said

Dass and others in the UK's decades-old Ambedkarite movement have been campaigning for caste to be included in the UK's 2010 Equality Act which provides legal protection from discrimination at the workplace and in wider society on the basis of nine protected characteristics, including race, gender, sexual orientation and age. Previously, their efforts were thwarted by counter-lobbying from groups such as the Hindu Forum and the Hindu Council in the UK. Now, with students and Ambedkarite societies on campus trying to bring a recognition of caste within their universities' policies, activists like Dass are hoping that it creates a bottom-up demand for the UK government to include caste as a protected characteristic in the law

If caste is added to the Equality Act, universities would be required to take active steps to eliminate discrimination on the basis of it and advance equality of opportunities, said Meena Dhanda, Professor of Philosophy and Cultural Politics at the University of Wolverhampton and long-time anti-caste activist. This could result in sensitisation for all staff and more targeted support for marginalised caste students with finding accommodation, navigating academics, scholarships and addressing any discrimination

What happened in Oxford in 2023 is an indication of how the work of student societies and anti-caste groups in the UK can come together to create a wider impact. In June 2023, OxSAAF organised a one-day conference on the theme 'Caste Beyond South Asia' with participation from academics, senior university administration staff and key activists from the UK. Professor Annapurna Waughrey and Professor Meena Dhanda, both academics involved in the anti-caste movement and Dass of ACDA shared their research on caste discrimination in the UK in housing, education and employment. Holly Cooper, Equalities Officer for the Oxford branch of the University and College Union (UCU) which represents academic and support staff in higher education, was present at the meeting. “The conference revealed the extent of the injustices related to caste-based discrimination at Oxford and the wider community.

As Equality Officer, my main job is to address injustices and so taking action was a necessary step,” Holly said in an email response. The discussions prompted Holly to

take up the issue of caste at a meeting of the Oxford UCU branch, ultimately leading to them passing a resolution to recognise 'caste' as a protected characteristic within the branch. The motion also led to many conversations among branch members on what caste is and what caste discrimination looks like.

Yet, the Equality Act even as it exists today does not hinder universities from making positive change, if they have the intent to do so. Since the 2023-24 academic year, the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development (OICSD) offers the Savitribai Phule Graduate Scholarship, the first of its kind, targeted at students from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Caste backgrounds as well as first-generation learners to study on eligible master's programmes. The centre, based in Somerville College, University of Oxford, made a case for the scholarship on the basis that students from historically marginalised castes faced a higher barrier of entry to study at the University of Oxford. Commenting on the role of UK universities in addressing caste inequity, Baroness Jan Royall, Principal of Somerville College, said in an email, “Universities have a responsibility to ensure that students from all backgrounds have equal access to education and opportunities. While caste discrimination may not be as widely discussed in the UK, it remains a deeply entrenched issue for many South Asian students. If we are serious about global inclusivity, we must acknowledge these challenges and take meaningful steps to address them.”

Anti-caste activists, academics and students believe that the clamour for change within universities will only gain momentum in the coming years. As more students from marginalised castes come to the UK to study, there will likely be more instances of discrimination from privileged caste peers and a greater push for universities to take notice and address inequities within South Asian and Indian communities.

“It is one thing to be interested in issues of caste out of intellectual curiosity. But it is different when it's intimately connected with your own lives. The presence of people for whom it's a question of their own lives has changed everything. Their presence will force a change which is urgently needed,” Professor Dhanda said.

*Source: The Wire*



# Nepal's Dalits: Poor, illiterate and married too young

Ruby Rauniyar



Dalits, who constitute 13.4 percent of Nepal's total population, continue to face severe socioeconomic disparities compared to non-Dalit communities, a newly released government report has revealed.

The National Statistics Office published a detailed report on Dalit-related statistics based on the 2021 national census. The data paints a stark picture of inequality, with a significant portion of Dalit families categorized as extremely poor. According to the report, Nepal's total population stands at 29,164,578, of which 3,898,990 (13.4 percent) are Dalits.

Among them, 8.6 percent are hill Dalits and 4.8 percent are from the Terai region. Non-Dalit communities make up 86.2 percent of the population—56.2 percent are hill non-Dalits and 25 percent are Terai non-Dalits.

A staggering 36 percent of Dalits fall into the category of extreme poverty, compared to only 18 percent of non-Dalits. Among Dalits, Terai Dalits are the most economically disadvantaged, with 44 percent categorized as extremely poor, in contrast to 32 percent of hill Dalits.

Presenting the report, Sharad Kumar Sharma, Deputy Chief of the Statistics Office, noted that non-Dalits in both hill and Terai regions are economically far better off.

In the highest wealth category, 22 percent of non-Dalits are represented, while only 6.2 percent of Dalits fall in that range.

For Terai Dalits, the figure is a mere 1.9 percent. Among

hill Dalits, 8.2 percent belong to the highest economic tier.

Sharma said Dalits remain underrepresented in education, healthcare, prosperity and state mechanisms, which continues to pose challenges to national development.

Madhu Sudan Burlakoti, the chief statistician, added that the poor economic condition of Dalits stems from their limited access to basic services such as education, health, nutrition and development.

“Historically, Dalits were subject to untouchability and social discrimination, which pushed them to the margins,” he said, “Though such practices are gradually decreasing due to rising awareness of equality and human dignity, the statistical reality calls for targeted policy reform.” He emphasized that the data

should now guide state policy and program planning for the upliftment of Dalit communities. “It is difficult to achieve the vision of a prosperous Nepal while leaving behind 13 percent of its people,” he said.

## 32 percent illiteracy rate

The national literacy rate for individuals aged five and above is 76.2 percent. Among non-Dalits, it stands at 77.6 percent, while the average literacy rate for Dalits is 67.4 percent—8.8 percentage points lower than the national average.

Further disparities emerge when broken down regionally. Literacy among Terai Dalits is only 51.9 percent, compared to 75.7 percent among hill Dalits,







which closely aligns with the national average. Sharma said these disparities call for educational policies tailored to Terai Dalits, backed by appropriate budget allocations.

### 13 percent never attended school

Among the population aged 5 to 25, 8.1 percent in Nepal have never attended school. However, the rate is 13.1 percent among Dalits, compared to 7.1 percent among non-Dalits.

For Terai Dalits, the figure jumps to 27.5 percent. Among Terai Dalit women, a staggering 31.6 percent have never been to school. Overall, 32.6 percent of Dalits remain illiterate.

### Caste Categories: 5 hill and 17 Terai Dalit groups

Dhundi Raj Lamichhane, spokesperson for the Statistics Office, said affirmative action and inclusive quotas have encouraged Dalits to identify themselves more openly by caste. Among hill Dalits, there are five main sub groups:

Bishwakarma (Kami), Pariyar (Damai), Mijar (Sarki), Badi and Gaine. Bishwakarma represents the largest share with 5 percent of the total population, followed by Pariyar (1.9 percent) and Mijar (1.6 percent). The Badi population is 11,470 and Gaine are 6,971 nationwide.

Tarai Dalits include 17 caste groups. Major ones include Chamar/Harijan/Ram (1.4 percent), Musahar (0.9 percent), Dusadh/Passwan/Pasi (0.9 percent), Tatma/Tatwa (0.4 percent), Khatwe (0.4 percent), Dhobi (0.4 percent) and Bantar/Sardar (0.2 percent). The

Kalwar caste has the lowest Dalit population at just 931 individuals.

### 23 percent child marriage rate among Dalits

The child marriage rate among Dalits stands at 23 percent, significantly higher than the 13 percent rate among non-Dalits. The report indicates that 8 percent of Dalit men and 34 percent of Dalit women were married as children.

In contrast, 4.4 percent of non-Dalit men and 20 percent of non-Dalit women were married before the legal age. Province-wise, Karnali Province records the highest child marriage rate at 20.1 percent, while Bagmati has the lowest at 8.4 percent.

### Dalit population growing

The Dalit population has gradually increased over the past two decades. In 2001, Dalits made up 11 percent of the total population—7.1 percent hill Dalits and 3.9 percent Terai

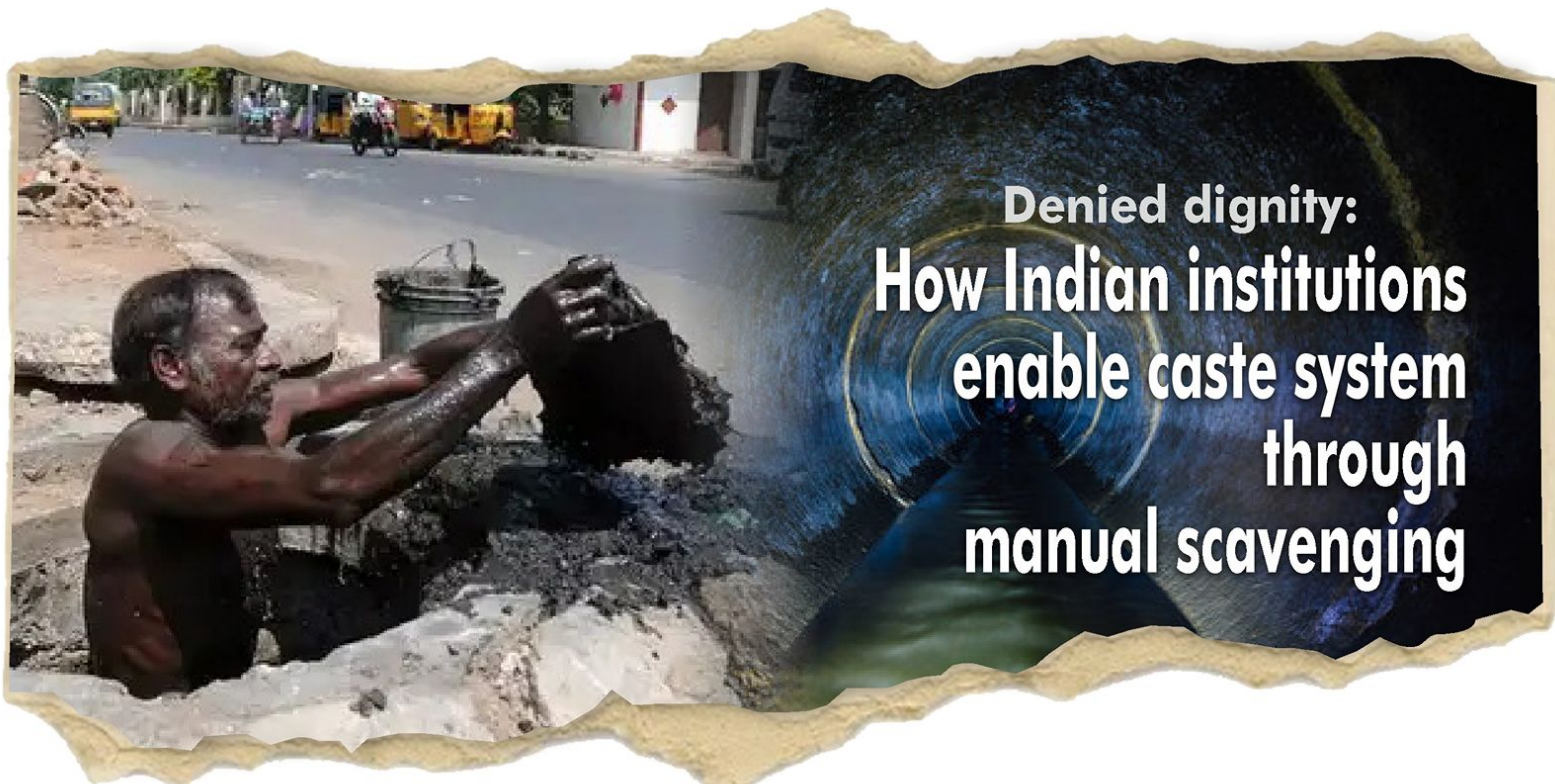
Dalits.

By 2011, the number had grown to 12.5 percent (8.1 percent hill Dalits and 4.4 percent Terai Dalits). The 2021 census now records Dalits at 13.4 percent of the population, with 8.6 percent hill Dalits and 4.8 percent Terai Dalits. Among the Dalit population, 2.4 percent are living with disabilities and 7.8 percent are single women.

**The child marriage rate among Dalits stands at 23 percent, significantly higher than the 13 percent rate among non-Dalits. The report indicates that 8 percent of Dalit men and 34 percent of Dalit women were married as children.**

*Source: My Republica*





## Denied dignity: How Indian institutions enable caste system through manual scavenging

Across the world, May 1 is set aside to honour the dignity of labour and the long struggle for workers' rights. In India, this reverence is starkly at odds with the everyday reality faced by its poor and vulnerable working class. Despite being the world's fifth largest economy, India continues to bury hundreds of its most marginalized citizens, mostly Dalits, in its sewers, septic tanks and graveyards.

The Indian State claims to have abolished manual scavenging, but the reality stinks of apathy, casteism and systemic failure.

### **The death toll of denial**

Since 2018, more than 400 workers have died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in India, according to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's admission in Parliament. This figure is widely seen as underreported. Civil society groups like the Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) estimate the actual number to be far higher.

These deaths aren't accidents, but caste murders. The victims are overwhelmingly Dalits, forced by social and economic discrimination to enter India's filthiest spaces, often without safety gear. Take the case of Joy, a 42-year-old sanitation worker in Kerala's capital, Thiruvananthapuram, who died in July last year while cleaning a clogged canal.

His story is not unique. Similar deaths have occurred in Hyderabad, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai—cosmopolitan cities where manual scavenging is explicitly illegal, yet continues in plain sight. The contrast between legal prohibition and lived reality is stark.

India outlawed manual scavenging over three decades

ago, first with the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. The law was expanded in 2013 through the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, which went further to mandate rehabilitation, alternative employment and the complete mechanisation of hazardous sanitation work.

And yet, the State has largely failed to implement these provisions. The Supreme Court's 2014 judgement reinforced the ban, ordered compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the families of deceased workers and even applied this rule retrospectively. Yet compliance remains abysmal. Many states have failed to complete the most basic requirement — identifying the people still forced into this occupation. As a result, their deaths are often unrecorded, uncompensated and unacknowledged.

The court also directed governments to mechanise sanitation, but this remains a broken promise in most places. Machines are either unavailable, dysfunctional, or locked away behind bureaucratic red tape. In many municipalities, mechanisation exists only on official procurement sheets, not on ground. In Delhi, manual cleaning persists under the label of 'voluntary' labour performed by contract workers.

What emerges is a story of institutional abandonment. At every level — from policy design to municipal governance — the system tolerates this caste-based exploitation.

The deaths are not merely technical failures, but moral indictments. Each time a worker enters a sewer without protection, it represents a chain of failures — the failure to mechanise, rehabilitate, record, compensate and



To end manual scavenging, India does not need more laws. It needs political will, administrative integrity and a rupture with the caste logic that continues to justify this violence.

### **Bone scavenging: A new horror**

If cleaning human excreta was not already a grotesque affront to human dignity, India now confronts an even more disturbing case in its caste ordeal — bone scavenging. A joint study report by the World Sanitation Workers' Alliance, the South Asian Sanitation Labour Network (SASLN) and the Safai Karmachari Ekta Manch uncovers this harrowing practice in parts of West Bengal, Odisha and Rajasthan, where marginalised Dalit communities — many already trapped in manual scavenging — are now collecting human bones from graveyards and cremation sites to earn their bread.

This is not macabre curiosity or criminality; it is economic desperation forged by caste dynamics. In districts like Birbhum, Siliguri and Cooch Behar, at least 178 individuals, mostly Dalits, are engaged in this invisible trade. The bones are sold to unregulated networks supplying calcium-processing units and cosmetic industries. The returns are shockingly low, often just Rs 200 per transaction, underlining the dual economic and social exploitation that defines their existence.

This practice is more than illegal; it is profoundly inhumane. It reveals how caste and class conspire to extract value from the oppressed, not only in life but even after death. Historically relegated to 'impure' labour such as burial, leatherwork and waste collection, Dalit communities are once again reduced to their perceived utility.

Their suffering is attached even to death and is monetised.

To see bone scavenging as merely an outcome of poverty is to miss the point. This is the machinery of caste capitalism, where certain bodies are made economically viable through morally invisible, caste-coded labour.

As anthropologist Veena Das argues, disposability becomes normalised in postcolonial governance. Here, it is institutionalised. The dead are harvested because the living are abandoned.

Philosopher Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics — the power to decide whose life matters and whose death is meaningful — finds terrifying resonance here. In India,

Dalit death is doubly invisible — their lives are undervalued and their deaths unacknowledged.

The "economy of bones" turns the remains of the oppressed into industrial raw material, commodifying them beyond death and outside the gaze of the State and society.

Even more damning is the ritual and moral collapse this exposes. Across cultures, the dead are honoured. The bodies are sacred and their resting places inviolable. But in India, the poor, especially Dalits and Adivasis, are denied even this final dignity. The graveyard, meant to be a place of peace, becomes another site of caste-determined labour. Dignity is not just denied in sewers and toilets, but also beneath tombstones and smouldering pyres.

The State's silence is deafening. There are no relief packages, no targeted rehabilitation, no serious crackdowns on this underground economy. Welfare legislation like the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act

(2013) ends at the threshold of death.

There is no legal recognition of caste-based post-mortem exploitation.

The implication is chilling — in caste India, even your bones are not your own.

### **The need for a renewed behavioural framework**

India's persistent failure to eliminate manual scavenging, despite constitutional guarantees, progressive laws and technological alternatives, stems not from a legal vacuum but from entrenched behavioural and sociological norms. Caste-based prejudice, institutional apathy and administrative inaction have sustained this inhuman practice, making the failure systemic rather than incidental.

Dalit scholar Suraj Yengde, in *Caste Matters*, aptly terms this crisis "sanitation apartheid" — a caste-based segregation that frames sanitation work as the hereditary duty of Dalits, especially the Valmiki community. Rooted in the Brahmanical notion of ritual purity, this worldview renders certain bodies disposable and sanitation labour invisible.

This caste-based occupational segregation is institutionalised by the State through municipalities that continue to contract Dalits disproportionately for sanitation work, often masking it as 'voluntary' labour.

**Since 2018, more than 400 workers have died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in India, according to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's admission in Parliament.**

**This figure is widely seen as underreported.**



As BR Ambedkar warned, no true social democracy can exist where caste remains the foundation of labour relations. Moreover, the administrative class and civil society often approach welfare with a saviour complex, failing to acknowledge manual scavenging as a moral and civilisational failure.

Behavioural economics offers a useful lens here. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's *Nudge Theory* highlights how laws need reinforcement through behavioural shifts – choice architecture – that alters social norms.

India lacks both. Legal bans exist, but stigma persists due to the absence of institutional nudges and counter-narratives.

Comparative frameworks illustrate India's shortcomings. Japan addressed its historical caste-equivalent discrimination (Burakumin) through reparative policies and cultural re-narrativisation. South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission, though imperfect, represents a model for public acknowledgement. India, by contrast, has yet to confront caste-based labour with such seriousness.

Educational and cultural reform must be central to any lasting change.

As sociologist Ashis Nandy notes, the Indian state has internalised caste even while claiming to abolish it. Reform must extend beyond legal tools into pedagogy, representation and narrative justice. Dalits must be seen not as mere beneficiaries, but as policy agents and cultural authors.

Finally, the notion of the dignity of labour must be redefined. In India, bodily labour, especially involving sanitation, is not only materially devalued but morally degraded. We must why sanitation is not framed as a public health issue but reduced to a caste burden. Why is the firefighter valorised, but the sewer worker rendered invisible?

Addressing manual scavenging demands more than legal compliance; it calls for a radical shift in our moral imagination.

### Ensuring dignity: The way forward

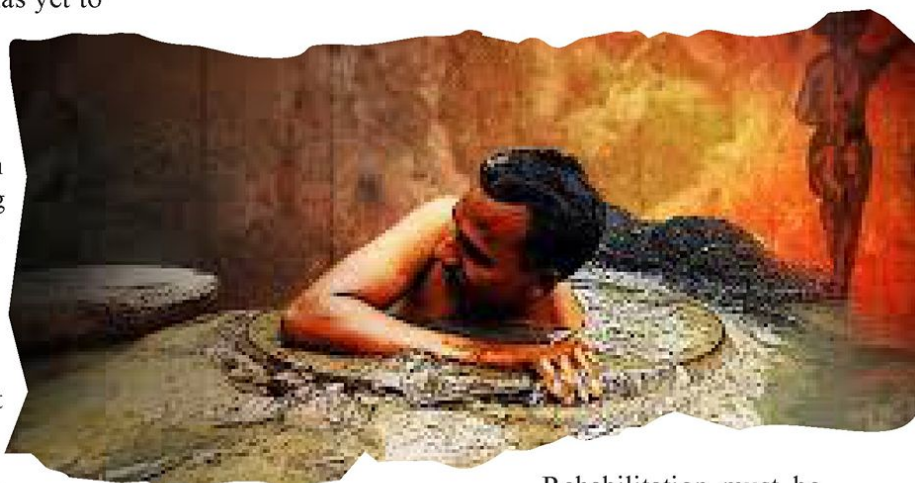
Globally, sanitation work is recognised as essential labour and is mechanised, unionised and dignified in countries like Japan, South Korea and across Scandinavia. Workers there wear uniforms of pride, not stigma.

The United Nations classifies manual scavenging as a modern form of slavery and has repeatedly called for its total eradication. As a signatory to international human

rights covenants and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), India's inaction is a violation not just of constitutional values but of its global commitments.

Ending manual scavenging requires urgent, structural reform, not symbolic gestures. The government must revive and meaningfully expand the Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) and the NAMASTE initiative, ensuring they provide minimum wages, full insurance and mandatory upskilling. Manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks must be stopped with strict enforcement, penalties and time-bound audits.

Independent safety boards and grievance redressal bodies must be established at the local level, insulated from bureaucratic apathy and casteist discrimination. Public discourse must also shift — a sustained national campaign should challenge the entrenched stigma surrounding sanitation work and affirm the dignity of those who perform it.



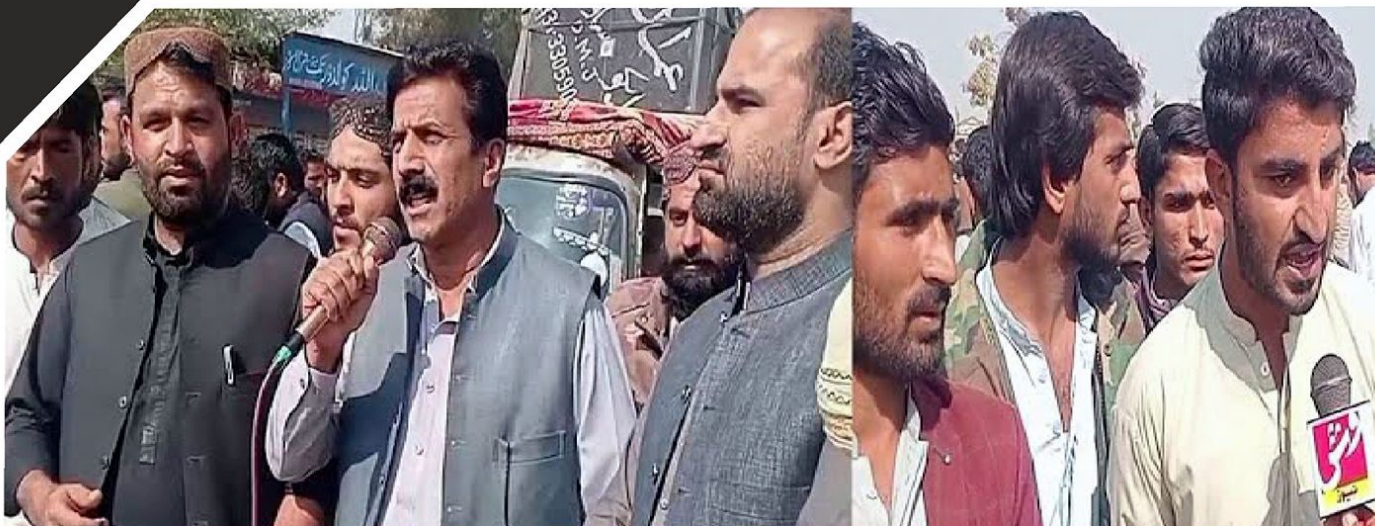
Rehabilitation must be holistic and community-driven, offering not just financial aid, but housing, education and sustainable livelihoods for the families of deceased or former workers.

Until these reforms are realised, India's pledges to end manual scavenging will remain performative. A manhole is not mere infrastructure; it is a caste trench swallowing generations of the oppressed.

Let May Days be not a festival of slogans, but a call for justice and reforms. As philosopher Michael Sandel argues, a just society must accord dignity to all forms of work, not only through fair compensation but by recognising the moral worth of the labour itself.

Source: *The News Minute*





## Traders protest colleague's kidnapping in Dera Murad Jamali

Locals staged a sit-in in Dera Murad Jamali against the kidnapping of a Hindu trader, Sital Das, who was abducted by armed men from Mangoli area of Nasirabad district.

The traders gathered at the DC Chowk and blocked the Sibi-Sukkur National Highway, suspending traffic between Sindh and Balochistan.

They set up a sit-in camp and demanded the immediate recovery of the abducted trader.

The protesters chanted slogans against the local administration and police.

They warned that if the trader was not recovered within the next 18 hours, they would start a protest on the highway for an indefinite period.

The leaders of different political parties, including the district council chairman, Haji Mir Fareedul Haq, former minister Mir Ghafoor Lehri, Shah Muhammad Baloch and other leaders visited the sit-in camp to express their solidarity with traders.

Balochistan Awami Party Senator Danish Kumar Palyani, PPP MPA Sanjay Kumar Panjwani, JUI-F MPA Ravi Kumar, former ministers Abdul Majid Abro, Mir Sikandar Umrani, Mir Safdar Khan Umrani and other political leaders have demanded that the Balochistan

government recover the kidnapped trader immediately and arrest the kidnappers.

They said the Hindu community was feeling insecure due to the law and order situation and it was the government's responsibility to protect the minorities.

Shahid Rind, the Balochistan government spokesperson, said Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti has taken notice of the kidnapping.

He described the abduction as extremely concerning and assured that all available resources were being used to ensure Mr Das' recovery.

**They said the Hindu community was feeling Insecure due to the law and order situation and it was the government's responsibility to protect the minorities.**

The police and other law enforcement agencies were working on this case and positive progress was expected soon, Mr Rind emphasised, adding the abductors will be brought to justice.

He further stated that protecting the lives and property of citizens was the government's top priority and CM Bugti has issued clear instructions for action against criminals.

*Source: Dawn*



# India's Untouchables:

## *The Undying Struggle for Equality*

*Poornima*

India's constitutional commitment to equality fails to prevent ongoing caste-based discrimination against Dalits. Legal frameworks evolved while numerous individuals maintain unchanged beliefs.

The recent incident involving Shivam Sonkar—a Dalit scholar who achieved second place in his PhD, the Banaras Hindu University entrance exam exposes the harsh reality that caste continues to control access to opportunities.

This article examines the persistent discrimination against Dalits alongside their democratic struggle, the necessity of reservations and Dr. Ambedkar's enduring influence.

India continues to struggle with caste-based exclusion even after seventy-five years of independence. Legal frameworks prohibit untouchability, yet real-world conditions contradict this narrative. Members of the Dalit community face exclusion in society.

Take Shivam Sonkar's situation: Despite being top-ranked, he was rejected from BHU's Ph.D. program. The reason? His Dalit identity. These incidents reveal the operation of caste bias within prestigious institutions.

Reports indicate that Dalits still encounter discriminatory practices across educational institutions, professional environments and social interactions. Members of lower castes remain trapped in demeaning employment while facing violent assaults for temple entry and brutal attacks for pursuing dreams beyond their caste restrictions.

"Democracy is meaningless unless it stands for the recognition of the dignity of every individual."

### **Democracy for Whom? When Equality is an Illusion**

Every Indian citizen theoretically enjoys fundamental rights under the Constitution, but Dalits frequently remain excluded from these legal protections.

The democratic system, designed to uplift marginalised groups, instead betrays their interests.

Dalits encounter political exclusion along with systemic violence and social rejection despite their constitutional rights. Requests for dignity by these individuals result in responses of threats, humiliation and potential fatal outcomes. Indian society has deeply entrenched caste structures that obstruct the achievement of genuine equality.

Why does this discrimination persist? Because casteism is not just a system; it is a mindset. Laws can change, but attitudes take generations to evolve. Until society indeed acknowledges its biases, Dalits will remain second-class citizens in their own country.

### **Why Reservation? Breaking the Myth of "Merit"**

A common question posed by critics is why Dalits continue to require reservations. What reasons exist for prioritising caste-based quotas over merit?



The straightforward explanation is that caste discrimination remains prevalent. Merit loses its significance when systemic barriers prevent access to opportunities. Historically, Dalits faced systemic exclusion from educational opportunities, job markets and economic advancement. The purpose of reservations is to create equality by adjusting a historically skewed playing field, rather than providing them with undeserved benefits.

Absent reservation systems, dominant caste groups would maintain control over institutions, resulting in total exclusion of Dalits.

Dalits encounter numerous barriers, including discrimination and isolation, along with inadequate institutional support despite existing reservation policies. The situation of Shivam Sonkar demonstrates that Dalits remain vulnerable to caste discrimination despite their achievements.

"Turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path." Think for a moment about an India without Dr B.R. Ambedkar. Would democracy, socio-economic justice and constitutional rights exist authentically?

Dr. Ambedkar was born into a Dalit family and faced humiliation at various points in his life. Yet, he emerged as the chief architect of India's constitutional framework, which empowered all people, regardless of caste, to have equal rights.

Ambedkar's vision was not merely about laws; it was about dignity. He worked for women's rights, labor rights and the annihilation of caste.

Ambedkar contributed to modern India's development,

but many who use these rights today fail to appreciate that they became entitlements through a Dalit leader. It is ironic that those opposed to reservations and Dalit rights conveniently overlook the fact that the Constitution was written by a Dalit. "The progress of any society can be measured by the position of its weakest members."

### **Beyond Caste: The Urgency of Humanity**

The matter of casteism concerns more than Dalits—it is a matter of humanity. Until India is prepared to identify people as 'people' and not castes, there can be no genuine



**Historically, Dalits faced systemic exclusion from educational opportunities, job markets and economic advancement. The purpose of reservations is to create equality by adjusting a historically skewed playing field, rather than providing them with undeserved benefits.**

democracy.

According to political scientist Dr. Hanumanthappa D.G., Ambedkar's philosophy was based on the universal human rights of all people. The principles of liberty, equality and fraternity should be the foundations of India today. The question becomes: are we really ready to live these principles? Are we, as a society, really ready to forego caste prejudice and elevate the human dignity of all people? It is time for India to choose.

Shall we continue to subjugate a portion of our own people? Or shall we finally be ready to rise above caste and adhere to the humanity that joins us all?

The untouchable truth is that caste discrimination is far from finished. However, it is not simply the burden of Dalits alone to fight it; it is a fight for any Indian who believes in an idea of equality and justice. History will judge us by how we treat the most marginalised. The choice is clear: either we uphold the Constitution and Ambedkar's vision of India, or remain bequeathed to a past of oppression.

Will India break the caste system? Or will we continue to let down our own? The answer rests in whatever we decide to do next.

*Source: The Mooknayak*







## Hindu Community Leader Kidnapped, Beaten To Death in Bangladesh

In yet another incident of violence against minorities in Bangladesh, a Hindu leader in Dinajpur's Biral upazila was kidnapped and brutally assaulted to death, as confirmed by the local police and family members.

The man, Bhabesh Chandra, was a prominent leader of the Hindu community in the area who also acted as the Vice-President of the Biral unit of the Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad, local media reported. Speaking to Bangladesh's leading newspaper, The Daily Star, Chandra's wife Shantana Roy said that four men arrived on two motorcycles and kidnapped Bhabesh from their residence. Several witnesses also reported seeing the assailants taking Bhabesh to Narabari village, where he was brutally beaten.

Later that day, the attackers dropped Bhabesh's unconscious body back at his home in a van. He was immediately rushed to the Biral Upazila Health Complex. Subsequently, he was transferred to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital, where on-duty doctors declared him dead upon arrival. The officer-in-charge of Biral Police Station said that police are working to identify and arrest the suspects involved and preparations are underway to file a case.

Last month, a report of the Dhaka-based human rights organisation, Ain O Salish Kendra (AsK), highlighted that there are reports of a total of 147 incidents of vandalization of houses, temples and business establishments of the Hindu community across Bangladesh.

Some 408 households were vandalised in these incidents, including 36 cases of arson. Besides, there have been reports of 113 incidents of vandalising business establishments owned by the minority community, 32 incidents of attack on temples and

mosques of the Ahmadiyya sect and 92 incidents of vandalising idols in 92 temples. In September 2024, the country's leading Bengali daily Prothom Alo reported that after the fall of the Awami League government, there have been several incidents of attacks on the minority communities all over the country, particularly on the Hindu community. In many areas, houses, business establishments and places of worship of Hindus still continue to come under attack. Bangladesh has been grappling with violence and protests after the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus came to power in August, last year.

The situation of Hindus has worsened drastically under Yunus-led interim government. There are several reports on an alarming rise in gang rapes, murders and desecration of temples of Hindu minorities. India has time and again raised concerns against the atrocities of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the issue of the safety and security of minorities in Bangladesh, including Hindus, during his meeting with Yunus, held on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok. "On the question of minorities, this particular issue came up for discussion. We have conveyed our concerns regarding the treatment of minorities and the kind of violence that has happened against them. We have been raising this in several of our conversations, including our meeting in Bangkok, that this violence and atrocities against minorities cannot simply be wished away or dismissed as political reasons or media agitations.

We hope that the Bangladesh government will take strong action against those responsible for these atrocities," Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs, said at a media briefing recently.

*Source: Financial Express*



# How Conversion of Dalits to Buddhism has Helped Dalits in their Emancipation?



The conversion of Dalits to Buddhism under Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's guidance, culminating in the mass conversion event on October 14, 1956, in Nagpur, was a pivotal moment in their emancipation. This movement, often called the Ambedkarite or Neo-Buddhist movement, offered Dalits a pathway to break free from the oppressive caste system entrenched in Hinduism, providing social, psychological and cultural liberation. Here is how it contributed to their emancipation:

## 1. Rejection of Caste-Based Oppression

Hinduism, as Ambedkar saw it, institutionally sanctioned untouchability and caste hierarchy through scriptures like the Manusmriti. By converting to Buddhism—a religion he viewed as egalitarian, rational and devoid of caste—Dalits could reject the theological basis of their subjugation. This act of conversion was a symbolic and practical renunciation of a system that deemed them “impure,” empowering them to redefine their identity outside the Hindu fold.

## 2. Restoration of Dignity and Self-Respect

Ambedkar emphasized that emancipation was not just about material upliftment but also dignity. Buddhism, with its focus on equality (all beings can attain enlightenment) and ethical living, gave Dalits a new sense of self-worth. The 22 vows he administered during the conversion—such as rejecting Hindu gods and rituals—were a deliberate assertion of agency, encouraging Dalits to shed the internalized inferiority imposed by centuries of discrimination.

## 3. Cultural and Social Alternative

Conversion provided Dalits with a distinct cultural identity rooted in Buddhist values like compassion, wisdom and community (Sangha). This countered the exclusion they faced in Hindu society, where they were barred from temples and social spaces. By embracing Buddhism, they built their own communities, rituals and spaces—like viharas—fostering solidarity and pride. Over time, this created a subculture that challenged the dominance of upper-caste norms.

## 4. Political Consciousness and Mobilization

The conversion movement was not just spiritual; it was deeply political. Ambedkar framed it as a revolt against

caste

tyranny, galvanizing

Dalits into a collective force.

This heightened their political awareness and strengthened their resolve to demand rights and representation. The Neo-Buddhist identity became a rallying point for Dalit activism, reinforcing Ambedkar's broader efforts through organizations like the Scheduled Castes Federation.

## 5. Education and Empowerment

Ambedkar saw Buddhism as a rational, scientific faith that encouraged inquiry and education—key tools for Dalit upliftment. By embracing it, many Dalits were inspired to pursue learning, as Ambedkar himself had urged (“Educate, Agitate, Organize”). This shift helped break the cycle of illiteracy and poverty that caste had perpetuated, enabling social mobility.

## 6. Long-Term Impact on Caste Dynamics

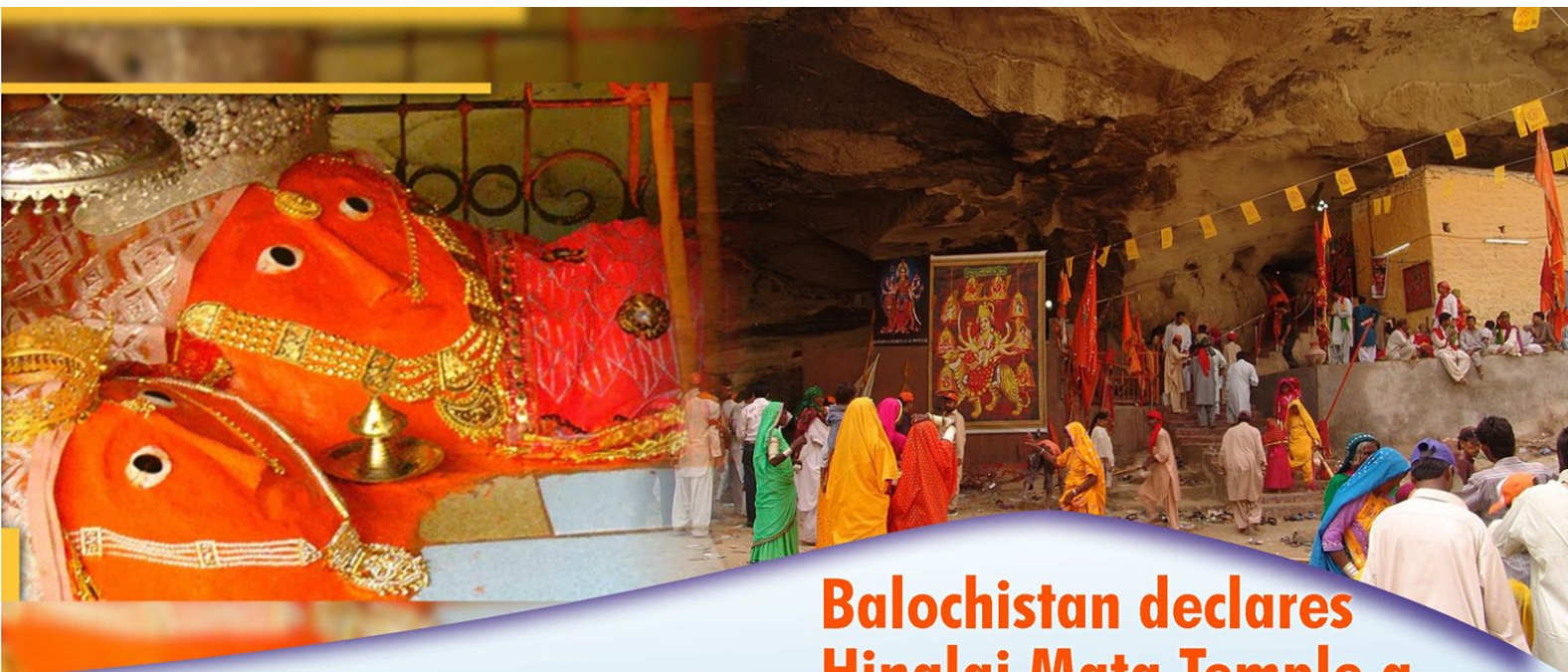
The mass conversion—initially involving over 500,000 Dalits and growing to millions in subsequent decades—sent a powerful message to Indian society. It pressured the state and upper castes to confront the injustices of untouchability, accelerating reforms and the implementation of constitutional safeguards. It also inspired future generations of Dalits to resist caste oppression, whether through Buddhism or other means.

**Practical Outcomes:** In Maharashtra, where the movement took root most strongly, Neo-Buddhists (often from the Mahar caste, Ambedkar's own community) saw gradual improvements in education, employment and political participation, aided by reservations and their newfound assertiveness. While not all socio-economic woes were erased—poverty and discrimination persisted—the conversion gave Dalits a framework to challenge their marginalization more effectively. **In summary,** Ambedkar's leadership in converting Dalits to Buddhism was a radical act of emancipation, offering them a spiritual escape from caste, a platform for self-assertion and a tool for long-term empowerment. It did not end all their struggles, but it planted the seeds for a sustained fight against inequality, reshaping their place in Indian society.

*Source: CounterCurrents*

AMBEDKAR VISION Apr. - Jun. 2025





## Balochistan declares Hinglaj Mata Temple a global tourist destination.

The Balochistan government has announced its plan to designate the historic Hinglaj Mata Temple in Lasbela district as a global tourist site.

This move was discussed in a meeting between Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti and Senator Danesh Kumar, where they reviewed strategies to boost religious tourism for minorities within the province.

Hinglaj Mata Temple, a revered pilgrimage site for the Hindu community—particularly in Balochistan—has stood for centuries and attracts hundreds of thousands of devotees from Pakistan and abroad annually.

The government's initiative aims to promote religious harmony, uplift minority tourism and project a positive global image of Balochistan.

Chief Minister Bugti emphasised that Balochistan represents a blend of diverse cultures and communities, and the temple is a testament to its deep-rooted tradition of coexistence and historical richness.

To support the temple's restoration and accommodate its growing number of visitors, the provincial government has allocated special development funds in the 2025 budget. Planned improvements include upgraded infrastructure, enhanced facilities for pilgrims and

conservation of the temple's historical architecture.

The Hinglaj Mata Temple draws over 250,000 pilgrims each year, not only from across Pakistan but also from countries such as India, the UAE, and other Gulf nations. The annual Hinglaj Yatra is a major spiritual event, reflecting the temple's profound religious importance. With this new designation, tourism in Balochistan is projected to increase by up to 30% over the next five years.


Balochistan is home to more than 50 minority religious and cultural heritage sites. By elevating Hinglaj Mata Temple to global status, the province is reinforcing its identity as a land of tolerance, coexistence and heritage.

The move also sends a clear message to the world: Pakistan is a nation where diverse faiths thrive, cultures are honored and unity is rooted in mutual respect.

*Source: Dawn*







## Censoring Change: How Bollywood's Elite Resist Caste-Conscious Cinema

Phule seems to be the latest among the long line of alternative movies that have faced significant hurdles on the way to the big screen, simply for exploring Dalit-Bahujan identities and narratives that mainstream Hindi cinema has often shied away from; and it's not without a pattern it seems

Hindi cinema, dominated by profit-driven masala films, often glorifies social elites while sidelining Dalit-Bahujan identities and their concerns.

Mainstream Bollywood, criticised for promoting patriarchal and casteist stereotypes, rarely embraces cinema as a tool to challenge social injustices.

Additionally, it tends to uphold the cultural and political agendas of traditional social elites while avoiding engaging with Dalit-Bahujan narratives and their social experiences.

Popular cinema hesitates to embrace cinema as a platform for artistic and creative exploration that would unearth orthodox social practices and sensitise the audience about it.

In recent years, mainstream Hindi cinema has seen rare

but significant attempts to challenge Bollywood's stereotypical narratives through films like *Article 15*, which exposes caste atrocities through a police officer's awakening and *Dhadak*, which subtly weaves caste into a tragic romance, signal a shift toward socially aware storytelling.

Other films like *Shamshera* and *Veda*, which address issues of caste oppression and present robust Dalit protagonists to fight such social ills, are crucial additions.


This emerging genre has carved out a peripheral yet vital space for films that expose societal injustices and advocate for reform, offering a vision of a more equitable society.

Such efforts should be celebrated and supported, but the industry's conventional ruling elites have largely distanced themselves from this shift.

Instead, these films are often criticised as threats to the dominance of social elites, accused of disrupting social harmony by foregrounding Dalit-Bahujan symbols and narratives.

*Source: Magzter*





## DALIT HISTORY MONTH Recognized in Burlington Amid Calls for Awareness and Protection

Last April, the City of Burlington officially proclaimed Dalit History Month, recognizing the resilience, history and ongoing struggles of the Dalit community, both locally and globally. Mayor Marianne Meed Ward made the declaration, noting the city's ongoing commitment to addressing systemic racism and discrimination in all its forms.

"I, Marianne Meed Ward, Mayor of the City of Burlington, do hereby declare April 2024 as 'Dalit History Month' in the City of Burlington," reads the proclamation, which honours the birth and death anniversaries of key social reformers such as Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, Mangu Ram Mugowalia and Sant Ram Udasi.

And again, April 2025 was proclaimed as Dalit History Month in Burlington, alongside April 14 being declared Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Day for Equity.

Dalit History Month is observed globally to commemorate the experiences and resistance of Dalit people — formerly referred to as "untouchables" — and to recognize their contributions to justice and equality. While the caste system originates from South Asia, its impact extends far beyond those borders.

"This is why we are celebrating this Dalit history here," said Vijay Puli, founder and director of the South Asian Dalit Adivasi Network (SADAN). "There are so many Dalit people who came from South Asia to escape

discrimination, but they are still facing the same kind of treatment here in Canada."

Puli described caste-based discrimination as a "multi-generational issue" deeply rooted in the 2,500-year-old caste hierarchy of South Asia. "Dalit is the new identity for the untouchables," he said.

"Even in Canada, people are asked their caste when renting houses, denied opportunities and ostracized based on what they eat. If they say they eat beef, that's often used to identify them as Dalit."

He noted that caste discrimination in Canada can affect Dalits' access to housing, employment opportunities and education. "Dalit people aren't getting promoted once dominant caste supervisors or managers learn of their identity," Puli said.

"They face discrimination in the school system, in workplaces and even in social gatherings and partner relationships."

In 2021, Dalit History Month was first celebrated in Canada through community efforts in the Peel Region. Since then, it has gained growing support across the country.

Human rights institutions are beginning to formally acknowledge caste-based discrimination.



The Ontario Human Rights Commission now recognizes caste as a category that can fall under prohibited grounds such as race, ancestry and place of origin. The Toronto District School Board has taken steps to address it and

the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal has also acknowledged caste-based discrimination. A motion is before Canada's House of Commons to explicitly add caste as a protected category under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The City of Burlington echoed the importance of awareness in a statement: "The City is enriched by the cultures, histories and contributions of diverse communities here in Burlington.

Dalit History Month, recognized by a proclamation each year, is an opportunity to reflect on the resilience and activism of Dalit and caste-oppressed communities, honouring those who have been instrumental in the fight for social justice and equality."

Although the city is not hosting any events directly, it encourages local organizations to list their events on the city's online calendar and participate in learning more about Dalit history and its significance.

"The City remains committed to advancing equity, inclusion and human rights, in alignment with the Ontario Human Rights Commission's recognition of caste-based discrimination," the statement reads.

A major community event recognizing Dalit History Month will take place on April 12 at Tomken Twin Arena in Mississauga, hosted by SADAN.

The event, themed "Caste & Race in Global Context," features speakers such as Dr. Sumeet Mhaskar of Carleton University, Dalit doctoral scholar Kavya Harshitha Jidugu of Queen's University and Alayna Puli, a youth activist and member of SADAN.

More than 150 attendees are expected and the event will also include a stand-up performance by Dalit comedian Manjeet Sarkar.

Puli expressed gratitude to the individuals and



organizations that have supported the Dalit community's journey toward recognition. "There is a need to recognize this because people are still facing the same kind of discrimination here in Canadian society," he said. "Thanks to the people and organizations that have recognized and celebrated Dalit History Month — it's very important for everyone's voice to be included."

When asked how Canadians can learn more, Puli recommended *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson and its accompanying film *Origin*, which follows Wilkerson's journey in writing the book and examining how caste operates in different global contexts.

"We hope to bring more awareness to Canadian history and see caste recognized under DEI protections," Puli added. "It's time for laws that provide real protection and security to Dalit people in Canada — so they can advocate for themselves and live free of discrimination."

Most of all, Puli expressed gratitude. "I want to thank all the organizations, municipalities and people that have supported Dalit history in Ontario. Their allyship is priceless."

**Source: *Pentictonherald***





# Plight of Nepal's Dalits

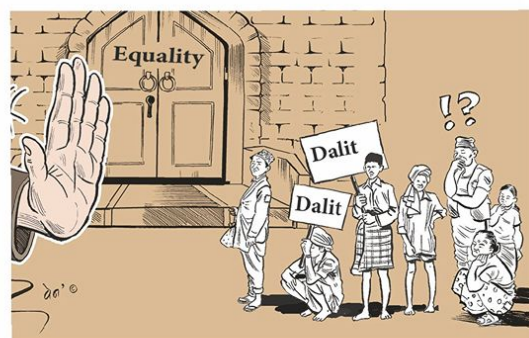
Persistent structural inequality has affected Nepal's marginalized communities, especially the Dalit community, which resides throughout the country's rural hinterlands. Dalits, who comprise more than 13 percent of the population, are disproportionately impacted by poverty, illiteracy, child marriage and social exclusion despite constitutional guarantees of equality and inclusion.

According to the latest data released by the National Statistics Office, which this daily's headline summed up, Nepal's Dalits are poor, illiterate and married too young. A whole bunch of complex factors are at play, making the lives of Dalits hellish ones. The economic marginalization of Dalits is perhaps the most serious issue that needs to be tackled since 36% of Dalits live in extreme poverty. The situation of Terai Dalits is even worse, with 44% classified as extremely poor. Just 6.2% of Dalits are in the highest wealth category, demonstrating the depressingly large wealth distribution gap. Terai Dalits make up a mere 1.9% of that. These figures indicate serious economic exclusion of the Dalit communities. Educational inequality further worsens this socioeconomic divide. The literacy rate among Dalits stands at 67.4%, which is lower than the 77.6% recorded among non-Dalits. Terai Dalits stand at around 51.9%. Worse still, nearly a third of Dalit girls between the ages of 5 and 25 never get to attend school. This lack of access to education has snowballing effects: low skill levels mean menial, low-paying jobs, which in turn limit their chances of coming out of poverty. Child marriage is another disturbing trend. According to the data, 23% of Dalits marry before reaching adulthood. The practice is more prevalent among girls, especially among Terai Dalits. Early marriage frequently leads to reduced educational opportunities, increased maternal and infant mortality and early pregnancies. Laws against child marriage are obviously in place, but they are ineffective due to a lack of enforcement and deeply ingrained, widely accepted cultural customs. A comprehensive and long-term strategy is required to address these complex issues. The

underlying causes must be addressed in addition to the symptoms. For instance, a ten-year plan might start with economic empowerment via focused vocational training and job programs that are adapted to the demands of the market.

Together with community-based organizations and groups, government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate to offer skills development in small-scale manufacturing, services and agriculture. Dalits' access to microfinance and entrepreneurship would undoubtedly encourage economic independence within Dalit communities if all three levels of government cooperated. Education must be at the core of this transformation.

Adult literacy programs can come in handy to equip the older generations with the skills needed for economic participation. To



address child marriage, step up community-level awareness campaigns and enforce the laws. Local governments should take the lead role. But these initiatives must come together with improved access to healthcare, especially reproductive and maternal health services. The issues made public by the National Statistics Office are part of a complex web of socioeconomic barriers that the Dalits have faced for centuries.

These challenges are not insurmountable and can be solved if we have the required political will. With a coordinated, long-term plan grounded in inclusion, equity and empowerment, Nepal can make meaningful progress toward lifting Dalit communities out of rampant poverty and discrimination. Nepal's democracy and progress hinge on how well it integrates and empowers its most disadvantaged citizens because the nation cannot truly grow if millions of its people are left behind.

Source: My Republica





# Gender in Social Justice:

## Remembering Ambedkar's Contributions to Dalit feminism

Dr BR Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and independent India's first Law Minister, remains a towering figure in the struggle for social justice. His legacy is often celebrated for dismantling caste hierarchies and empowering the Dalit and other marginalised communities.

What is less acknowledged, yet equally transformative, is his radical vision for women's liberation, especially the empowerment and liberation of Dalit women.

Ambedkar never viewed caste and gender as isolated structures of oppression. For him, the caste system was inherently patriarchal, and patriarchy was deeply entrenched in Brahmanical Hinduism. In his works, including *The Annihilation of Caste*, he exposed how religious doctrines not only sanctioned caste-based hierarchies, but also dictated women's subjugation. Dalit women were positioned at the intersection of caste, class, and gender. Ambedkar's feminist approach was, therefore, not abstract or elitist, but grounded in the lived realities of their double or triple marginalisation.

Long before feminist discourse entered mainstream academia in India, Ambedkar articulated a distinctly rooted, intersectional approach to gender justice, laying the foundation for what we now identify as Dalit feminism.

He recognised that the liberation of Dalit women was central to the emancipation of the entire Dalit community. As the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar ensured that gender equality was enshrined in the very fabric of the nation.

Articles 14, 15, and 16, which prohibit discrimination based on sex and caste, are a direct result of his insistence on an inclusive framework that permitted affirmative action to integrate the marginalised in the mainstream.

He argued for equal access to education, employment, and civil liberties for women, anticipating the feminist critiques that would emerge much later.

### Liberation through education

Ambedkar was not only a legislator or theoretician, but also a social reformer who worked on the ground. Many of his initiatives were for women.

He encouraged Dalit women to form collectives and participate in public life. In his speeches made at women's gatherings, he urged them to educate themselves, be financially independent, and challenge oppressive traditions. Ambedkar believed education was the most potent tool for liberation. He encouraged Dalit women, in particular, to break the shackles of tradition, seek knowledge, and participate in the public sphere.

He facilitated hostels and scholarships for Dalit girls and spoke out against the denial of education to women by orthodox systems. He believed that unless women were educated and economically independent, the dream of equality would remain hollow.

### Power of collective action

In the rigid social terrain of early 20th century India, where caste hierarchy worked hand-in-glove with patriarchy, Dalit women were not granted the right to grieve aloud, let alone speak in public. Ambedkar's encouragement of their self-organisation was a radical political move rooted in his understanding that the emancipation of the Dalit community could not be achieved without the absolute liberation of Dalit women.

His belief in the power of collective action led him to actively promote the formation of Mahila Mandals – autonomous women's collectives – where Dalit women could come together, not just to share their burdens, but to voice their politics.



The Mahila Mandals were more than meeting spaces — they were schools of political consciousness, where women learned to speak, question, organise, and resist. They discussed social reform, legal rights, child bearing, health, and even inter-caste violence. These collectives became their first steps toward reclaiming public space, political legacy, and personal dignity.

At these gatherings, Ambedkar spoke as a comrade, a visionary, and a reformer. He called on women to not merely to read and write, but to critically understand the systems that subjugated them. He urged them to seek economic independence to work, earn, and make decisions for themselves and their families. He reminded them that true dignity comes not from independence, but from self-respect earned through struggle and assertion.

### 'Born to rise'

Ambedkar did not romanticise motherhood or womanhood. Instead, he gave a constant reminder: "You are not born to suffer. You are born to rise." These words echoed in the minds of women who had been taught for centuries to keep their heads bowed. He challenged Brahmanical patriarchal practices that justified child marriage, widowhood taboos, and sexual exploitation of Dalit women by dominant caste men. He insisted that these customs were not sacred and were tools of domination, and said it is the duty of every Dalit woman to expose and reject them. Perhaps his most courageous legislative intervention was the Hindu Code Bill, which sought to reform Hindu personal laws by granting women the rights to property, divorce, and inheritance. Though the Bill was diluted after facing opposition from conservative forces, Ambedkar's commitment was unwavering. He resigned from his post as Law Minister in protest, declaring that he could not be part of a government that denied justice to women.

### 'Annihilate caste to empower women'

Ambedkar's public burning of the Manusmriti in 1927 was not merely a symbolic act against caste oppression, but a radical feminist gesture that marked the rupture with the ideological foundation of Brahmanical patriarchy. The text, which justifies the degradation of women, especially those of lowered castes, was rejected in its entirety by Ambedkar. In setting Manusmriti on fire, Ambedkar ignited a movement that challenged not just caste supremacy, but also the religious sanction behind women's oppression, especially that of Dalit and Sudra women who bore the heaviest burden of its decrees. The silence of dominant caste feminists on this act is telling — it reminds us that Dalit feminism as



envisioned

by Ambedkar emerged not from drawing room debates, but from the fires of resistance and from the courage to reject inherited systems of violence. Mainstream feminism often misses what Ambedkar had seen clearly. He was certain that without addressing caste, liberation of women remains incomplete. For Dalit women, empowerment cannot be separated from the annihilation of caste, and Ambedkar's politics continue to offer the sharpest tools to fight that battle. The legacy of Ambedkar's work with Dalit women lives on in countless Dalit feminist movements, self-help groups, and resistance campaigns. The seeds sown in Mahila Mandals have grown into forests of defiance.

At the roots of Dalit feminism lie his words, his courage, and his uncompromising belief in equality for all. Dalit feminist scholars and activists like Dakshayani Velayudhan, Ruth Manorama, Gogu Shyamala, Urmila Pawar, Babytai Kamble, Shantabai Kamble, Rekha Raj, and Cynthia Stephen continue to echo Ambedkar's insistence on an anti-caste, anti-patriarchal framework.

### 'Organise, educate, liberate'

To remember Ambedkar only as a jurist or Dalit icon is to erase his radical contributions to gender justice. His vision was never limited to legal reforms — it was a call for social revolution. As we reclaim his legacy today, we must center the voices of those Dalit women whose liberation was always at the heart of his dream for a just society. In a world still shaped by systemic exclusions, Ambedkar's call to Dalit women remains urgent and unyielding: organise, educate, and liberate. Let us rise, then, not in memory alone, but in the living fire of his unfinished revolution. Dr BR Ambedkar's contributions to women's empowerment were foundational and far ahead of his time. His work inspires Dalit feminists, gender justice activists, and all who believe in an India where dignity, equality, and justice are not just constitutional ideals, but lived realities.

*Source: The Newsminute*





*Ambedkar Society for South Asia*

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